

## **THE ONGOING CRISIS IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE: THE HISTORIC RESPONSIBILITY OF FÉLIX HOUPHOUËT-BOIGNY**

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*Abstract. This article argues that the root causes of the conflict can be traced back to the leadership of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the first President of the independent, post-colonial nation. Houphouët-Boigny failed to successfully manage a leadership transition from his generation to the next. During his three decades of rule, there were no plans made for his succession. When he ultimately died in office, the result was political, economic, and social instability. Consequently, the country was plunged into ongoing crises and conflicts. President Houphouët-Boigny had been the dominant political force of Côte d'Ivoire. His political skills made the country one of the most stable in the continent. Despite the rise of opposition from students, teachers, trade unionists and northern ethnic groups – all of whom were resentful of the southerner's dominance of government, Houphouët-Boigny was able to restore calm through political dialogue. In 1987, Houphouët-Boigny's advanced age - he was at least 81- contributed to the succession issue's centrality in Ivorian politics. However, Houphouët-Boigny manipulated the Constitution. This caused frustration and set the stage for Houphouët-Boigny to remain in his role for the remainder of his life, despite a massive demonstration in Abidjan on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1991, where 20,000 protesters chanted for 'Houphouët-Boigny to resign.' Consequently, a public leadership contest after Houphouët-Boigny's passing reopened old wounds among interest groups which sought more economic and political power. This triggered the country's ongoing crisis.*

*Keywords: Côte d'Ivoire, political crisis, violent conflict, Félix Houphouët-Boigny*

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### **Introduction**

This article examines the manipulation of the Ivorian constitution by Félix Houphouët-Boigny, who led the country from 1960 to 1993, and his failure to properly organise his succession. By deliberately refusing to nominate his successor Houphouët-Boigny, made a grave political mistake that plunged the country into a devastating crisis. This article argues that for 33 years many were concerned that Houphouët-Boigny did not want to step down in order to usher in a new generation of Ivorian politicians. Houphouët-Boigny knew the risk involved in his inaction, but he was reluctant to do anything meaningful about it. As a result, after his death in 1993, the nation was submerged in a political crisis. The crisis arguably resulted in a reign that lasted too long. Furthermore, its severity was strengthened by his undefined process of succession. This article contributes to that perspective, arguing argues that Côte d'Ivoire is in crisis due to Houphouët-Boigny's failure to organise a smooth transfer of power to the younger generation, to choose an acceptable successor, or prepare for a proper democratic transition.

Shortly after being elected as Head of State for the fourth time in 1975, Houphouët-Boigny amended the Ivorian constitution. He named the President of the National Assembly, Phillippe Yacé, as his successor in the event of his death or incapacitation, as Yacé was con-

sidered to have sufficient experience for the role. It became clear by 1980 that Yacé was unlikely to succeed Houphouët-Boigny. From Houphouët-Boigny's perspective, the best approach to avoid the threat of a premature succession was to not definitively designate a successor. In the meantime, given his ethnicity, the Head of Economy and Finance, Henri Konan Bédié, was identified by many as a likely potential successor: yet the striking fact was that he was dumped from that position in 1977. Houphouët-Boigny and Bédié were from the same ethnic group – the Baoulé. Bédié became an advisor for the International Financial Corporation before being appointed as President of the National Assembly in 1980.

At the same time, the 1980 amendment to the Constitution allowed Houphouët-Boigny to nominate a Vice-President tasked with carrying out presidential duties in the event of the President's death. However, Houphouët-Boigny never named a candidate for this Vice-Presidential role. In October 1980, a revision of the Constitution authorised the abolition of the Vice-President's office while adopting a modified version of the previous Constitution related to the issue of succession. This modified version allowed the President of the National Assembly to act as an interim President for a period of 40 to 60 days, and to contest the next presidential election. Facing the press in late 1985, Houphouët-Boigny argued that the overwhelming majority of Ivorians rejected the idea of a Vice-President, and insisted that establishing a presidential dynasty was not a part of his plan. He added that in Côte d'Ivoire "everyone is a candidate for President" (Cowan, 1987). This suggested that although Bédié was renominated President of the National Assembly in 1985, 1986 and 1990, he was not necessarily Houphouët-Boigny's real choice. Houphouët-Boigny sought, instead, to maintain his power. It was this historic decision that would fuel the country's political crisis after his death in 1993.

This article also discusses the probability of the democratic scenario for Côte d'Ivoire and attempts to explore other elements of responses to this issue. This scenario, if fully realised, would respond to the deepest aspirations of the people of Côte d'Ivoire and beyond. Côte d'Ivoire is not yet a democracy, and there is reason to wonder whether President Alassane Ouattara is capable of carrying out the necessary reforms for the establishment of a fully democratic system.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

This article is based on PhD research data collected by the author in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, from March to June 2012. All interviews and discussion sessions were held in French and translated by the author. Twenty participants were interviewed. They described their perceptions of the causes of the Ivorian crisis. Participants included a range of political powerbrokers, representatives of the oldest political party in Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), the opposition political party the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI), and a number of academics, journalists, representatives of civil society, religious groups, and Ivoirians from different social, political and economic backgrounds.

