



2014

An Unconventional Challenge to Apartheid: The Ivorian Dialogue Diplomacy with South Africa, 1960-1978

Abou B. Bamba
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/histfac>

 Part of the [African History Commons](#), and the [African Studies Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Bamba, Abou. "An Unconventional Challenge to Apartheid: The Ivorian Dialogue Diplomacy with South Africa, 1960-1978." *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 47.1 (2014): 77-99.

This is the publisher's version of the work. This publication appears in Gettysburg College's institutional repository by permission of the copyright owner for personal use, not for redistribution. Cupola permanent link: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/histfac/48>

This open access article is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

An Unconventional Challenge to Apartheid: The Ivorian Dialogue Diplomacy with South Africa, 1960-1978

Abstract

This article focuses on the dialogue diplomacy that Ivorian President Félix Houphouët-Boigny initiated in the late 1960s to engage apartheid South Africa. Although contemporary observers and subsequent scholars (have) derided the scheme as an act of acquiescence and even betrayal, I argue that Ivory Coast's dialogue diplomacy was neither accommodationist nor dependent on the prodding of neocolonial powers such as France. A Pan-Africanist extension of the home-grown neotraditional practice of *Dialogue ivoirienne*, the diplomatic initiative never got the backing of other African states. A close analysis of the Ivory Coast's maneuvers in the context of an increasing radicalization of the anti-apartheid movement sheds a new light on the complexity of the transnational politics to defeat apartheid.

Keywords

South Africa, apartheid, Ivory Coast, transnational politics, diplomacy

Disciplines

African History | African Studies | History | International and Area Studies

An Unconventional Challenge to Apartheid: The Ivorian Dialogue Diplomacy with South Africa, 1960–1978

By Abou B. Bamba

Gettysburg College (abamba@gettysburg.edu)

In early September 1975, a Johannesburg newspaper broke the news that an Ivorian delegation led by Laurent Dona Fologo (Minister of Information) was about to start a twelve-day visit to South Africa. The planned trip was the culmination of a dialogue diplomacy that Ivory Coast initiated in the late 1960s and was a clear departure from the isolation policy that African states were trying to implement so as to pressure the apartheid regime in Pretoria. Even though the visit had been arranged by a black South African, the Ivorian scheme was bound to stir controversy. Indeed, the very news of sending a “Dialogue mission” to South Africa led President Marien Nguabi of the Congo to dismiss the initiative as a “grotesque masquerade.” Other African opinion-makers echoed Nguabi’s rejection, including Paul Bernetel—an influential columnist at the Paris-based weekly *Jeune Afrique*—who found the trip ill timed.¹

African public opinion in reaction to the Ivorian mission was largely hostile and dismissive, deriding the visit as an act of acquiescence and even betrayal. I argue in this article that a critical look at the Fologo mission and the larger Ivorian stance can shed new light on the complex transnational politics used to fight apartheid. First, unlike the claim that the Ivorian policy-makers acted on the prodding of the French, I suggest that Ivory Coast’s dialogue initiative was primarily a Pan-Africanist extension of the home-grown practice of “Dialogue à l’ivoirienne.”² Moreover, by sending a multiracial delegation to South Africa, the Ivorian authorities genuinely attempted to undermine apartheid, in that

¹ Patrick Laurence, “Fologo Arrives on a ‘Mission of Peace,’” *Rand Daily Mail* [Johannesburg], 11 September 1975; “Dialogue: ‘Ivorian Weapon,’” *West Africa* [London], 29 September 1975; Paul Bernetel, “Un voyage inopportun,” *Jeune Afrique* [Paris], 19 September 1975. Reportedly it was Professor Winifred M. Kgwara who arranged for the visit. For details, see Patrick Laurence, “‘I Talked Fologo into It,’ Says Prof.,” *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 September 1975. It is equally plausible that the Ivorian president and Johannes B. Vorster had discussed that trip during their secret meeting of Yamoussoukro in September 1974. For details, see *Official Yearbook of the Republic of South Africa*, 3rd ed. (Pretoria: Department of Information, 1976), 871–72.

² On the history and workings of “Dialogue à l’ivoirienne,” see W. Joseph Campbell, *The Emergent Independent Press in Benin and Côte d’Ivoire: From Voice of the State to Advocate of Democracy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 78–81; Lanciné Sylla, “La dynamique de la réconciliation et de la prévention des conflits en Côte d’Ivoire,” *Africa* [São Paulo] 20–21 (1997–1998), 9–26; Michael Cohen, *Urban Policy and Political Conflict in Africa: A Study of the Ivory Coast* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 115–44; Jeanne M. Toungara, “The Apotheosis of Côte d’Ivoire’s Nana Houphouët-Boigny,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 28, 1 (1990), 34–35.

they took inspiration from the transnational politics that led to desegregation in the United States. Thus, focusing on the period between 1960 when a distinctive African voice in the anti-apartheid movement emerged and 1978 when the Ivorian authorities backed down from their public call for dialogue with South Africa, the article recounts the vicissitudes of an activist, if misunderstood, diplomacy.

Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the man who sent Fologo and his delegation to Pretoria, was not a newcomer to Pan-African diplomacy.³ In fact, his political career had long been marked by the desire to secure a place of leadership for himself and for his country in Francophone West Africa's regional politics. During the heyday of decolonization he spearheaded the creation of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA), a particularly vocal trans-territorial nationalist political organization in French West Africa.⁴ Although he was eclipsed somewhat later on by younger and more militant West African politicians, the statesman (whom many referred to as *Le Vieux* or Wise Old Man) had, by the 1970s, succeeded in establishing a regional hegemony in the framework of relatively loose inter-state organizations within Francophone West Africa.⁵ Houphouët-Boigny's diplomatic initiatives toward the rest of Africa, including South Africa, were meant to further this leadership role steeped in an inflated deployment of dialogue. To achieve his rather narrowly defined goal, the Ivorian president adopted flexible strategies that shifted according to the particular junctures of African politics. Although the old statesman had backed the militant Pan-African coalition against apartheid in the early 1960s, he had by the 1970s come to favor a policy of negotiation and dialogue, which he claimed did "not necessarily lead to political recognition of the South African regime."⁶ What prompted such a volte-face in Houphouët-Boigny? What was the nature of the proposed dialogue diplomacy? How did *Le Vieux's* peers and the larger African public opinion receive the plan? Within the dual context of a radicalization of the worldwide anti-apartheid movement and the increasing paranoia of the Afrikaner ruling elite in South Africa, was the plan viable at all?

In examining these questions I have come to see the Houphouëtian diplomacy of dialogue as a failure. I do so not only on the evidence that the Ivorian leader was unable to

³ For an insightful biography of Houphouët-Boigny's life, see Frédéric Grah Mel, *Félix Houphouët-Boigny*, 3 vols. (Abidjan/Paris: Editions du CERAP/Maisonneuve & Larose/Karthala, 2003–2010). See also Paul-Henri Siriex, *Houphouët-Boigny: An African Statesman* (Paris: NEA and Nathan, 1987).

⁴ Elizabeth Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Nationalist Movement in Guinea 1939–1958* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005); Tony Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa: France's Successful Decolonization?* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2002); Ruth Schachter Morgenthau, *Political Parties in French-Speaking West Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).

⁵ Virginia Thompson, *West Africa's Council of the Entente* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972); Jacques Baulin, *La politique africaine d'Houphouët-Boigny* (Paris: Eurafor-Press, 1980). For an overview of Ivorian diplomacy under Houphouët-Boigny, see Marc A. Ziké, *La politique étrangère de la Côte d'Ivoire (1959–1993): Une diplomatie au service de la paix et du développement* (Abidjan: COPRECA Edition, 1994).

⁶ "Vorster Hints He Will Establish Ties with Black African States," *New York Times*, 6 November 1970.

convince the South African government to trust black South Africans, but also on the observation that Ivorian diplomacy could not bring on board the influential members of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Pan-African intellectuals, the African press, and to a lesser degree, the transnational anti-apartheid movement. Given the timing of *Le Vieux*'s dialogue scheme and despite his much acclaimed "skills at persuasion and negotiation," the Ivorian president could not persuade the OAU and the African anti-apartheid coalition to espouse his ideas.⁷ This does not necessarily imply that Houphouët-Boigny's stance vis-à-vis apartheid was accommodationist; very much the opposite. As the examination of his September 1975 diplomatic maneuvers demonstrates, by sending a multiracial delegation led by Minister Laurent Dona Fologo (and his white wife—Danièle Fologo) to South Africa, the Ivorian leader did attempt to subvert the South African racist ideology even as he seemed to save Pretoria from the diplomatic isolation that both grassroots organizations and the international community deemed critical to the overthrow of apartheid.

By focusing renewed attention to the modality of President Houphouët-Boigny's engagement, I wish not to rehabilitate a man whose Machiavellian paternalism needs no further demonstration. However, I deem it necessary to complicate the assessment of his diplomatic ploys vis-à-vis apartheid.⁸ While a number of studies have explored the dialogue diplomacy, very few have seriously analyzed the tactics and arguments of the official Ivorian side in this episode of the anti-apartheid movement.⁹ In a certain sense, revisiting this chapter in the diplomacy against apartheid will challenge the basic conclusion of an Ivorianist (and by extension, Africanist) historiography that still views anyone who ventured to propose a different philosophy of action regarding the South African question as a "sellout" or "lackey" of Western imperialism and neocolonialism.¹⁰

⁷ For *Le Vieux*'s skills as a negotiator, see Toungara, "Apotheosis," 51; Siriex, *Houphouët-Boigny*, 309.

