

The Legacy And Impact Of French Colonialism In Cote D'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)

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Abstract: For almost a century and a half, France has maintained a vast colonial empire in Africa. Through political, security, economic and cultural relations, France has intervened and maintained a hegemonic control in Francophone Africa, both to serve its interests and perpetuate neo-colonialism. The 1960s symbolized hope, sovereignty, development and freedom for Africa. It also signified an era of equality with former colonial powers and greater participation in the international system. However, five decades after colonialism, most African states, including Cote d'Ivoire are plagued with political instability and underdevelopment attributed to the legacy of French colonialism and external factors.

Keywords: Francophone Africa, neo-colonialism, sovereignty, underdevelopment, hegemony.

I. INTRODUCTION

A former French colony in West Africa, Cote d'Ivoire became an independent state on August 7, 1960 after centuries of French colonial rule. Since then Côte d'Ivoire was known as a “beacon of hope and stability” in the West African region and an economic power under the leadership of its first President, Félix Houphouët-Boigny (1960-1993). On August 7, 2010, Cote d'Ivoire celebrated the 50th anniversary of its independence from France. Likewise, 17 other African states celebrated their 50 years of independence in 2010. The difficult question remains: what progress has been achieved and challenges faced to warrant a celebration? Using dependency and neo-Marxist theory, this paper explores and demonstrates how the legacy of French colonialism is responsible for the contemporary crisis of underdevelopment and political instability in Cote d'Ivoire.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Much has been written about Africa's predicament, both from modernization and dependency schools of thought. Dependency theorist blames neo-colonialism in Africa and the persistent crisis of underdevelopment and political instability in African states (Frank, 1969; Amin, 1972). Frank formulated the concept of development of underdevelopment to denote that underdevelopment is not a natural condition, but an artifact created by the long history of colonial domination in Third World. The historical experience of colonialism and foreign domination have undermined the development of the Third World. Frank also formulated a ‘metropolis-satellite’ concept to explain underdevelopment and domination. The historical process that generates development in the western metropolises also simultaneously generates underdevelopment in the Third World satellites. This historical colonial system perfectly captures the relationship between France and Cote d'Ivoire and therefore explains the continued development of the former and underdevelopment of the latter. In fact, the system of political, military, economic and cultural relations

between France and Côte d'Ivoire has been described as an illustration of French neo-colonialism in Africa (Bustin, 1982; Amin, 1973).

III. CONCEPT OF NEO-COLONIALISM

The term 'neo-colonialism' was originally coined by Third World leaders who found that the achievement of constitutional independence and sovereignty did not give total freedom to the newly formed nation-states, due to the continuing presence of powerful western economic interests (Nkrumah, 1965). The neo-colonialist argument is that total independence means both political and economic freedom. Neo-colonialism tries to encapsulate the idea that economic power and political power that flows from it still reside elsewhere even when independence had been achieved. The independent African states are free from direct foreign rule, but the economic structures are still maintained and controlled by the former colonial powers and their multinational corporations (MNCs).

O'Connor, (1970:117) defined neo-colonialism as "the survival of the colonial system, in spite of formal recognition of political independence in emerging states which had become the victims of an indirect and subtle form of domination by political, economic, social, military and technical forces. The essence of neo-colonialism is that the state which is subject to it is in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside (Nkrumah, 1965: ix). According to Julius Nyerere, Tanzania achieved "political independence in 1961", but attained neither economic power nor economic independence.

We gained the political power to decide what to do. we lacked the economic and administrative power which would have given us freedom in those decisions... A nation's real freedom depends on its capacity to do things, not on the legal rights conferred by its internationally recognized sovereignty (Nyerere, 1973:263).

IV. HISTORICAL LEGACY OF COLONIALISM

Establishing the dynamics African colonial history is essential for understanding the root cause of Africa's political and economic crisis. European colonialism replaced the pre-colonial political and economic structures and created a culture of dependency and neopatrimonialism in Africa. The colonial governments educated African elites to entrench their hegemony and economic exploitation creating a dominant bourgeoisie' class and consigning the proletariat masses in poverty. The integration of African states into the international capitalist economy further fostered inequality between Africa and western capitalist states.

The authoritarian and exploitative legacy of European colonialism and neo-colonialism manifests itself in various ways in Africa. In the 19th century, French colonized more African territory than its European counterparts. The Colonial Pacte Agreement (CPA) signed between France and its

African former colonies gives France a dominant role in Francophone Africa. It has created a structural mechanism for French control and domination of political, military and economic systems of its African colonies. The CPA created the CFA Franc Zone and a legal mechanism under which France obtained special preference in the political and economic life of its colonies. The CPA has maintained French control over the economies of African states; possession of African foreign currency reserves and monetary policy; control of strategic natural resources and raw materials; monopoly in key sectors such as water, electricity ports, infrastructure, telecommunication, transport, energy, education civil aviation and judiciary (N'Diaye, 2005:04). Further, under the defence agreements, in the CPA, France has the right to intervene militarily in African Francophone states; deploy its troops permanently in bases and military facilities managed by France; and provide military and police training and procurement contracts for France (Mbakwe, 2011:13).