In determining who I would interview, I aimed to get a balance of views from different ethnic groups: in the end, five respondents were from the Akan ethnic group, five from Krou; five from Gur, four from Malinké, and one from another. I was able to achieve my goal of using a diverse group of participants. However, it was difficult to achieve a balance of male and female participants. Only two of the participants were female as most of the women approached for this research were not willing to be interviewed.

Three respondents identified themselves as political analysts, two as public servants, and one as a former public servant: of then remainder one was an entrepreneur, and another a security officer' one was a house cleaner, another one a bank manager, one was a former journalist, one was an academic, one an economist, one a businesswoman, one a church spokes-

person, one a social worker, and one journalist. One was a representative of civil society, while for two respondents their occupation was not significant. Nine respondents were aged between 50 and 60, six respondents were aged from 40 to 50, while five respondents were aged from 30 to 40. In order to report the direct voices of some respondents and to maintain their anonymity, every respondent was assigned a 'code name', in this case a letter of the Roman alphabet

### **The Manipulation of Article 11**

Supported by his inner circle, Houphouët-Boigny was the 'Strong Man' of Abidjan and had put in place several strategies to stay in power. This point is attested to by Table 1 below, which highlights the various amendments made to Article 11 of the Ivoirien constitution, which made provision for a substitute in the event of the president dying in office (Alexander 1963: 310). Like many other leaders of what had been French colonies, Houphouët-Boigny designed the first Constitution '*à la française*', basing it on that of the Fifth French Republic, introduced in 1958 by his mentor, General Charles de Gaulle. As a result, Houphouët-Boigny had greater authority over the new postcolonial state, accumulating more powers in parliament (Edie, 2003, p. 63). Moreover, Houphouët-Boigny was the sole person in charge of hiring all military and most personal civilians. Most importantly, he enjoyed enhanced power through Article 11 of the Constitution, which he manipulated on several occasions through his 'personal rule', allowing him to hang on to power against the odds.

The reasons for Article 11's manipulation were highly questionable, as was the philosophy behind it. Laws were made in a highly debated fashion, and thus contributed to a controversial outcome. Houphouët's mentor General de Gaulle believed in the philosophy that it is better to leave power years earlier than a minute later. This is consistent with the African wisdom that tells us that it is better to leave glory before it leaves you (Karamoko, 2014). Houphouët-Boigny, however, amended the Constitution when pursuing his political agenda, sparking a succession battle. More than one African conflict has had its roots in a power struggle caused by the confusion surrounding succession (Bakary, 1984, pp. 21-56).

According to Richard Crook, Houphouët-Boigny categorically resolved the succession problem by amending Article 11 of the Constitution, enabling the President of National Assembly, Bédié, to automatically replace him in the event of his death in office (Crook, 1997, p. 215). Other writers have argued that, as a proponent of tribalism, Houphouët-Boigny carefully orchestrated the transition of Bédié to power by amending the Constitution on many occasions (Coulibaly, 2000; De Yédagne, 2013). Based upon the information gathered, one could surmise that Bédié received special treatment. Many have insisted that he was Houphouët-Boigny's favourite, the one that he loved the most, and had a political edge over his rivals. In reality, however, Bédié was a frustrated man who was constantly humiliated and terrorised by Houphouët-Boigny, something evident, for example, in the corruption accusations fabricated by Houphouët-Boigny against him. Bédié became only a team member among his colleagues, with a very limited mandate (see Table 1, below). What we witnessed, in this incident, was a clear indication of Houphouët-Boigny's master plan to destroy Bédié's political career via the recruitment of Ouattara. As the succession had been postponed by Houphouët-Boigny on numerous occasions, Bédié's role appeared to be only temporary, amid the constitutional amendment (Grah Mel, 2010b: 324 – 325).

One can argue that with the constitutional amendment of May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1975, the conditions emerged for Philippe Yacé, (an Akan from the south), to later become the heir apparent of the President of the Republic after his election to the National Assembly in 1980, when he took on the role of the assembly's President. At that time, Yacé was one of the rare candidates who

both enjoyed the stature of the President and had the experience necessary for assuming a presidential role, due to his tenure as Minister of Finance. When Houphouët-Boigny discovered Bédié's irrepressible determination to accede to the presidency, he revoked everything and ensured that neither Bédié nor Yacé would be designated as his successors. To achieve this objective, Houphouët-Boigny rushed to announce the amendment of the Constitution on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1980, and without waiting for the return of parliamentarians to the parliament. This was only 48 hours after the second round of the legislative elections and Yacé was replaced in 1980 as President of the National Assembly by Bédié. Nonetheless, Bédié's power was strictly limited, as Houphouët-Boigny remained the supreme holder of executive power. Bédié's mandate and the timeframe of the succession were also strictly circumscribed as he was only authorised to govern for a maximum period of 60 days before a new round of elections would take place.

From that point on, the President of the Republic became the only one in charge. Houphouët-Boigny chose a Vice-President who would become President of the Republic in case of a vacuum of power. However, the name of the Vice-President was made public in 1985 and the role only existed on paper. In November 1985, Houphouët-Boigny won re-election for a fifth term, and he had still not indicated any preference for a successor. Consequently, there was considerable uncertainty over succession. On January 31<sup>st</sup> 1986, three months after the 1985 amendment, Houphouët-Boigny introduced another amendment. Nothing was added that was substantial to the previous text. It only stated that where the President of the Republic was prevented from exercising his functions, they should be exercised temporarily by the President of the National Assembly.