⁸ The literature on Houphouët-Boigny's Machiavellian ploys is extensive. For a short list, see Samba Diarra, *Les faux complots d'Houphouët-Boigny: Fracture dans le destin d'une nation* (Paris: Karthala, 1997); Laurent Gbagbo, *Côte d'Ivoire: Pour une alternative démocratique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1983); Marcel Amondji, *Félix Houphouët et la Côte d'Ivoire: L'envers d'une légende* (Paris: Karthala, 1984).

⁹ Roger Pfister, *Apartheid South Africa and African States: From Pariah to Middle Power, 1961–1994* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2005), 48–76; Sifiso M. Ndlovu, "The ANC's Diplomacy and International Relations," in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol. 2, 1970–1980, ed. SADET Trust (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2004), 615–67. There are some exceptions to this trend, but the couple of studies that have looked at the dialogue diplomacy from the Ivorian side usually fall short of analyzing *Le Vieux*'s actions as serious and potentially consequential diplomatic moves. For details, see Baulin, *La politique africaine*, 199–208; Daniel Bach, "L'insertion ivoirienne dans les rapports internationaux," in Y.-A. Fauré and J.-P. Médard, eds., *Etat et bourgeoisie en Côte d'Ivoire* (Paris: Karthala, 1982), 110–12. Grah Mel's latest installment on the life of the Ivorian statesman provides a more nuanced, if largely popular, account. For details, see *Félix Houphouët-Boigny*, vol. 3: *La fin et la suite* (Abidjan/Paris: Editions du CERAP/Karthala, 2010), 101–31. Finally, there is one first-hand account of this episode of the dialogue diplomacy from an Ivorian perspective. For details, see Gaoussou Kamissoko, *De Yamoussoukro à Pretoria: Le chemin du dialogue* (Abidjan: NEA, 1985).

¹⁰ A prime example of this historiographical school is Pierre Nandjui, *Houphouët-Boigny: L'homme de la France en Afrique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995). See also Gbagbo, *Côte d'Ivoire*, 168–70. Revealingly, the

To portray the likes of Houphouët-Boigny as puppets of Western interests is to subscribe to a historiographical tradition that sees Africans only as powerless, with little agency. I argue that it might serve Ivorianist scholars well to rethink such views, especially when some of the supposedly all powerful Western actors have suggested that in many instances it was the Ivorian leader who manipulated his European peers.¹¹

Tracking the Routes of a Dialogue Diplomacy

The story of the Ivorian call for dialogue with Pretoria confirms Pierre Kipré's laconic observation that Houphouët-Boigny's engagement with apartheid South Africa can be best described as "ambiguous."¹² Before independence, Ivorian authorities had been quite critical of the apartheid regime. In July 1959, *Fraternité* (mouthpiece of *Le Vieux's* party) had labeled the South African regime a "short-sighted government" which used an "indefensible racial principle" that has "worn out the patience of the Africans."¹³ In the years following Ivory Coast's independence, *Le Vieux* and his lieutenants joined the Pan-African chorus in denouncing apartheid, which they described as an "anachronistic" system.¹⁴ In this vein, Arsène Usher Assouan, the Ivorian ambassador to the United Nations in the 1960s, violently criticized both Portuguese and South African leaders who had come to "lock themselves" in a historical time that most people had left behind. As a consequence, Assouan continued, the victims of Portuguese and South African rule were forced to envision "war or subversion" as the only possibility for emancipation. However, in a move that prefigured things to come, the Ivorian diplomat concluded that Africa needed peace—a concept that neither the Portuguese nor the white South Africans seemed to understand.¹⁵ In subsequent years, a web of domestic events and regional geopolitical entanglements would force Houphouët-Boigny to focus on the consolidation of the Council of the Entente and to tighten his grip on power within Ivory Coast.

It was in this crucible that dialogue emerged as a privileged, if self-serving, means of political communication. This context is important because it allows us to see that the origins of *Le Vieux's* dialogue diplomacy were beyond the seeming dependency of Ivory Coast on France. In fact, if there is any single root of the diplomatic posture, it is to be found in Houphouët-Boigny's "style of rule" which, in the words of Jeanne Toungara, was

members of the scholarly school seem to reiterate the ideas of some of the historical actors without much critical distance. For details, see Ansoumane Bangoura, "L'imperialisme et ses agents," *Horoya* (Conakry), 11–17 July 1976; "Beware of the Tempter," *Sechaba* (Dar es Salaam/London), January 1971.

¹¹ Jacques Foccart and Philippe Gaillard, *Foccart parle: Entretiens avec Philippe Gaillard*, 2 vols. (Paris: Fayard/Jeune Afrique, 1995–1996). See also, Baulin, *La politique africaine*, 50–58; Felix O. Alalade, "President Felix Houphouët-Boigny, the Ivory Coast, and France," *Journal of African Studies* 6, 3 (Autumn 1979), 122–31.

¹² Pierre Kipré, *Côte d'Ivoire: La formation d'un peuple* (Paris: Sides-Ima, 2005), 218.

¹³ "Troubles raciaux," *Fraternité* (Abidjan), 3 July 1959.

¹⁴ K.A.J., "Intolérable ségrégation," *Fraternité*, 1 April 1960.

¹⁵ "M. Usher stigmatise l'attitude du Portugal et de l'Afrique du Sud," *Abidjan Matin*, 22 November 1962. On the significance of the rhetoric of peace and dialogue in Ivorian diplomatic action, see Ziké, *Politique étrangère*, 99–102.

“greatly influenced by the application of traditional concepts in a modern context.”¹⁶ As we shall see, no other practice better typified this astute combination of the old and the new than the mobilization of the so-called “Dialogue à l’ivoirienne” as a political weapon.

Dialogue—a neotraditional reactualization of the institution of the palaver tree—had been used repeatedly in Ivory Coast since the late 1950s to diffuse and even settle social unrest and other political conflicts.¹⁷ In the aftermath of decolonization, it became the favorite tool of political communication of the Ivorian leadership. In times of crises such as those involving the alleged plots of 1963–1964 or the student unrest of 1967–1968, Houphouët-Boigny used dialogue in the form of mass meetings and face-to-face discussions to “legitimize his action while permitting some symbolic participation in the decision-making process.”¹⁸ The legacy of these political moves may have proved problematic since dialogue only “strengthen[ed] the single-party state and expand[ed] its reach in society.”¹⁹ Yet in the context of the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s, it allowed Houphouët-Boigny to retain the reins of power. Given the relative success in mobilizing dialogue to manage politics within the Ivory Coast, it might have been tempting to implement the same technique to address Africa-wide problems, including the crisis that resulted from South Africa’s policy of racial segregation.²⁰

Since the first wave of decolonization on the continent, much of the African diplomacy against apartheid South Africa had been left in the hands of regional actors in Southern Africa and Pan-Africanists such as Kwame Nkrumah.²¹ By the late 1960s, however, Houphouët-Boigny was becoming less impressed by the policies carried out by his peers vis-à-vis Southern Africa and the Portuguese colonies. In May 1967, he reportedly told the U.S. ambassador to Ivory Coast that all the African leaders could accomplish was to merely take “some platitudinous resolutions about Angola and Southern Africa, with no attention to realistic means of implementation.”²² Some months later Houphouët-Boigny reiterated his point claiming that, “African policies toward South Africa, Rhodesia, [and] Portuguese Africa are getting nowhere.” Then he concluded: the “only hope of progress lies in resuming dialogue” with the authorities of those countries/territories.²³ Although it fed on the omnipotent “Dialogue à l’ivoirienne,” the Ivorian leader’s move was clearly a nod to the “Outward policy,” which South African

¹⁶ Toungara, “Apotheosis,” 25. See Sylla, “Dynamique de la réconciliation,” 15.

¹⁷ For this interpretation of dialogue as a form of neotraditionalism, see Sylla, “Dynamique de la réconciliation,” 13, and Campbell, *Emergent Independent Press*, 77.

¹⁸ Cohen, *Urban Policy and Political Conflict*, 117.

¹⁹ Campbell, *Emergent Independent Press*, 78.

²⁰ Grah Mel, *Houphouët-Boigny*, vol. 3, *Fin et suite*, 34, 106–107.

²¹ Jeffrey S. Ahlman, “Road to Ghana: Nkrumah, Southern Africa and the Eclipse of a Decolonizing Africa,” *Kronos* 37, 1 (2011), 23–40.

²² Abidjan to Department of State, 24 May 1967, Papers of George A. Morgan, Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Library (hereafter, LBJ Library), Austin, Texas.