It is clear that from 1975 to 1990, Houphouët-Boigny was determined to make the succession difficult for Bédié, whose last stumbling block organised by Houphouët-Boigny to stop his ambition for the presidency was the arrival of Ouattara on the Ivorian political scene in 1990. Ouattara did not appear to have much hope of gaining the significant levels of ethnic support that would be necessary to challenge for the Presidency, because he had spent much of his adult life working overseas for the IMF and the West African Central Bank. By nominating him, Houphouët-Boigny showed that he was not keen to "share power" (Respondent "R", Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire 10 June 2012). Indeed, as the November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1990 Constitution stipulated, Bédié became the successor in line with the Constitution as President of the National Assembly. Nonetheless, as Prime Minister of Houphouët-Boigny and the deputy of Bédié, Ouattara became Bédié's opponent, a rivalry that contributed to the Ivorian conflict.

The various amendments can be seen as a tactical approach to neutralise public disturbance and end speculation over the succession. During the 1990 presidential election, Houphouët-Boigny decided at the last minute to run for the seventh time for the presidency as the unique candidate for the PDCI. It was evident that if not for Houphouët-Boigny's serious illness, his intention was to dump both his constitutional heir, Bédié and his first Prime Minister, Ouattara. Moreover, Houphouët-Boigny's intention was to elevate Gbagbo, his historic rival, and seek another term (Grah Mel, 2010b: 555; Varenne 2012: 32). Ultimately, he wanted to finish off Bédié and Ouattara politically.

History shows that Houphouët-Boigny was using constitutional manipulation to retain his hold of the presidency. As Table 1 shows, on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1980 the post of Vice-President was created merely for the sake of formalities. In 1985, Houphouët-Boigny put more restrictions on the succession criteria. Perhaps the most defining moment in the story of the amendments to the Ivorian constitution came on January 31<sup>st</sup> 1986, when the post of Vice-President was abolished. The Constitution had been modified for the last time by Houphouët-Boigny in 1990, but this does not suggest that Houphouët-Boigny had an immediate succession plan (Cornwell, 2000, pp. 80 – 93).

It was stipulated that in the event of the incumbent's death, the President would be succeeded by the speaker of the house. The latter would hold office until the next scheduled election. However, the events that unfolded prior to Houphouët's death gave plenty of good reasons to suggest that Houphouët-Boigny only wanted his successor to carry out presidential functions after his death. As one respondent pointed out, going through the constitutional amendments was a *passage obligé*, an essential phase for Houphouët-Boigny to consolidate his power (Respondent "M", Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 27 June 2012). As a result, like Malawi's President Kamuzu Banda, Houphouët-Boigny remained President-for-Life, and was, in other words, "plugged into eternity" (Cowan, 1987).

**Table 1. Amendments of Article 11 of the Constitution: 1975-1990**

DATE	AMENDMENT	DESCRIPTION
May 31 <sup>st</sup> 1975	First amendment: The law stipulates power would pass to the President of the National Assembly	Law no 75-365 related to amendment of Article 11 of the Constitution
November 25 <sup>th</sup> 1980	Second amendment: The succession is given to a Vice-President elected the same way as the President of the Republic	Law no 80-1232 amending and adding certain clauses of the Constitution
October 12 <sup>th</sup> 1985	Third amendment: The President of the National Assembly takes over the functions of the President, but new elections must take place between 40 days and 60 days. If incapacitated, he is replaced by the first Vice-President of the National Assembly	Law no 85-1072 amending and adding certain clauses of the Constitution
January 31 <sup>st</sup> 1986	Fourth amendment: The President of the National Assembly takes over the functions of the President, but new elections must take place within 60 days. The eventual role of the first Vice-President of the National Assembly is scrapped.	Law no 86-0090 related to amendment of Article 11 of the Constitution
November 6 <sup>th</sup> 1990	Fifth amendment: The President of the National Assembly takes over the functions of the President of the republic should the latter die or become incapacitated, but the Prime Minister is a designated <i>suppléant</i> , Deputy President of the National Assembly	Law no 90-1529 related to amendment of Article 11 of the Constitution

Note: Data compiled by the author. Law nos from Grah Mel 2010, p. 325.

As Table 1 above shows, Ivorians witnessed another characteristic example of Houphouët-Boigny's use of delay tactics to remain in power through the amendments of Article 11 of the Ivorian constitution. Article 11 was amended five times.

### **The Confusion over the Succession**

Houphouët-Boigny enjoyed creating doubt and confusion over his succession. He believed that no one was ready or capable of succeeding him. The last constitutional modification of 1990 stipulated that the President would be succeeded by the President of the National

Assembly, who would hold office until the next election, at that time scheduled to be held in 1995. Despite this stipulation, many Ivorians were critical about Houphouët-Boigny's transition plan, accusing him of not being in favour of a short transition, and delaying the process which sparked crisis (Respondent "K", Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 23 June 2012).

Even while nearing the end of his life, Houphouët-Boigny appeared to have every intention of contesting the presidency in 1995 for his eighth mandate as Head of State. When he was asked by French journalist Arthur Conte on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1981 about how he would prefer to die, Houphouët-Boigny replied, "In my village, on my bed, and full of lucidity" (Conte, 1993). In the end, this was exactly what happened. Houphouët-Boigny spent the last few days of his life in Yamoussoukro, his doctors doing their best to sustain him (Respondent "T", Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 29 June 2012). The transition problem, meanwhile, remained unresolved (Respondent "T", Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 29 June 2012).

Analysts of Ivorian politics such as Robert Handloff and Gray Cowan have argued that Houphouët-Boigny refused to clearly name a successor in order to prevent a split between the apparent heir and the other potential candidates (Handloff, 1988; Cowan, 1987). To make matters worse, Houphouët-Boigny even avoided openly suggesting a successor, which resulted to a standoff between Bédié and Ouattara. Houphouët-Boigny was determined to remain in power. That was his ultimate objective. For Houphouët-Boigny, Côte d'Ivoire was his territory and he was prepared to cling to power until death. Obsessed with the idea of being the unique representative of the nation, he failed to give the opportunity to his potential opponents and political heirs. Houphouët-Boigny thought being the President was his privilege and no one else. Although the time for him to hand over his authority to his successor was up, like many other African leaders, he got caught up in 'the trappings of power', and never left them (Beattie, 2005, p. 279). This was confirmed in his 1985 statement, when, after a long search for power-sharing arrangements, he stated that, "wise old men... all reminded me that I am by custom the chief; that we have principles that must be respected" (Toungara, 1995: 11–38).

There is no doubt that Houphouët-Boigny was a politician with strong conviction, who was a leader of the nation. His goal was to reform Côte d'Ivoire after the French colonial era. To achieve this vision of the country's future, Houphouët-Boigny pursued it relentlessly and, above all, with a lot of diplomacy and courage. In the end, however, Houphouët-Boigny betrayed the Ivorian people. Chaos arose because Houphouët-Boigny did not step down and died in power without putting a system of smooth transition in place. "These attempts to amend the Constitution highlighted Houphouët-Boigny's strong intention to stay in power," explained one respondent (Respondent "R", Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 10 June 2012). As one observer concludes, at least Houphouët-Boigny "must share the blame of what is happening in his country today" (Souare, 2006: 50 – 51). As stated by one respondent, "with the failure of the transition, chaos was never far away" (Respondent "M", Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 27 June 2012).

According to Grah Mel, the succession problem was not resolved on time and with transparency, due to Houphouët-Boigny's faulty policy of repeatedly postponing the *dénouement*. In a media interview when asked about the succession in 1980, Houphouët-Boigny replied: "We never think about a successor." He added: "But we always think about a team, whose members will trust each other, and will be committed to my work. And it will be among this team that the future leader will emerge, who will have a difficult task of leading a young nation with a lot of difficulties because of its limited resources" (Grah Mel 2010 b, pp. 265-266, Translated by the author).

Five years later, during a workshop on July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1985, he said yet again, "The succession of Houphouët-Boigny is unity, peace, and team work. Therefore, anyone who will be ap-

pointed will carry on the nation-building work in the best conditions possible” (Grah Mel 2010b: 265 – 266, author’s translation).

Some suspected that he never really wanted to resign, despite making statements about his desire to retire to his ‘small village’ of Yamoussoukro for the rest of his life. Houphouët-Boigny offered a particularly interesting illustration of a failed political transition in Côte d’Ivoire. Having played a key role in the 1950s during the battle for independence, he became the example not to be followed by the end of his public life. Widespread opinion inside Côte d’Ivoire agreed that toward the end of the leadership of former President Houphouët-Boigny, Côte d’Ivoire appeared headed for political crisis because of a failed transition. For the Ivorian population and respondents interviewed for the thesis, the period of political transition represented a critical moment that was to permit the arrival of a new generation of Ivorian politicians with fresh ideas, the holding of elections and the reestablishment of a democratically elected leader. Therefore, popular expectations *vis à vis* the transitional government were high, and data collected in Abidjan are consistent with this argument.

According to many of those interviewed for this study, including members of Houphouët-Boigny’s party, the PDCI, the amendments that had been made to the Constitution by Houphouët-Boigny were the signs of his lack of desire to retire early and he caused the problems. Respondents believed that there was a lack of political responsibility on the part of Houphouët-Boigny for the measures which he proposed and for the political processes of which he was a part (Respondent “O”, Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, 19 May 2012).

Here, the emphasis must be placed on Houphouët-Boigny’s failure of leadership for transition. There are not too many commentators who really understand the central role played by Houphouët-Boigny, the first President. Some would argue that Houphouët-Boigny really could not successfully manage a leadership transition from his generation to the next even if he wished, because as a “Big Man” he ruled the nation for more than three decades under an authoritarian regime. So therefore, this could not allow the transition to take place in Côte d’Ivoire. The present author believes that Houphouët-Boigny never intended to step down. Houphouët-Boigny’s failure to successfully transfer political power to younger generation of Ivorian leaders has profoundly impacted the nation.