²³ Abidjan to Department of State, 7 November 1967, Papers of George A. Morgan, Box 1, LBJ Library.

authorities embraced when Johannes B. Vorster assumed the Premiership in 1966.²⁴ But domestic events compelled Houphouët-Boigny to focus again on Ivory Coast, even as he remained “determine[ed] to recognize and establish closer relations with South Africa.”²⁵

At the Fifth Congress of Ivory Coast’s ruling party (the Parti Démocratique de Côte d’Ivoire [PDCI]) in October 1970, Houphouët-Boigny turned this theoretical determination into practice when he publicly declared himself in favor of dialogue with the white minority government in Pretoria.²⁶ Domestically, the Ivorian president had just survived yet another challenge to his authority by young technocrats who were demanding the expansion of the gerontocratic boundaries of the patrimonial state. Through cunning and the use of dialogue, the Ivorian statesman once again had overcome opposition to his mercurial rule. Past the storms of unrest, he could now devote his time to foreign policy, including the South African puzzle.²⁷ Houphouët-Boigny’s resurgent activism found its first public manifestation in January 1971 at a gathering of Francophone African countries in Chad. Although the efforts at rallying his Francophone peers were not successful, the Ivorian leader did not concede defeat. Rather, he opted to shape international public opinion by organizing a press conference to which some 126 international journalists were invited.²⁸ At that media event held on 28 April 1971, the man whom many observers considered a moderate affirmed: “I believe that dialogue with the Whites of South Africa is possible, especially if we locate it within the neutral framework of a peace through neutrality.” Such peace, Houphouët-Boigny argued, would be a “peace that involves all the Africans, both the Whites of South Africa as well as ourselves. White South Africans must overcome apartheid which is the sole cause of disunion between them and their black brothers of Africa.”²⁹

²⁴ Pfister, *Apartheid South Africa and African States*, 39–104; Ndlovu, “ANC’s Diplomacy,” 616; Robert S. Jaster, *The Defence of White Power* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1989), 11.

²⁵ David Rockefeller to Henry Kissinger, 4 April 1969, White House Central Files, GEN CO 73, Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library (hereafter, RMN Library), Yorba Linda, California. For a quick overview of *Le Vieux*’s domestic difficulties, see Diarra, *Faux complots*, 65–97; Grah Mel, *Houphouët-Boigny*, vol. 2, *Epreuve du pouvoir*, 277–304.

²⁶ Theodore Eliot to Henry Kissinger, 25 November 1970, National Security Files, Box 737: Ivory Coast, RMN Library; Kamissoko, *De Yamoussoukro à Pretoria*, 12; Nandjui, *L’homme de la France*, 204. See also, Grah Mel, *Houphouët-Boigny*, vol. 3, *La fin et la suite*, 106–107.

²⁷ Theodore Eliot to Henry Kissinger, 25 November 1970, National Security Files, Box 737: Ivory Coast, RMN Library.

²⁸ William Borders, “Vorster Bid Gets Support in Africa: Ivory Coast’s Leader Urges Black Nations to Join in Efforts for Closer Ties,” *New York Times*, 29 April 1971; Claude Lemelin, “Africa’s Chief Emphasizes ‘Dialogue,’” *Washington Post*, 29 April 1971; Daniel Bach, “Les initiatives franco-sud-africaines de ‘dialogue’ avec l’Afrique francophone,” in Daniel Bach, ed., *La France et l’Afrique du Sud: Histoire, mythes et enjeux contemporains* (Paris and Nairobi: Editions Karthala and CREU, 1990), 211; Baulin, *La politique africaine*, 206.

²⁹ Kamissoko, *De Yamoussoukro à Pretoria*, 13. See also Nandjui, *L’homme de la France*, 204; Sam Nolutshungu, *South Africa in Africa: A Study of Ideology and Foreign Policy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), 274.

Arsène Usher Assouan, as Ivorian delegate to the OAU Ministerial Council, heartily defended this stance at the June 1971 meeting of the Pan-African organization. When the matter came to a vote, however, a too strong majority of the member-states of the union rejected his proposal.³⁰ Nonetheless, the Ivorian president remained confident. He quietly sent Laurent Dona Fologo to sound out the American authorities on the issue of dialogue.³¹ More tellingly, an interview in *Fraternité Matin* showed that Houphouët-Boigny had stubbornly decided to move ahead, for he vowed to intensify efforts to rally other like-minded African leaders and possibly to send a delegation to South Africa.³²

An Ivorian mission on a “private visit” did arrive in Pretoria in early October 1971. Reportedly, the head of the Ivorian delegation was even received by Premier Vorster.³³ The Pan-African outcry that ensued must have deterred other countries from associating themselves with Houphouët-Boigny’s diplomatic move.³⁴ By mid-1972 the Ivorian president had come to doubt any prospect of success for his attempt at a Pan-African mobilization for his dialogue diplomacy. The effects of this conjuncture are revealed obliquely in a letter of the French Chargé d’Affaires in Pretoria to the Quai d’Orsay. Reporting on an interview that Arsène Usher Assouan gave to Raymond Louw (editor of the *Rand Daily Mail*), the French diplomat noted:

Mr. Assouan Usher seemingly told Mr. Louw that Ivory Coast still believes in the politics of dialogue, but that it must convince other African countries of its usefulness. The Ivory Coast will not act without the consent of these [African] countries. Thus any direct conversation between Ivory Coast and South Africa was premature.³⁵

But the Ivorian authorities were not conceding defeat on the issue of dialogue. In fact, they were ready to re-establish direct exchange with the South African government on the condition that South Africa officially declared that all men are created equal and publicly

³⁰ Gilbert Comte, “Remous autour du projet de dialogue avec Pretoria: Le Président Houphouët-Boigny aura du mal à rallier les Etats francophones à ses thèses,” *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Paris), June 1971; “OAU Dissension as Emperor Pleads for Unity,” *Guardian* (Manchester), 16 June 1971; Colin Legum, “Ivory Coast Walks Out over Agenda: Objects to ‘Dialogue,’” *Washington Post*, 19 June 1971; “Black Africa Rejects ‘Dialogue’ with S. Africa,” *Washington Post*, 24 June 1971; Bach, “Initiatives franco-sud-africaines,” 212.

³¹ Jerry Warren to Ronald Ziegler, 8 October 1971, White House Central Files, (EX) CO 73, RMN Library.

³² Félix Houphouët-Boigny (interview with Laurent D. Fologo), “Houphouët rompt le silence: ‘Nous enverrons une mission à Prétoria pour le dialogue,’” *Fraternité Matin* (Abidjan), 4 October 1971. *Fraternité Matin* replaced *Fraternité* in 1963 when the latter merged with *Abidjan-Matin*.

³³ Paul Hofmann, “Border Incidents Stall Vorster’s Bid for Talks,” *New York Times*, 8 October 1971; “Black Envoys Visit Pretoria,” *New York Times*, 7 October 1971; Ndlovu, “ANC’s Diplomacy,” 623–24; Bach, “L’insertion ivoirienne,” 111; Baulin, *La politique africaine*, 207; Nolutshungu, *South Africa in Africa*, 278.

³⁴ Ndlovu, “ANC’s Diplomacy,” 624.

³⁵ Chargé d’Affaires [Pretoria] to Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, 31 August 1972, Archives des postes/Abidjan, Carton 43, Centre des Archives Diplomatiques (hereafter, CAD), Nantes, France.

committed itself to the abolition of racial discrimination. Only then would a world conference be organized to promote reconciliation among South Africans.³⁶

Although the South African officials never complied with these demands, the Ivorian leader staged in 1973 a “world peace conference” in Abidjan where, according to one zealot of Houphouëtism, “more than 3,000 delegates gathered to listen to the apostle and militant of world peace.”³⁷ Reportedly, the old statesman cautioned his disciples against using armed struggle to solve the South African question for “it is usually better to engage in dialogue than to dramatize.”³⁸ If the aim of that media event was to sway the African opinion to the politics of dialogue, it seems to have had little impact. Thus Houphouët-Boigny had to wait until the mid-1970s to see the emergence of a new opportunity for his dialogue agenda.

This prospect came in the form of the Carnation Revolution when, on 25 April 1974, a group of army officers mounted a mutiny that led to the overthrow of the Caetano government in Portugal.³⁹ The new political situation in Lisbon led to an alteration of the geopolitical balance of forces in Southern Africa. Portugal’s withdrawal from the region spelled the collapse of the South African “cordon sanitaire.” Aware of this disturbing prospect, the realist Vorster indulged in a series of meetings meant to resuscitate the détente plans that had been laid in 1967.⁴⁰ Thus, in late 1974, the South African Premier became personally involved in the negotiations for a peaceful settlement in Rhodesia, whose white settlers had declared a Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965 in an attempt to shortcut black-led decolonization. In a similar move, he made surreptitious overtures to both the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) and the Zambian president, Kenneth Kaunda.⁴¹ What a contemporary observer dubbed the “secret diplomacy of détente” was extended beyond southern Africa, since in September 1974 the Afrikaner Premier met with Houphouët-Boigny in his hometown of Yamoussoukro.⁴² Though the military invasion of Angola by the apartheid forces would bring a halt to

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Harold B. Martinson, *Felix Houphouët-Boigny at the Service of World Peace*, abrig ed. (Abidjan: Editions du Souvenir, 1992), 53–54.

³⁸ Ibid., 54.

³⁹ Paul Bernetel, “Où en est l’OUA?” *Jeune Afrique*, 7 March 1975. See also Avelino Rodríguez, Cesário Borge, and Mário Cardoso, *Portugal en Revolución* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1977), 7.

⁴⁰ “Kenneth Kaunda: ‘M. Vorster est un réaliste,’” *Jeune Afrique*, 21 March 1975; “For the Liberation of South Africa and All Her People: No Dialogue with Apartheid!” *Vukani/Awake* (underground/South Africa), March 1975.

⁴¹ Graham Hovey, “Vorster’s Détente II,” *New York Times*, 1 April 1975; Colin Legum, *Southern Africa: The Secret Diplomacy of Détente/ South Africa at Crossroad* (New York: Africana Publications, 1975), 2–3; Jaster, *The Defence*, 51–54.

⁴² “Vorster Trip to Ivory Coast Is Rumored in South Africa,” *New York Times*, 1 December 1974; *Official Yearbook of the Republic of South Africa* (1976), 871. The meeting was so secretive, Bach reminds us, that even the French ambassador, who was usually in the know of all the moves made by *Le Vieux*, did not know about it until two weeks later. For details, see Bach, “L’insertion ivoirienne,” 111.

Vorster's diplomatic offensive, the seeds of discord within the African coalition against apartheid South Africa had been sown anew.

Nothing testified more clearly to the re-emergence of jarring dissonances than the heated debate driving the February 1975 budgetary session of the OAU in Addis Ababa. The mood at that session was so electric that, in an effort to prevent the OAU from losing face, the Algerian Foreign Minister had to propose that a special session be called to deal with the question of détente with Vorster.⁴³ When the date of the eagerly awaited meeting came, Houphouët-Boigny, through his envoy Assouan, quickly pressed for the adoption of a policy of dialogue with apartheid South Africa. With the signatories of the Lusaka Accords backing off, however, the future of dialogue was once again doomed. As Vorster recognized a week later, the member-states of the OAU "decided to close the door to détente and dialogue."⁴⁴ But the Ivory Coast authorities gave a radically different reading of the policy document that resulted from the meeting—the Dar es Salaam Declaration on Southern Africa. Indeed, in an article entitled "L'unique voie" (The Only Solution), the editor-in-chief of *Fraternité Matin* claimed that the OAU special session confirmed the legitimacy of dialogue. Then the editorialist concluded:

They certainly are disappointed, those duplicitous champions of violence who sit in the comfort of their palaces and remain far removed from the war zones. They must be disheartened at reading the "Dar-es-Salaam Declaration" which recommends, just like the Lusaka Manifesto, to explore all the promise of dialogue with Vorster and Ian Smith rather than to use force.⁴⁵

Even if language is polysemic, nothing was so removed from the spirit of the Dar es Salaam resolution. In fact, not only did the text reject the kind of détente that Vorster was advocating, but it also reiterated Africa's "support to the national liberation movements of South Africa in their struggle in all its forms."⁴⁶ In hindsight, however, it appears that the Ivorian newsman was paving the way for the boldest act of his president's politics of dialogue: the sending of an official delegation to South Africa in September 1975; a delegation led by none other than Fologo who was accompanied by his French wife.

It is revealing, if ironic, that upon arrival at Jan Smuts Airport, Houphouët-Boigny's envoy told reporters that in the quest of peace through dialogue, "no sacrifice will be spared, not even sacrifice of self-respect."⁴⁷ While he never refused to socialize and

⁴³ Paul Bernétel, "Où en est l'OUA?" *Jeune Afrique*, 7 March 1975.

⁴⁴ Paul Bernétel, "L'Afrique contre le dialogue," *Jeune Afrique*, 2 May 1975.

⁴⁵ Auguste Miremont, "L'unique voie," *Fraternité Matin*, 14 April 1975.

⁴⁶ "Document: Organization of African Unity (OAU) Dar es Salaam Declaration on Southern Africa," *Journal of African Studies* 3, 1 (Spring 1976), 131. For an American diplomatic assessment of the declaration, see Dar es Salaam to Washington, 11 April 1975, Record Group [RG] 59, Access to Archival Databases (hereafter AAD), Document Number [#]: 1975DARES01049, National Archives and Records Administration [hereafter, NARA], College Park, Maryland. For further discussion of this policy document, see Ndlovu, "ANC's Diplomacy," 628–30.

⁴⁷ "The Long Road to Pretoria," *West Africa*, 22 September 1975; Patrick Laurence, "Fologo Arrives On a 'Mission of Peace,'" *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 September 1975.

drink toasts with the Afrikaner ruling elite, Fologo made no bones about voicing his repulsion for apartheid South Africa, which he even called a “sick” society. He also lashed out at apartheid, calling it a “poison.”⁴⁸ Given such a seemingly contradictory stance, many contemporaries wondered about the motivations prompting Houphouët-Boigny to send a delegation to apartheid South Africa. All the more so since rumors in certain liberal circles in South Africa suspected material benefits for the West African country. In fact, as early as 1973 they argued that Houphouët-Boigny’s dialogue diplomacy was aimed at helping Ivory Coast fill out its “empty” hotel rooms with South African tourists. In other words, Ivorian calls for dialogue was informed by a desperate search for South African partners to salvage the economy of West African country.⁴⁹

In response to these rumors and other accusations, Fologo made the following statement as soon as he reached Johannesburg: “Our country is not even looking for investment. We already have investors.”⁵⁰ Although South Africa was Ivory Coast’s fifth largest trading partner—a fact that Ivorian officials strove to hide from the international community—Fologo’s claim must not be dismissed altogether.⁵¹ For, at the time Houphouët-Boigny was promoting a dialogue diplomacy with South Africa, the economy of Ivory Coast was on the road of success—prompting some analysts to dub the Ivorian experience an “economic miracle.”⁵² Macroeconomic indicators were so positive in the late 1960s and 1970s that some scholars even claimed that Houphouët-Boigny’s country had reached the status of semi-periphery in the global economy.⁵³ Aware of this situation, political scientist and contemporary observer Sam Nolutshungu argued in 1975 that Ivory

⁴⁸ “M. Fologo, très ferme, en Afrique du Sud: ‘Non au racisme, oui au dialogue,’” *Fraternité Matin*, 17 September 1975; Patrick Laurence, “Fologo Cancels Final Press Conference,” *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 September 1975.

⁴⁹ On these rumors, see Ambassade de France (Abidjan) to Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, 12 January 1973, Archives des postes/Abidjan, Carton 43, CAD.

⁵⁰ “Peace at Any Price—Ivory Coast,” *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 September 1975. See also Kamissoko, *De Yamoussoukro à Pretoria*, 14.

⁵¹ Ambassade de France [Abidjan] to Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, 9 January 1973, Archives des postes/Abidjan, Carton 43, CAD. For a look at this secretive trading relationship between South Africa and the larger Black Africa, see “Vorster Hints He Will Establish Ties with Black African States,” *New York Times*, 6 November 1970.

⁵² For a scholarly discussion of the “Ivorian Miracle” of the 1960s and 1970s, see Neil B. Ridler, “Comparative Advantage as a Development Model: The Ivory Coast,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 23, 3 (September 1985), 407–17; Robert M. Hecht, “The Ivory Coast Economic ‘Miracle’: What Benefits for Peasant Farmers?” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 21, 1 (March 1983), 25–53; Michael O’Connor, “Guinea and the Ivory Coast: Contrasts in Economic Development,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 10, 3 (October 1972), 409–26; Bastiaan den Tuinder, *Ivory Coast: The Challenge of Success* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Samir Amin, *Le développement du capitalisme en Côte d’Ivoire* (Paris: Editions Minit, 1970).

⁵³ Karen A. Mingst, “The Ivory Coast at the Semi-Periphery of the World-Economy,” *International Studies Quarterly* 32, 3 (September 1988), 267.

Coast and its president could not be “accused of having a material interest in dialogue.”⁵⁴ Such observation was certainly perceptive.

However, the lack or implausibility of a quest for material wealth as the motive behind Houphouët-Boigny’s dialogue initiative must not lead one to believe that there was no investment.⁵⁵ The Ivorian leader was not so much interested in accumulating economic capital as he wanted to attract other forms of capital, including the social and the symbolic, that is, prestige and leadership.⁵⁶ This becomes apparent when Nolutshungu suggested that Houphouët-Boigny’s ploys with regards to South Africa might have been a tactical maneuver in a larger “right-wing revolt” of some African countries, including among others the Ivory Coast, Tsiranana’s Malagasy Republic, and Busia’s Ghana. In this scenario, the actions of Houphouët-Boigny are cast as lending a helping hand to Tsiranana who lacked influence in African politics yet needed a normalization of relations with South Africa.⁵⁷ Jacques Baulin, another observer/participant who, as erstwhile counselor of the Ivorian president, has further offered that Houphouët-Boigny’s initiatives stemmed from the coming together of three extremely important parameters in Ivorian political life: a narrow-minded nationalism, moderation with a whiff of anti-communism, and complicity with certain Parisian business circles.⁵⁸

Among these factors, the fear of a communist takeover of Africa was arguably paramount. Although Houphouët-Boigny and his friends of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA) had allied themselves with the French Communist Party in the early days of postwar nationalism in West Africa, such alliance subsequently proved to be a liability. Consequently, the RDA leadership disaffiliated their political movement from the French communists in 1951. Even more, Houphouët-Boigny became one of the staunchest anti-communist leaders in Francophone West Africa.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Nolutshungu, *South Africa in Africa*, 277; see also “‘Dialogue’ with South Africa,” *New York Times*, 14 June 1971.

⁵⁵ Bach, “L’insertion ivoirienne,” 111.

⁵⁶ For this non-Marxian understanding of capital, I draw on Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capitals,” in John G. Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 241–58. For a similar reading of *Le Vieux*’s move by a contemporary journalist, see Gilbert Comte, “Remous autour du projet de dialogue avec Pretoria: Le Président Houphouët-Boigny aura du mal à rallier les Etats francophones à ses thèses,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, June 1971.

⁵⁷ Nolutshungu, *South Africa in Africa*, 278–79.

⁵⁸ In a postscript, Baulin offers some additional elements, including the quest for prestige and reward to South Africa for its pro-secessionist position on the Biafran question. For details, see Baulin, *La politique africaine*, 199, 205–206.