During his leadership, he manipulated Article 11 of the Constitution to hang on to power as much as he could and caused the Ivorian crisis. Indeed, the country’s leadership was passed on to the latter’s constitutional heir, Bédié, who was not Houphouët-Boigny’s immediate choice. Houphouët-Boigny did not trust Bédié. Most importantly, the succession only took place when Houphouët-Boigny died. Houphouët-Boigny had cited the peaceful transitions in Senegal and Cameroon as a proof that African states were able to select a leader without causing crisis (Cowan, 1987). However, that was not the case in relation to the transition in Côte d’Ivoire. As has been pointed out by a number of respondents, Houphouët-Boigny had failed to understand that in these countries, governments were “up-front” with regard to their plans for the future, and the new head of state had been known sufficiently far in advance and accepted before taking office in order to avoid turmoil (Respondent “K”, Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, 23 June 2012; Respondent “F”, Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, 19 May 2012).

Due to the prolonged transition, Côte d’Ivoire became unstable, sparking the crisis that occurred when he died (Respondent “K” Abidjan Côte d’Ivoire, 23 June 2012). According to Fologo, one of Houphouët-Boigny’s disciples and followers, Houphouët-Boigny himself might well have predicted the Ivorian crisis. In his interview with Flore Hazoumé from Scrib Magazine, Fologo revealed that Houphouët-Boigny saw the Ivorian crisis that came after him coming on the horizon. He sensed it, which helps to explain why he said, “After me, make up a team,” knowing that no one among his colleagues, taken separately, could succeed him (Djedje Mel, 2014).

In any case, by this point many people were questioning if Houphouët-Boigny's resignation would be enough to solve the problems facing Côte d'Ivoire.

In April of 1990, when the single party system ended and political pluralism was established, Côte d'Ivoire experienced its first political demonstrations headed by a large number of political opposition leaders such as Laurent Gbagbo. While the motivations behind the protests were social and political, they covered all segments of Ivorian society including, farmers, civil servants as well as youth. As Akindès, Fofana and Kouamé argued, the demonstrations were mainly connected to the issue of power struggles at that time. For example, during May 14<sup>th</sup> through 16<sup>th</sup> and May 21<sup>st</sup> of 1990, the army and the police took to the streets in Abidjan, showing that the Houphouët-Boigny government no longer controlled Ivorian society. Perhaps the major demonstration that took place was on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1990 when an estimated 20,000 protesters called for the resignation of Houphouët-Boigny (Akindès, Fofana, & Kouamé, 2014, pp. 232-233).

However, that did not happen, although Houphouët-Boigny got what was probably the biggest wake-up call of his public life. Additionally, many Ivorians became uncomfortable with the Houphouët-Boigny authoritarian regime, which was growing old and out of touch with reality. From that moment on, the stage was quietly set for a politico-military crisis. Ultimately, Côte d'Ivoire experienced a political face-off between Houphouët-Boigny and the political opposition in their pursuit of power. Côte d'Ivoire's image as a nation of peace in a region marred with violence was tarnished.

The debate over the long-awaited resignation of Houphouët-Boigny that never took place is a complex issue that must be addressed. However, its complexity must not be used as a smokescreen to avoid need for careful analysis. According to Langer, due to his tendency to favour the southern areas over the northern areas, in the 1960s, Houphouët-Boigny built many factories in the area. This production excluded sugar factories such as Sodecure in the south, rich in natural resources. This approach resulted in inequalities between south and north which was increasingly seen as a threat to ethno-regional harmony, suggesting that Houphouët-Boigny's resignation would not be enough to solve the problems (Langer, "n.d.").

Similarly, for Akindès, Houphouët-Boigny privileged people from his own ethnic group, the Baoulé. Moreover, Houphouët-Boigny saw them as superior to other ethnic groups, a stance which he openly articulated in his speeches. Therefore, the privileging and superiority of the Baoulé by Houphouët-Boigny laid the foundation for potential confrontations and conflicts among Ivorians, according to Akindès, and his resignation would not mean that Côte d'Ivoire was out of the woods (Akindès, 2004).

According to 80% of the respondents from the older generation from Côte d'Ivoire interviewed for the thesis, it was Houphouët-Boigny's long political career based on personal rule and the succession war caused by his political regime that essentially caused the Ivorian conflict. For example, respondent "O" stated that: "Houphouët-Boigny bore some responsibility for the problems in Côte d'Ivoire because, during his leadership, Côte d'Ivoire welcomed a large number of migrants from the sub-region (Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinée, and Togo), but Houphouët-Boigny failed to adopt automatic mechanisms for the integration of successive waves of migration. After his death, the identity crisis emerged as Côte d'Ivoire has been affected by its debate over national identity or *Ivoirité*" (Abidjan Côte d'Ivoire, 19 May 2012).

Respondent "D" also stated Houphouët-Boigny caused the Ivorian crisis which started with Houphouët-Boigny's personal rule and the succession crisis because for him there is no succession in Africa and Côte d'Ivoire was no exception, when there is no death.

Respondent "D" further stated that: "The real cause of the Ivorian crises is that Houphouët-Boigny was prepared to die in office, but he said he had a younger person in mind



for his succession. This was followed by a creation of a board governance committee. Since he was never clear about who would succeed him, Houphouët-Boigny created confusion, uncertainty, and the succession crisis” (Abidjan Côte d’Ivoire, 10 June 2012).