⁵⁹ On *Le Vieux*’s alliance and subsequent disaffiliation with the French communists, see Philippe Guillemin, “Les élus d’Afrique noire à l’Assemblée nationale sous la Quatrième République,” *Revue française de science politique* 8, 4 (1958), 861–77; Jean Suret-Canale, *Les Groupes d’Etudes Communistes (GEC) en Afrique noire* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1994); Félix Houphouët-Boigny, *Chronique de la décolonisation* (Abidjan: Ministère de l’Information, 1986), 15–18; Félix Houphouët-Boigny, *Anthologie des discours*, vol. 1, 1946–1978 (Abidjan: CEDA, 1978), 83–89.

Adding to this dread of communism, one can argue along with the *New York Times* that the fear of open war was a significant factor in the political thinking of Houphouët-Boigny.⁶⁰ Though little is known about the efficiency of the Ivorian Intelligence Service, it is likely that Houphouët-Boigny knew, in the Cold War context, that the “Cape route factor” played against the liberation movements in Southern Africa, all the more so since “OAU’s ability to provide financial aid to African liberation movements was limited.”⁶¹ Terrified by the prospect of a replication of what he saw as the Palestinian Syndrome whereby subaltern groups came to lose the little they had due to both intransigence and the war-mongering counsel of “unreliable” friends, the Ivorian president received African National Congress leader Oliver Tambo and some of his close companions in December 1972.⁶² According to diplomatic sources, Houphouët-Boigny told his South African guests that he was dubious about the efficacy of violence in bringing the Afrikaner ruling elite to reason: “Your means are weak not only at the plane of finance and armament but also at the level of military technique.” Even more, the Ivorian statesman pointed out that “the era when one would assess military might by the number of draftees is over.”⁶³

Perhaps Paul Bernetel—a prominent journalist at *Jeune Afrique*—had understood this rather cold realism that informed Houphouët-Boigny’s larger political philosophy. Although the columnist did not agree with the policy option of the Ivorian president, he nonetheless ended his 1975 cover article on Houphouët-Boigny with this advice: “I believe it wise for Africans as well as for the South African Liberation movements to dissociate Houphouët’s diagnosis from the cure he proposes.”⁶⁴ These words fell on deaf ears; for the OAU, African intellectuals, and the Pan-African press seem to have all agreed to vilify the Ivorian leader for singing so different a tune in the choir to condemn apartheid.

Responding to Houphouët-Boigny’s Dialogue Diplomacy

The reception of Houphouët-Boigny’s diplomatic moves regarding the South African question in the early 1970s did not suffer from much opacity. In both the African and Pan-African press, politicians, diplomats as well as intellectuals questioned the validity and the legitimacy of *Le Vieux*’s politics of dialogue. And this was ultimately conducive to and a reflection of the neutralization of Houphouëtism in the larger context of African

⁶⁰ “‘Dialogue’ with South Africa,” *New York Times*, 14 June 1971. See also Bach, ‘L’insertion ivoirienne,’ 110.

⁶¹ Roger Pfister, “Gateway to International Victory: The Diplomacy of the African National Congress in Africa, 1960–1994,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 41, 1 (2003), 61; Ndlovu, “ANC’s Diplomacy,” 639–49. The “Cape route factor” resulted from the Cape’s strategic position, which allowed apartheid South Africa to monitor oil shipments from Western Asia to the Atlantic world. Thanks to this geo-strategic advantage, South Africa was one of the countries unofficially placed under the protective shield of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). For details, see Sean Gervase, “Under the NATO Umbrella,” *Africa Report* (Washington, D.C.), September–October 1976.

⁶² Ambassade de France (Abidjan) to Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, 16 January 1972, Archives des postes/Abidjan, Carton 43, CAD.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Paul Bernetel, “Houphouët-Boigny: La hantise du chaos,” *Jeune Afrique*, 21 November 1975.

diplomacy. Houphouët-Boigny's first public diplomatic initiative regarding the South African question caused outcries from many an African capital. Thus, as early as 1970 when the Ivorian president made his announcement of planning to engage in dialogue with Vorster, Lagos criticized it as "unacceptable" while Conakry saw it as a "dishonor."⁶⁵ In the same vein, at the 1971 session of OAU Ministerial Council, the Congolese Foreign Minister depicted the Ivory Coast as a "by-product of French imperialism in Africa."⁶⁶ Four years later, commenting on the presence of the Fologo delegation, Steve Biko's South African Student Organization (SASO) slammed Ivory Coast for "flirting with people who were not interested in peace or dialogue, but were only gulling the world into accepting their racist policy."⁶⁷

Yet it is in the print media that Houphouët-Boigny's politics of dialogue received its harshest criticism. Indeed, in the form of a trope that posited the Ivorian president as a willing stooge working along the lines set by Western imperialists, Houphouët-Boigny and his country emerged in the 1970s as the target *par excellence* of both the underground press and the major Africanist newsgroups. Beginning in 1971, the South African underground newspaper *Sechaba* (official organ of the African National Congress) lashed out at the "Fort Hares and Turfloops, the Matanzimas, Banda and Houphouët-Boignes ...[as] agents of colonialism [...] offering their services as Bantu Commissioners in the political structure of the racist regime."⁶⁸ In early 1975 while Houphouët-Boigny was laying the groundwork for sending of his South Africa delegation, another black South African underground newspaper denounced the leaders of numerous moderate African countries who had "again raised the nauseating slogan of 'dialogue' with the racist South African regime."⁶⁹

Though moderate in tone, Pan-African newspapers as diverse as *West Africa* and *Jeune Afrique* shared a similar view. In 1975, for instance, while the Fologo mission was still in South Africa, the Paris-based newsmagazine dismissed the trip of the Ivorians as "inopportune." Then it continued, "It is dangerous to award Pretoria a degree of respectability without serious protest."⁷⁰ Laurent Dona Fologo, a trained journalist, did not wait long to vent his displeasure. No sooner did he get back from the ill-fated trip than he

⁶⁵ Philippe Decraene, "Apartheid: L'offre ivoirienne de dialogue avec Pretoria rencontre une réticence croissante," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 1970; Baulin, *La politique africaine*, 206.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Nandjui, *L'homme de la France*, 206. For a coverage the subsequent brawl between the Congolese minister and Usher Assouan, see "Black Africa Rejects 'Dialogue' with S. Africa," *Washington Post*, 24 June 1971; Charles Mohr, "Ministers Clash at African Talks: Call for Contact with South Africa Stirs Controversy," *New York Times*, 16 June 1971.

⁶⁷ Nat Serache, "SASO Slams Ivory Coast's 'Flirtation,'" *Rand Daily Mail*, 12 September 1975.

⁶⁸ "New Year Message to the ANC External Mission," *Sechaba*, March 1971.

⁶⁹ "For the Liberation of South Africa and All Her People: No Dialogue with Apartheid!" *Vukani/Awake*, March 1975.

⁷⁰ Paul Bernetel, "Un voyage inopportun," *Jeune Afrique*, 19 September 1975. For an English translation, see "An Inopportune Trip," *Africa Report*, November–December 1975.

replied to *Jeune Afrique*.⁷¹ In an article entitled “I Am Back from South Africa,” Houphouët-Boigny’s emissary voiced his repulsion at what he qualified as “hypocritical editorials.” Then he concluded:

Our immediate interest is peace. Our short-term interest is peace. Our long-term interest is peace. *For us in Ivory Coast any time is an opportune time for peace.* Our mission is not to mislead African opinion but to accept the unrewarding and dreaded task (in a climate of perpetual suspicion and hostility from our brothers) to tear down frontiers in the realms of fear, racism and hatred so that peace and justice may triumph on the African soil.⁷²

The last word in the media brawl known as “Dialogue on Dialogue” came from the editor-in-chief of *Jeune Afrique*, who attacked Houphouët-Boigny’s dialogue initiative on the grounds that “the liberation movements in South Africa that are [...] the first to be concerned, and the majority of the continent’s countries, are hostile to the ‘dialogue’ policy.”⁷³ Judged from the standpoint of media reception, Houphouët-Boigny’s politics of dialogue reinforced his diplomatic failure to win over his fellow African leaders.

A number of elements explain such failure. First, by the time the 1960s drew to a close, as one keen observer has stressed, revolutionary ideas had come to permeate the intellectual and cultural space of many African countries.⁷⁴ In fact, it is no mere coincidence that the late 1960s and early 1970s were also the heyday of the late Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral, Kwame Nkrumah, Steve Biko and their critical theories on colonialism, neocolonialism, national liberation, and black consciousness.⁷⁵ Second, the presence of French expatriates in Ivorian bureaucracy was increasingly perceived as having a dominant influence in the late 1960s and 1970s.⁷⁶ As an American diplomat

⁷¹ “En réponse à l’article de Paul Bernetel (Jeune Afrique): M. Fologo: ‘Je reviens d’Afrique du Sud,’” *Fraternité Matin*, 22 September 1975.

⁷² Laurent Dona Fologo, “Je reviens d’Afrique du Sud,” *Jeune Afrique*, 3 October 1975. For an English translation, see “I am Back from South Africa,” *Africa Report*, November–December 1975. [Emphasis added].

⁷³ Paul Bernetel, “Ce que nous savons,” *Jeune Afrique*, 3 October 1975; see also, “What We Know,” *Africa Report*, November–December 1975.

⁷⁴ Kamissoko, *De Yamoussoukro à Pretoria*, 13.