### **Twenty-First Century Côte d’Ivoire and the probability of a democratic future**

Under Houphouët-Boigny’s rule, Côte d’Ivoire failed to make an effective transition of political power. Its democratic institutions also failed to take root within Ivorian society. The consequences of these actions led to years of turmoil for Côte d’Ivoire. As a typical neo-patrimonial ruler, Houphouët-Boigny was able to stay much longer in office by systematically confining political power in his hands, while promoting some formal institutions such as the presidential Constitution. Consequently, his political footprint significantly impacted Ivorian politics. Presidency under Houphouët-Boigny largely “contributed to the weakening of existing fragile structures within the military, the judiciary as well as the civil service” (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997, pp. 61–66).

From the onset in 1960 until 1993, Côte d’Ivoire remained the territory of one man. Many other countries suffered from political instability in the post-colonial era. However, Côte d’Ivoire, under the undisputed rule of Houphouët-Boigny, was relatively stable with an economic boom. From 1960 until the early 1980s, this boom was largely based on agricultural (cocoa and coffee) exports which masked democratic deficits. Politically, as a neo-patrimonial ruler, Houphouët-Boigny established a one-party state which eliminated the opposition through “manipulation and intimidation,” maintaining control over Côte d’Ivoire. In his view, “multi-party competition was not allowed in Côte d’Ivoire until the nation was fully initiated” (Thomson, 2010, p. 125).

Nevertheless, in the late 1980s, Houphouët-Boigny faced a socio-political and economic crisis with some protesters wanting a multi-party democracy to open up the political system. Others went further by asking for Houphouët-Boigny’s resignation. It was evident that there were a large number of emotional arguments. Ivorians were complaining about scandals and Houphouët-Boigny’s long reign. Thirty years in the top job was too long, therefore, they urged Houphouët-Boigny to go (Noble, 1990). As Crook (1995) explained in his response to the emerging tensions, and the international donor community increasingly pressuring for political reforms, Houphouët-Boigny introduced a series of reforms of the political system. These reforms included a decentralisation of powers to local levels, giving the locals autonomous powers. This resulted in the creation of 135 elected communes. Furthermore, Houphouët-Boigny encouraged competitive elections between candidates of his own political party, the PDCI, for the National Assembly. While the competitive elections between PDCI candidates presented an opportunity for the new elite to contribute to democratic ideas, these reforms had a negative side effect to say the least, because they resulted in tensions within the PDCI. The competitive elections were a failure because rather than taking root in substantial debate, the campaigns became dirty and personal, which resulted in “high personal costs” (p. 14).

In addition, due to the democratic wave across Sub-Saharan Africa in the late 1980s, Houphouët-Boigny was forced to authorise the nation’s first multi-party elections in 1990 after the late French President François Mitterrand’s speech in La Boule. In his speech at this France-Afrique Summit, Mitterrand exhorted African countries to initiate democratisation in return for aids from the Bretton Woods Institutions. In an unexpected move, Houphouët-Boigny announced that opposition parties would be legalised and the elections would be held on May 5th, 1990. This gave little time to Laurent Gbagbo, the opposition leader, and his allies to organise themselves and run a proper campaign. As a result, Houphouët-Boigny was able to maintain a tight control over the elections. Houphouët-Boigny won the elections by a landslide with 81.7%

of the votes in his favour and a turn-out of 69.1%. It is difficult to say whether the win could be attributed to massive fraud by the PDCI or the inexperience of the opposition, but one can determine the win triggered political tensions (Fauré, 1993, pp. 318-320).

Aimé Henri Konan Bédié, the President of the National Assembly, succeeded the deceased President Houphouët-Boigny in accordance with the Constitution in 1993. Bédié won the subsequent 1995 elections with 96.44% of the vote, a comfortable but suspicious election margin. Political violence also marred the 1995 elections following the opposition's boycott. Bédié introduced a new electoral code that excluded Ouattara from running, claiming Ouattara was not an Ivorian citizen (Konaté, 2002, p. 255).

In 1999, General Robert Guéi toppled Houphouët-Boigny's successor Konan Bédié in a military coup d'état. Guéi promised to "sweep the house clean," and end corruption by taking steps towards creating a political climate of inclusion and transparency. However, within ten months, Guéi had transformed himself into another power-hungry civilian politician. The General was hardly considered to be supportive of democratic institutions – and rightfully so (Assalé, 2009, p. 167).

Guéi decided to run for the 2000 presidential election against Gbagbo. This move would prove to be costly as Guéi was unaware of the lack of harmony between the military and the democratic process. Extreme political tension on a scale never seen before in Ivorian history also marred the 2000 elections. Additionally, Guéi promoted Bédié's xenophobic policies. Not only did Guéi become as unpopular as Bédié, but he failed to make a positive contribution to Ivorian democracy. As a consequence, this contributed to the election of Laurent Gbagbo in 2000 (Ahipeaud, 2009, p. 150).