⁷⁵ A short list of the writings of the activists/politicians includes, Frantz Fanon: *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963); *A Dying Colonialism* (1965; repr., New York: Grove Press, 1967), *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967). Amílcar Cabral: *National Liberation and Culture* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, 1970); *Análise de alguns tipos de resistência* (Lisboa: Seara Nova, 1974); *Guiné-Bissau: Nação africana forjada na luta* (Lisboa: Nova Aurora, 1974). Kwame Nkrumah: *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Heinemann, 1965); *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare: A Guide to the Armed Phase of the African Revolution* (New York: International Publishers, 1969); *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-colonization* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970); *Revolutionary Path* (New York: International Publishers, 1973). Steve Biko, ed., *Black Viewpoint* (Durban: Spro-Cas Black Community Programmes, 1972).

⁷⁶ For accounts of such perception, see Morgan to Department of State, 19 October 1968, George A. Morgan Papers, Box 1, LBJ Library; Denis Zunon, “The Analysis of French Technical Assistance Personnel

articulated it later, wedding the knowledge of such perception to the closer economic ties between Ivory Coast and France, on the one hand, and France's military-business ties with South Africa, many observers came to view Ivorian foreign policy as a hostage to French interests.⁷⁷ In other words, given the close relationship between Paris and Abidjan, any action on the part of the Ivorian authorities became synonymous with lackeyism. It is in this light that one can make sense of the dismissal of Houphouët-Boigny's South African diplomacy by some of his peers. In a similar context, one can understand why U.S. Vice-President Hubert Humphrey had, as early as 1968, advised President Lyndon Johnson that the United States should avoid "over-identification" with the Ivorian leader lest Houphouët-Boigny meet the "same problems he faces because of his heavy reliance on France." Rather, Humphrey suggested that "quietly, and with only occasional publicity, we encourage the Ivory Coast to continue its leadership" in African matters, including the anti-apartheid struggle.⁷⁸

Thus radicalization of the anti-apartheid movement collaterally forced such a great power as the United States to maintain a low profile. By dismissing Houphouët-Boigny's initiatives, however, anti-apartheid activists as well as revolutionary scholars have overlooked the subtlety of the weapon that Houphouët-Boigny attempted to deploy against the South African regime. In so doing, they may have left unfinished their attempts to understand the various modes of action to subvert apartheid.

The Fologo Mission as Political Performance

Before we examine the subversive edge of the Fologo mission, it is appropriate to relate an incident that involved yet another proponent of dialogue with apartheid South Africa. In late 1971, Malawian President Kamuzu Banda visited South Africa, and in his honor, the Vorster government organized a reception. Reportedly, at that dinner, the Afrikaner Prime Minister sat between two black Malawian ladies. This caused outcries and concerns among diehard Afrikaner nationalists who had come to believe that "the inevitable social contacts with black diplomats would be subversive of *apartheid*." They were so repulsed by the idea that the seemingly outrageous picture appeared in every edition of *Die Afrikaner* for many months.⁷⁹ Whether the Ivorian delegation knew about this incident is not clear,

in the Ivory Coast (1960–1976)" (Ph.D. diss., SUNY-Albany, 1978). In fact, if it is true that there were many French expatriates in the Ivory Coast, the majority of them worked in the private sector. Furthermore, the Ivorian government had initiated, if reluctantly, a process of "Africanization" in the public sector. For details, see Consulat Général/Abidjan to Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, 27 August 1974, Archive des postes/Abidjan, Carton 37, CAD; Terry D. Monson and Garry Pursell, "Evaluation économique des programmes de remplacement de la main d'œuvre expatriée dans les pays en voie de développement: Etude du cas de la Côte d'Ivoire," *L'Actualité économique* 53, 2 (1977), 280–317.

⁷⁷ Theodore Eliot to Henry Kissinger, 25 November 1970, National Security Files, Box 737: Ivory Coast, RMN Library.

⁷⁸ Report from Vice-President Humphrey to President Johnson, 12 January 1968, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter, *FRUS*), vol. 24, *Africa* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1999), 382–410.

⁷⁹ Nolutshungu, *South Africa in Africa*, 125.

although Houphouët-Boigny approved of Banda's visit and even sent a letter to congratulate the Malawian leader for his courage in meeting with the South African authorities.⁸⁰ What is beyond doubt is that the very presence of the Fologos was intended to transgress such apartheid laws as the Prohibition of Mixed Marriage Act or the Immorality Act. The editorialist of the Ivorian daily newspaper *Fraternité Matin* made that point quite explicit when he argued that Mr. and Mrs. Fologo were the "first mixed couple to be admitted *together* [into South Africa] in violation of the 'Immorality' Act."⁸¹

Foreign correspondents of wire services in Johannesburg did not lose sight of this transgression either. They underlined that the South African government was deliberately "ignoring the violation of its Immorality Act by the Information Minister of the Ivory Coast here on an official visit with his white wife." Then the journalists explained: "The Immorality Act bans mixed marriages or any other close relationship between blacks and whites."⁸² In a similar vein, the local *Rand Daily Mail*, in breaking the news that a mission from a black African country was coming to South Africa, added conspicuously that the head of the delegation would be "accompanied by his *French* wife."⁸³ Two days later the images of the couple were ostensibly displayed as if to say that apartheid was a hoax.⁸⁴ Furthermore, Fologo himself did not hide his dream of a multiracial South Africa. During a visit to the University of the North in Sovenga, for instance, the Ivorian emissary reportedly affirmed: "My wife is White, my friend is a Coloured and I am Black. We are trying to get together. This is what we wish to see in this country."⁸⁵ Bridging the gap between Fologo's wish of a multiracial society and the coming of a rainbow South Africa may have had a long way to go. Still the race-based composition of the delegation he headed—four blacks, one white, and one *métis*—was a deliberate act of transgression meant to destabilize, in the view of an Ivorian editorialist, one of the tenets of the apartheid system: the myth of racial purity and white (male) supremacy.⁸⁶

Despite its fair coverage of the Fologo mission, the liberal *Rand Daily Mail* does not tell us the reaction of the ruling Afrikaner elite vis-à-vis the mixed nature of the Ivorian delegation. It seems, however, that Houphouët-Boigny was attempting to create cracks in the apartheid regime as a prelude to the eventual massive assaults he dreamed of when

⁸⁰ Félix Houphouët-Boigny [interview with Laurent Dona Fologo], "Houphouët rompt le silence: 'Nous enverrons une mission à Prétoria pour le dialogue,'" *Fraternité Matin*, 4 October 1971; see also Rajen Harshé, "France, Francophone African States and South Africa: The Complex Triangle and Apartheid," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 9, 1 (1983), 62.

⁸¹ Auguste Miremont, "Précédents" *Fraternité Matin*, 18 September 1975.

⁸² "South Africa Welcomes Aide with White Wife," *New York Times*, 11 September 1975; "Apartheid Morals Placed in Limbo," *Washington Post*, 11 September 1975.

⁸³ Patrick Laurence, "'I Talked Fologo into It,' Says Prof.," *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 September 1975 (Emphasis added).

⁸⁴ Patrick Laurence, "Dona-Fologo 'Satisfied,'" *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 September 1975.

⁸⁵ Patrick Laurence, "Go Multiracial, Fologo Tells SA," *Rand Daily Mail*, 13 September 1975.

⁸⁶ Auguste Miremont, "Un moment historique," *Fraternité Matin*, 13–14 September 1975.

African countries flooded Pretoria with Black diplomats.⁸⁷ Anti-Houphouët scholar Pierre Nandjui has dismissed this attempt at a “pacifist invasion” of South Africa as a misguided strategy.⁸⁸ But a comparative look at the historiography on desegregation in the United States in the 1960s suggests that Nandjui as well as radical African leaders in the 1970s may have ignored the power of a transnational historical process that proved so crucial in shaking the confidence of “apartheid’s reluctant uncle,” that is Jim Crow America. Such power, as many historians have demonstrated, resided in the unintended consequence of the presence of diplomats of color in the United States in the era of mid-twentieth century decolonization.⁸⁹

President Houphouët-Boigny was attentive to these transnational developments in the fight for desegregation in the United States and he attempted to replicate them in South Africa. An indication of this was revealed in 1971 when he called for the posting of African diplomats to Pretoria. During an interview with a journalist to clarify his position, Houphouët-Boigny rhetorically posed: “Don’t you think that the presence of foreign blacks in the US, in all the sectors, was helpful and conducive to solving this problem [of segregation] and leading to effective equality?”⁹⁰ Attention to the behind-the-scenes decision making regarding Houphouët-Boigny’s purported non-violent assault on apartheid further confirms that the Ivorian leader knew how potentially disruptive and influential the presence of diplomats and dignitaries could be on the domestic events of any given country. Indeed, Gaoussou Kamissoko, a member of the delegation to South Africa, claims that Houphouët-Boigny’s appointment of Fologo rather than the Ivorian Minister of Foreign Affairs was mainly due to the fact that Danièle Fologo, the wife of the Minister of Information, was white.⁹¹ Thus while Houphouët-Boigny’s foray into the South African entanglement was graphed on a philosophy meant to forestall drama, the collateral consequence of his choice to send a racialized delegation to Pretoria was doubly dramatic:

⁸⁷ Auguste Miremont, “Précédents,” *Fraternité Matin*, 18 September 1975.

⁸⁸ Nandjui, *L’homme de la France*, 205.

⁸⁹ For comparison between the United States and South Africa and the filial metaphor, see Thomas Borstelmann, *Apartheid’s Reluctant Uncle: The United States and Southern Africa in the Early Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). For discussions of how the presence of black diplomats affected the politics of desegregation in the United States, see Renee Romano, “No Diplomatic Immunity: African Diplomats, the State Department, and Civil Rights, 1961–64,” *Journal of American History* 87, 2 (September 2000), 546–79; Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Cary Fraser, “Crossing the Color Line in Little Rock: The Eisenhower Administration and the Dilemma of Race for U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Diplomatic History* 24, 2 (Spring 2000), 233–64; Timothy P. Maga, “Battling the ‘Ugly American’ at Home: The Special Protocol Service and the New Frontier, 1961–63,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 3, 1 (1992), 126–42; Calvin B. Holder, “Racism Toward Black African Diplomats During the Kennedy Administration,” *Journal of Black Studies* 14, 1 (September 1983), 31–48.