Laurent Gbagbo ushered in a new era filled with hope and change. Gbagbo was effective at promoting a new Côte d'Ivoire and promising hope for democracy, but his eleven years in office did not go as expected. He took office in 2000, defeating General Robert Guéi in his own words in a "calamitous circumstance," but overall, the former President Gbagbo failed to deliver on his promises. Despite holding power from 2000 to 2011, Gbagbo failed to give Côte d'Ivoire new heart in one of its blackest periods (Hofnung, 2012, p. 49).

Although Gbagbo took over the presidency in 2000, this did not resolve the political tensions. As a result, it directly threatened a political stability and democratic governance in Côte d'Ivoire. Elections were supposed to be held in 2005, but they were postponed six times due to insecurity. When they were finally held in 2010, incumbent President Gbagbo contested the results. Consequently, violence increased, resulting in a full-blown civil conflict which devastated the nation and brought democratisation to a halt. Some 3,000 people were killed, and thousands displaced. Based upon the history of civil wars due to the political process, there is one fundamental question: is current President Alassane Ouattara capable of establishing a genuine democracy in Côte d'Ivoire?

Ouattara took over the presidency in 2011. While his accession to power did not result in long lasting peace, the 2015 elections represent a significant moment for the Ivorian democracy. That was because the elections went on calmly without major incident and Côte d'Ivoire did not descend into a bloody post-election crisis as opposed to 2010, leading to the "landslide victory of President Ouattara by 83,66%" (UK Department International Trade, 2016). There is no such thing as a perfect election. However, these positive developments suggest that Côte d'Ivoire may be ready to facilitate the holding of more free and transparent elections peacefully in the future and serve as a firm building block for the nation's democracy.

During this troubled period of the nation's history, cleavages and dissensions within communities have become worse, which have deeply affected the Ivorian social fabric. Therefore, the government has embarked on strengthening democratic process and institutions, re-

spect for the rule of law and human rights. A large number of reforms are in place to improve the functioning of democracy, strengthen citizens' rights and fundamental rights; improve the living standards of Ivorians. At present there are no precise dates yet, but constitutional reforms and referendum; including legislative elections are more likely to be held by the end of 2016 (UK Department International Trade, 2016; RFI, 2016).

At the economic level, the Ouattara government created the High Authority for Good Governance (HAGG) in September 2013. Its objectives were the normalisation of public life by inculcating values such as ethics in the management of human resources, financial and material all based on the principles of transparency, responsibility and collective participation (World Bank, 2015).

At the social level, the Ouattara government put in place the Social and Economic Council, which was tasked to legislate in order to allow the government to implement its economic development and social policies for the benefit of Ivorian populations (Présidence de la République de Côte d'Ivoire, n. d).

In regards to the political climate, on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the government and most opposing political parties resumed the political dialogue. The conversations were previously interrupted in May 2014 (RFI, 2015). The conversations held in 2015 have moved the political climate into a progressive direction. There were many solutions created as a result of the conversations held by the parties, but there is more work to be done.

Firstly, as Ahipeaud (2009) and Prempeh (2008) argued, one potential solution to this problem might be to reform the Constitution as the drafting of the provisions of Articles 35–40 was politically motivated. If Article 35 of the 2000 Constitution targeted the exclusion of Ouattara in the past and that triggered a crisis, today it is clear that the other Articles enabled any potential President to justify his/her grip on power. Furthermore, as these Articles give exceptional prerogatives to the President of the Republic, the President becomes a 'constitutional monarch' (p. 186; pp. 20–28).

Secondly, the government might put in place an institutional reform, enabling to jointly organise the presidential and parliamentary elections. By doing so, not only it would be difficult to commit frauds, but it would be practically impossible for the newly elected President to influence the parliamentary elections. If this reform is adopted, that would certainly be the end of clan-based and neo-patrimonial management of the executive power. In order to complete the institutional reform, it would be useful, if not crucial to ensure that the electoral code does not allow a hybrid election (Ahipeaud, 2009, p. 186; Fish, 2006).

It is noteworthy that even in all so-called democratic countries, democratisation is an ongoing process. It is a long-term process implicating constitutional, institutional and cultural changes. Even old democratic systems are still evolving. The ruling elite has learned the lesson that an authoritarian neo-patrimonial political rule is no longer a viable option and the introduction of democratic reforms appears to be the best option. As findings from above indicate, Côte d'Ivoire is on the right track for democratisation. Given the above reforms and the government's commitment to democracy, the government should be aware that democracy is not about a dominance of a minority over a majority, and vice versa. Rather, it is about a consensus based on the rules of cohabitation, concertation and decision making within a specific society. It is likely that a fully democratic system will be established in Côte d'Ivoire.

As Berman (2007: 28–41) suggests, the road to democracy is a long one. Therefore, a long-term vision might be needed for further research to evaluate the progresses of democracy in a country like Côte d'Ivoire, which has a history of failed democratic transitions. This would help to identify whether the ruling elite has succeeded in their democratisation project or failed.

## Conclusion

This article has argued that the chaos, crisis and civil wars in Côte d'Ivoire can be blamed on the post-colonial politics promulgated by Houphouët-Boigny, particularly his inability to step down and hand over the reins of power to a successor prior to his early death. Côte d'Ivoire had five versions of the Constitution under Houphouët-Boigny's watch after independence from France. Some people saw the last Constitution, in particular, as an effective means to address many problems associated with the succession issue (Cornwell, 2000). Others saw it as a diversionary tactic orchestrated by Houphouët-Boigny to hold onto his power (Grah Mel, 2010 b, p. 325). While it is difficult to prove what went on in Houphouët-Boigny's mind, history does show that Côte d'Ivoire went through one of its most restless times. Ultimately, this was sparked by the failed transition after Houphouët-Boigny's untimely, but not unexpected, death (Respondent "T", Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 29 June 2012).