⁹⁰ Gilbert Comte, “Remous autour du projet de dialogue avec Pretoria: Le Président Houphouët-Boigny aura du mal à rallier les Etats francophones à ses thèses,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, June 1971.

⁹¹ Kamissoko, *De Yamoussoukro à Pretoria*, 105.

not only did it violate the Afrikaner legislation against mixed marriages but, as we shall see, it more subversively assaulted the sexist subconscious of South African race relations.

The interplay of race, gender, and sexuality have had a rather long and tormented history in South Africa. Miscegenation was tolerated and even looked at with some degree of amusement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁹² By the early twentieth century, however, hysteria over the “threatening” libidinal drive of black males had raised concerns in white communities for their female members. By mid-century the hysteria known as the “black peril” had evolved into a major campaign issue which both the National Party and the United Party tried to mobilize for their benefit.⁹³ Beyond electoral politics though, the debate over “black peril” offers a window into the sexist culture that informed race relations in South Africa throughout the apartheid era. That is because the obsession-driven debate indexed not only the subaltern status of white women who were posited as “weak” and “defenseless” objects to be protected against oversexualized black males, but it also echoed attempts at controlling their sexuality. When the attempt failed, ostracism was the ultimate sanction.⁹⁴

Danièle Fologo may have sensed the ordeal that this control and the implicit threat of marginalization entailed for women. In response to a question on Women’s Liberation by an interviewer during her stay in South Africa, she lamented that “in almost every country women are behind, the degree [of their subaltern status] depending on the [particular] country, but there is almost nowhere they are equal.”⁹⁵ Earlier on in the same interview, Mrs. Fologo confided that she had anticipated that her trip “would be difficult because *we are a mixed couple*, and *I know this is not in the framework of South Africa*.”⁹⁶ Indeed, as Pierre van den Berghe put it, an “increasing stigma [had come to be] attached to miscegenation in South Africa over the years.”⁹⁷ Worse still, such stigma was not restricted only to South Africans as evidenced by the conviction of aliens on charge of violation of the Immorality Act.⁹⁸ Yet, what was even further beyond the framework of apartheid—which Danièle Fologo politely avoided to name, was that she, as a white

⁹² Pierre L. van den Berghe, “Miscegenation in South Africa,” *Cahiers d’Etudes Africaines* 4, (1960), 68–84.

⁹³ Charles van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886–1914*, vol. 2, *New Nineveh* (London: Ravan Press, 1982); John Pape, “Black and White: The ‘Perils of Sex’ in Colonial Zimbabwe,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16, 4 (December 1990), 699–720; Jonathan Hyslop, “White Working-Class Women and the Invention of Apartheid: ‘Purified’ Afrikaner Nationalist Agitation for Legislation against ‘Mixed’ Marriage, 1934–9,” *Journal of African History* 36, 1 (1995), 57–81.

⁹⁴ Rob Nixon documents the life of one victim of this marginalization in his study of Bessie Head. For details, see his “Border Country: Bessie Head’s Frontline States,” *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 101–30.

⁹⁵ Sue Unterhalter, “Danièle Is Enjoying Her Détente Mission,” *Rand Daily Mail*, 13 September 1975.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

⁹⁷ Van den Berghe, “Miscegenation,” 75.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

woman, could trample on the sanctity of sex across the color line and not the other way round. Mrs Fologo, and for that matter Houphouët-Boigny who sent her along with her husband, may have not been knowledgeable in the particulars of South Africa's sexist past. Such lack of awareness, however, did not diminish the potential collateral power of her presence among the members of the Fologo delegation to South Africa.

It is clear that such potentially subversive power did not mean much to the opponents of dialogue diplomacy. Within the context of the ever more radicalized anti-apartheid movement, Houphouët-Boigny ultimately failed to rally people around his agenda as demonstrated by the outcry against the Fologo mission. Although the Ivory Coast appeared as "something of a maverick in the OAU," as U.S. Ambassador Robert Smith assessed in 1976, it nonetheless drew "sharp criticism for its policy of increasing 'dialogue' with South Africa." Despite the Africa-wide condemnation, Houphouët-Boigny showed "no intention of abandoning 'dialogue.'" To the contrary, he anticipated giving "landing rights" to South African airlines and "if the Angolan crisis defused," Ivory Coast might establish "consular or even diplomatic relations" with Pretoria.⁹⁹ Domestic events in South Africa and the heightening of the police state by a besieged apartheid regime, however, forced the authorities in Abidjan to reconsider their plans.

Burying the Dream of Dialogue?

Any attempt to understand how Houphouët-Boigny came to retreat from the dialogue scheme must take stock of the fact that the official position of Ivory Coast regarding the Afrikaner regime vacillated over the course of the 1960s and 1970s. Although much of the latter decade saw Ivorian diplomats calling for dialogue, as we have seen, it is worth remembering that in the early postcolonial period, especially with the creation of the OAU in 1963, Houphouët-Boigny had approved of the formation of a systematic and coordinated anti-apartheid coalition of African countries. The first strategy of such coalition was to pressure the UN into taking decisive actions against the minority regimes in Southern Africa. These actions ultimately put pressure on the UN General Assembly in 1967 to set up both a Special Committee on Apartheid and a Unit on Apartheid. By 1966, however, the OAU had started to lose confidence in the efficacy of this tactic. As one analyst offered in the mid-1970s, it had "become obvious that the United Nations would not be the machinery for the liberation of any of the territories in Southern Africa."¹⁰⁰

The OAU did not rely solely on the niceties of diplomacy. In an era where revolution was in the air, many "Founding Fathers" of the organization could not but subscribe to a radical strategy of liberation. This found its embodiment in the establishment of the Liberation Committee and a Special Fund to help finance the different wars of liberation throughout Southern Africa. But the committee failed to provide sufficient financial resources to carry out a liberation war. Such failure doomed recourse to armed struggle as a viable method to bring about change, especially in South Africa whose

⁹⁹ Robert Smith (Ambassador to Abidjan), "Ivory Coast: 1975 Year-End Assessment," 12 January 1976, RG 59, AAD # 1976ABIDJA00295, NARA.

¹⁰⁰ Leonard T. Kapungu, "The OAU's Support for the Liberation of Southern Africa," in Y. El-Ayouty ed., *The Organization of African Unity after Ten Years* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975), 147.

liberation movements received just a fraction of an already dwindled fund.¹⁰¹ The military inferiority of the anti-apartheid liberation movements was worsened by the fact that some French firms had kept providing the South African government with armaments while the British government, through the Simonstown Accords, maintained joint maneuvers with and military assistance to the South African Defense Forces (SADF).¹⁰² In a similar move, the Nixon Administration, following the recommendations of the National Security Study Memorandum 39, resumed selling aircraft and other military equipment banned under the terms of the UN arms embargo.¹⁰³

Given his knowledge of these developments, there is cause to believe that Houphouët-Boigny genuinely feared that guerrilla warfare in South Africa would lead to a Palestinian-like tragedy.¹⁰⁴ Yet by citing the military weakness of the South African freedom fighters to justify his call for dialogue, the Ivorian statesman underestimated the ability of the black majority to regain their agency in the domestic fight against apartheid. In fact, even as Vorster seemed to control domestic events with the establishment of a police state through intimidation, banishment, imprisonment, and/or the sending of hundreds of veteran anti-apartheid activists into exile, the youth in black South Africa never gave up. Tellingly, as Vorster steadily consolidated his grip on power, young South Africans in the townships—many of whom had joined Steve Biko’s Black Consciousness movement—were becoming ever more radical in their defiance of the apartheid system.¹⁰⁵ This became manifest in mid-June 1976, when thousands of students took to the streets to denounce a new ordinance that required using Afrikaans as medium of education in black schools. The response of the South African authorities to such public display of defiance was as brutal as it was revealing of the desperate search for means to contain what turned out to be the fiercest popular challenge to Vorster’s rule. Confronted with the determination of the youth, the security forces fired on the protesters killing many,

¹⁰¹ Pfister, “Gateway to International Victory,” 61–62; Ndlovu, “ANC’s Diplomacy,” 639–49.

¹⁰² For a journalistic account of the French connection, see C. L. Sulzberger, “Arms and the Frenchman,” *New York Times*, 21 February 1971; Bruno Crimi, “Armements contre matériaux stratégiques,” *Jeune Afrique*, 14 March 1975. See also Daniel Bach, “Un système autonome de relations: La France et l’Afrique du Sud,” in Bach, ed., *France et Afrique du Sud*, 173–202. For the British-South Africa military accords, see Sean Gervase, “Under the NATO Umbrella,” *Africa Report*, September–October 1976.

¹⁰³ Memorandum from the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Rostow) to the Under Secretary of State (Katzenbach), *FRUS*, 24: *Africa*, 1088–110. For U.S. violation of the arms embargo, see Donald R. Culverson, “The Politics of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in the United States, 1969–1986,” *Political Science Quarterly* 111, 1 (Spring 1996), 127–49.

¹⁰⁴ On the *Le Vieux*’s knowledge of the conjuncture, see Ambassade de France (Abidjan) to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 16 January 1972, Archives des postes/Abidjan, Carton 43, CAD; Ziké, *Politique étrangère*, 115.

¹⁰⁵ Mbulelo V. Mzamane, Bavusile Maaba, and Nkosinathi Biko, “The Black Consciousness Movement,” *Road to Democracy*, vol. 2, 1970–1980, ed. SADET Trust, 99–160.

including primary school students. The ensuing Soweto Uprising shook not only apartheid, but the entire world which had kept its eyes on the dramatic events.¹⁰⁶

The reaction of the Ivorian leadership was subdued, at best. Unlike much of the continent, the official press coverage in Ivory Coast was almost non-existent. Moreover, although Houphouët-Boigny condemned the Soweto shootings themselves, he remained adamant on the necessity of dialogue between the white regime and its black opponents.¹⁰⁷ Even more perplexing, Laurent Dona Fologo argued in an editorial in *Fraternité Matin* that the tragedy of Soweto happened because South Africans (both Blacks and Whites) did not practice the culture of dialogue. Houphouët-Boigny's right-hand-man continued suggesting that given the revolting shootings of Soweto, it was tempting to call for the use of military force as advocated by some Pan-Africanist activists. But Fologo concluded that his country would not follow the "wolves and war mongers" since the Ivorian people remained certain that "dialogue and negotiation" were the only solution to solve the South African imbroglio.¹⁰⁸ While the Ivorian government persisted in the belief that international dialogue with South Africa would pave the way for domestic dialogue between Blacks and Whites, it was clear to many contemporary African observers that things would not be the same after Soweto.¹⁰⁹

Soweto did change the power equation in apartheid South Africa. But even more damaging for the international standing of Pretoria was the police detention that led to the death of Steve Biko in October 1977.¹¹⁰ Sensing a radicalization of the police state in South Africa, Houphouët-Boigny revised his diplomatic response to apartheid. Thus, although he and his minister for Foreign Affairs had continued to meet secretly with the South African authorities, Ivory Coast decided to harden its stance against Pretoria. While the Ivorian statesman never discarded his "fundamental distrust of Communism," by early 1978 he was increasingly expectant that the United States would pressure the South African government.¹¹¹ By mid-year, a spokesperson for Houphouët-Boigny disclosed

¹⁰⁶ Michael Kaufman, "Soweto Tragedy: There Are No Blacks to Speak Out for Rioters. No Debate of Problems," *New York Times*, 25 June 1976; Robin Wright, "Soweto: Defiance Amidst the Ruins," *Washington Post*, 25 June 1976; "Flaming Night," *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 June 1976; "It's Milnerism in Reverse, Says Brink," *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 June 1976; Bernardi Wessels, "Kruger Tells Rioters: 'I've Had Enough,'" *Rand Daily Mail*, 18 June 1976; "La revolte monte et s'étend," *Jeune Afrique*, 30 July 1976.

¹⁰⁷ "Emouvant message du Président aux diplomates," *Fraternité Matin*, 21 June 1976; Dominique Lagarde, "Après la rencontre Kissinger-Vorster et ... Soweto," *Jeune Afrique*, 9 July 1976.

¹⁰⁸ Laurent Dona Fologo, "Dialogue ou sang?" *Fraternité Matin*, 21 June 1976.

¹⁰⁹ Paul Bernetel, "Rien ne sera plus comme avant," *Jeune Afrique*, 2 July 1976; "Soweto: Le début de la fin," *Horoya*, 4-10 July 1976; Moctar Kebe, "Une citadelle qui s'écroule," *Le Soleil* (Dakar), 22 June 1976.

¹¹⁰ M.N., "Steve Biko ou la conscience noire," *Jeune Afrique*, 7 October 1977; "Police Cite Fall in Scuffle Before Steve Biko's Death," *Chicago Tribune*, 15 November 1977; "Steve Biko: The Questions for the Coroner to Resolve," *Guardian*, 12 November 1977.

¹¹¹ Monteagle Stearns to Department of State, 10 February 1978, Collection 129 (Donated Historical Material—Mary King), Box 1, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia. On the post-Soweto

unsurprisingly that the dialogue approach was “not producing significant change in South Africa’s apartheid policies.” If the Ivorian leadership had embarked on the dialogue scheme, it was with the hope that “the South African Whites would understand the need for change. [...] But it seems that they did not understand.” In fact, the Vorster government reportedly told the Ivorian authorities that, “they cannot make changes without facing a revolution.” In other words, Vorster proved to be unwilling to commit genuinely because he feared that engagement in any real domestic dialogue process was tantamount to opening a Pandora’s Box.¹¹² In the early 1970s, as he justified his call for engagement with the Afrikaner regime, Houphouët-Boigny had promised that “If tomorrow the Dialogue policy that we are initiating with South Africa turns out to be inoperative and without effect on apartheid, we will be compelled to accept that they [opponents to Dialogue] were right and honestly we will revise our position.” It seems that Houphouët-Boigny kept his words on this promise.¹¹³

Conclusion

On the whole, it is true that in the long run there emerged other instances whereby Houphouët-Boigny became personally involved in South Africa’s inter-race negotiations and the eventual dismantling of apartheid.¹¹⁴ However, few of these subsequent involvements matched the boldness of Houphouët-Boigny’s initiatives in the late 1960s and 1970s. At a time when Africa was discarding its final colonial yokes in bloody liberation wars throughout the Portuguese African colonies and radical grass-roots movements as well as the Organization of African Unity were stepping up pressure to isolate apartheid South Africa, Houphouët-Boigny decided to single himself out through a seemingly conservative approach towards the regime of so-called separate development. He not only proposed to engage in dialogue with the Afrikaner regime but also promised to convince other African countries to do likewise. Although the intended dialogue diplomacy was meant to break down apartheid, it ultimately proved ill-timed. This was so because Houphouët-Boigny failed to take stock of the intellectual atmosphere within the OAU and the larger anti-apartheid movement. In an era when revolutionary ideas were in vogue and thinkers/activists such as Fanon, Cabral, Nkrumah, and Biko were ascendant, any initiative to carve out a non-revolutionary space for diplomatic action was hopeless. This was especially so in the case of Houphouët-Boigny’s dialogue diplomacy towards apartheid South Africa that involved convincing people who were still grappling with the memory of their own racialized colonial pasts. In intellectual and political circles, the

meetings between Ivorian and South African authorities, see “S. African Minister Confers with Ivory Coast President,” *Washington Post*, 5 September 1977; “Botha in Geneva Talks,” *Guardian*, 5 September 1977.

¹¹² Jim Hoagland, “The African Dialogue that Turned to Disillusionment,” *Guardian*, 3 June 1978; Jim Hoagland, “3 Moderate Black States Harden Line on South Africa,” *Washington Post*, 2 June 1978.

¹¹³ Félix Houphouët-Boigny (interview with Laurent Dona Fologo), “Houphouët rompt le silence: ‘Nous enverrons une mission à Prétoria pour le dialogue,’” *Fraternité Matin*, 4 October 1971.

¹¹⁴ Toungara, “Apotheosis,” 49; Kamissoko, *De Yamoussoukro à Pretoria*, 51; Christopher S. Wren, “De Klerk and Mandela Discuss Future,” *New York Times*, 14 December 1989, and “De Klerk Gets Full Welcome in Ivory Coast,” *New York Times*, 3 December 1989.

course of dialogue became readily identified with collusion or acquiescence to neocolonialism.

Re-examination of the strategies mobilized by a so-called agent of imperialism suggests, however, that Houphouët-Boigny acted “without prodding” in his initiatives within the OAU on specific problems.¹¹⁵ As we have seen, the seeming about-face of the Ivorian statesman and his subsequent embrace of an alternative to revolutionary diplomacy stemmed from a domestic political practice in which “Dialogue à l’ivoirienne” was deployed to manage contentious politics. Started during the late colonial period, such a neotraditional form of political communication had become in the 1970s a religion of sort that the old statesman repeatedly mobilized in an effort to reassert control over volatile situations.¹¹⁶ In this light, Ivorian policy toward Southern Africa demonstrated that Ivory Coast’s adherence to dialogue was “anything but servile.” Rather, the use of dialogue by the Ivorian authorities “reflect[ed] the belief that Ivory Coast, while still vulnerable, [was] increasingly in control of its own destiny.”¹¹⁷

There is even room to see a subversive edge in Houphouët-Boigny’s maneuvers as revealed by the racial composition of the delegation he sent to Pretoria in 1975. As demonstrated in this essay, the scheme of sending such a delegation suggests that the Ivorian leader had a keen awareness of the paradox of international policy-making since he compared his maneuvers to the transnational politics of desegregation in the United States. Although overlooked at the time, the Fologo mission also proved to be an unintended subtle spoof on the gendered civility of the apartheid system. To some extent, then, the various of Houphouët-Boigny’s postures with regard to South Africa echo Leela Gandhi’s exegesis of “colonial mimicry.” Re-appropriating her ideas in the international context of anti-apartheid politics, one can claim that the engagement of *Le Vieux* with South Africa was an “ambivalent mixture of deference and disobedience.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Report from Vice President Humphrey to President Johnson, 12 January 1968, *FRUS*, 24: *Africa*, 382–410.

¹¹⁶ Auguste Miremont, “Le dialogue, une religion,” *Fraternité Matin*, 3 September 1978.

¹¹⁷ Robert Smith, “Ivory Coast: 1975 Year-End Assessment,” 12 January 1976, RG 59, AAD # 1976ABIDJA00295, NARA.

¹¹⁸ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 149.