One could certainly argue that in Sub-Saharan Africa today, "Constitutional authoritarianism is almost diminished, but the authoritarian ways and authoritarian leaders from the past are not" (Baker, 1998). Côte d'Ivoire is no exception. It has a history of authoritarian leaders who have defined domestic and foreign policies through the neo-patrimonial system. Houphouët-Boigny's failure to address succession brought about chaos. Therefore, he can be seen as fully responsible for the current Ivorian political situation.

That situation bears comparison with the case of Senegal, known throughout Africa as one of the continent's most politically stable countries. This is because of its peaceful transitions from President to President, which have kept the country away from the fate of many of its neighbouring countries. Senegal became an independent state on August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1960 and Léopold Senghor became its first President. Like Houphouët-Boigny, Senghor dominated his country's politics for decades. Under his leadership, Senghor was virtually unchallenged through his ruling socialist party. While some of his rivals were defeated or co-opted, others had been forced into exile. This is where the similarities end, as Senghor was successful, and survived due to the way he interpreted Senegalese politics (Jackson & Rosberg, 1982, p. 89).

Many of the respondents interviewed for this study have pointed out that, if Houphouët-Boigny who had dominated the Ivorian political scene for decades had left power early like Senghor, perhaps the result and outcome would have been different. Unlike Houphouët-Boigny, Senghor peacefully transferred power to his handpicked successor, Abdou Diouf, without violence in the streets. Like Senghor, Houphouët-Boigny could have resigned. That might have been, perhaps, enough to solve at least some of the problems Ivorian society is facing today.

Those problems were not solved. This article has shown that in 1990, after the La Baule speech and when the wind of democratic change blowing through Sub-Saharan Africa finally reached Côte d'Ivoire, Houphouët-Boigny unsuccessfully embarked on democratisation. Similarly, from 1993 until 2010, his successors Bédié, Guéi and Gbagbo attempted to democratise Côte d'Ivoire, but none of them succeeded as they lacked the ability to 'deliver' democracy. Overall, the democratisation experience in Côte d'Ivoire has only triggered further political instability. This article has also discussed the probability of success for the democratic scenario in Côte d'Ivoire, and has shown that after acceding to power in 2011, the Ouattara government did indeed put in place some democratic reforms. Ouattara was re-elected in 2015 to a new five-year term and will probably not run again in 2020. On March 26<sup>th</sup> 2018, elections for the Ivorian senate were held, putting in place the country's first-ever senate, with the aim of counterbalancing the Assembly's constituency focused members. The institution was introduced on the new 2016 Constitution. While the opposition claimed the selection of senators gave President Ouattara far too much power over the legislative process and little pro-

gress has since been made, it appears that the ruling authorities – and Ivory Coast – might be on the right track for a successful transition to a democratic future.

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## НЕПРЕКРАЩАЮЩИЙСЯ КРИЗИС В КОТ-Д'ИВУАРЕ: ИСТОРИЧЕСКАЯ ОТВЕТСТВЕННОСТЬ ФЕЛИКСА УФУЭ-БУАНЬИ

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*Аннотация. В статье обосновывается, что истоки конфликта в Кот-д'Ивуаре коренятся в правлении Феликса Уфуэ-Буаньи, первого президента независимого постколониального государства. Уфуэ-Буаньи не удалось осуществить успешный переход руководящих позиций от своего поколения к следующему. Во время трех десятилетий его правления не составлялось никаких планов передачи власти следующему лидеру. Его смерть на посту президента привела к политической, экономической и социальной нестабильности. Президент Уфуэ-Буаньи был доминирующей политической силой в Кот-д'Ивуаре. Благодаря его искусству политика страны была одной из наиболее стабильных на континенте. Несмотря на рост оппозиционных настроений среди студентов, учителей, представителей профсоюзов и этнических групп севера страны, недовольных засильем южан в правительстве, Уфуэ-Буаньи удавалось поддерживать спокойствие посредством политического диалога. В 1987 г. преклонный возраст Уфуэ-Буаньи (ему было за восемьдесят) сделал проблему наследования власти в главный политический вопрос в стране. Однако Уфуэ-Буаньи стал манипулировать конституцией, что позволило Уфуэ-Буаньи остаться у власти до конца жизни, но привело к массовому недовольству, вылившемуся в мощную демонстрацию в Абиджане 31 мая 1991 г. В ходе ее 20 000 митингующих распевали «Уфуэ-Буаньи в отставку!» Соответственно, начавшаяся после кончины Уфуэ-Буаньи публичная борьба за лидерство вскрыла старые противоречия между заинтересованными группами, стремившимися к большей экономической и политической власти, что вызвало непрекращающийся кризис в стране.*

*Ключевые слова: Кот-д'Ивуар, политический кризис, вооруженный конфликт, Феликс Уфуэ-Буаньи*

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