Many African states colonized by France gained their formal independence in the early 1960s due to anti-colonial national liberation struggles. Despite the formal declaration of independence, France maintains deep ties with its former colony, Cote d'Ivoire. The Ivory Coast, known to its non-English speakers as the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, is a name reflecting its French colonial history with deep political, military, economic and cultural ties. The French administered the colony of Côte d'Ivoire from Paris using a system of direct and centralized administration. The French colonial administration also adopted divide-and-rule tactic and applying assimilation policy to educated elites. The French colonial policy incorporated concepts of assimilation and association. Assimilation presupposed the inherent superiority of French culture. In practice the assimilation policy in the colonies meant extension of the French language, institutions, laws and customs. In post-colonial era, France has maintained its cultural legacy in Africa, especially the resulting identity-construction encouraged within *la francophone*, a neo-colonial concept. France strives to maintain its cultural legacy with development funding towards education, scholars' cultural institutes under the *Agence de cooperation Culturelle et technique* in an effort to institutionalize the linguistic, cultural, values and educational links between France and Francophone Africa (Martin, 1995:5-80).

President Félix Houphouët-Boigny, a Pan Africanist, who fought against racism and colonialism, was a member of French governments in the 1950s after being appointed first black African minister. He worked within the French colonial parliamentary system to liberate Ivory Coast in 1960, becoming its first president and then a dictator until his death in 1993. Nevertheless, the new French imperialism has returned to Ivory Coast in the form of neo-colonialism. The current neo-colonialism is not only associated with political and economic interests, but also inextricably linked with conflict resolution and peace-keeping in Ivory Coast. The continued French political, military and economic interference in France has perpetually kept the Ivorian state economically poor and politically unstable.

V. ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT

The creation and maintenance of the French domination of the Francophone African economies is the product of a long period of French colonialism and perpetuated dependency of the African states. The Ivorian economy is a product of capitalist system of production controlled by French imperialism, based on exploiting and exporting the wealth and natural resources to the international capitalist market. This condition accounts for the persistent underdevelopment, poverty and political instability in Cote d'Ivoire.

Previously, in the 1960s and 1970s, Cote d'Ivoire experienced rapid economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s. It also stood out in the West African sub-region and international system for its political stability and economic prosperity. Houphouët-Boigny also enjoyed a reputation of man of wisdom and peace (Toungara, 1995:32). After independence in 1960, President Houphouët-Boigny pushed for "economic neoliberalism". He opened up Côte d'Ivoire to foreign investors and immigrant French workers. Between 1960 and 1980, the French population in Côte d'Ivoire nearly doubled, from about 30,000 to 60,000. Until 1985 Côte d'Ivoire had the highest number of French-controlled MNCs in Africa; had the largest percentage of French imports to and exports from Africa and along with Senegal; and received the largest French aid package in Africa. For over 20 years, Côte d'Ivoire achieved high GDP with a rate of 7.5% annually that it was dubbed the "Ivorian miracle". Cote d'Ivoire is rich in natural resources such as oil, diamonds, natural gas, cocoa and coffee. It is the largest producer of cocoa in the world, accounting for 40% of world production.

Unfortunately, since 1999, Côte d'Ivoire has faced economic decline, political instability and despotism by successive regimes largely attributed to its colonial legacy and French intervention. Côte d'Ivoire has suffered what Andre Gunder Frank called "development of underdevelopment", having one of the poorest populations in the world. In fact, French colonies are the poorest in the world. The Ivory Coast sank from position 156th place on the United Nations (UN) Human Development Index (HDI) in 2002 to 163 in 2004. In the HDI Index 2010, six of the ten poorest states in the world are former French colonies (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2010). First, France, does not have processing industries for raw-materials and hence its cocoa produce is exported to France. Moreover, the means of production are owned by foreign MNCs who employ various means to transfer profits to France to the neglect of Ivorian local economy. Twenty years after decolonization France still imported significant raw materials and its energy dependence on Africa had risen from 30% in 1950 to 80% for 1988 and 1989 (Martin, 1995:9-10).

Second, in an attempt to control and dominate the economy of her colonies, France forced Cote d'Ivoire to practice monocultures, which left the national economy extremely vulnerable to price fluctuation in the world market. Globalization, competition and trade liberalization have dictated prices of goods at the international capitalist markets. This has led to deterioration of Cote d'Ivoire's terms of trade and adverse balance of payments due to price fluctuation of

cocoa in the world market. Consequently, since cocoa is her main export, Cote d'Ivoire has faced economy depression which has contributed to underdevelopment and poverty. The depression on the Ivorian economy and adverse balance of payments on cocoa exports, forced the government to borrow loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. The repayment of these loans has deprived Cote d'Ivoire the funds needed for economic development and poverty alleviation. This dependency on borrowing allowed the IMF and the World Bank to impose Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) on Cote d'Ivoire. These adjustments resulted into high interest rates, massive capital flight, and huge debts whose repayments undermined investments in the social and infrastructure sectors. Under SAPs conditionalities, vital economic sectors such as energy, telecommunications, water supply and banking in Cote d'Ivoire were privatized to western MNCs.

Third, Francophone African states including Cote d'Ivoire are not allowed to have central banks and currencies. All monetary policies are imposed by France for her own interest, where each state has an operational account at the French Treasury. The most important influence in the political economy of Francophone African states is the impact of the 'CFA' currency (Colonies Françaises d'Afrique) (French African Colonies) formed in 1948. There are two separate CFA Francs. The West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) comprise eight West African states (Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo. The Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) comprise six Central African countries (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo- Brazzaville, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon). Each of these two groups issues its own CFA Franc through the two regional central banks. The WAEMU CFA franc is issued by the Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (BCEAO) and CEMAC CFA franc is issued by Banque des Etats de l'Afrique Centrale (BEAC) (Busch, 2010).

The aim of CFA Franc was to help France control the destiny of its 14 colonies, including Cote d'Ivoire, and has continued to maintain the Franc Zone since independence. In exchange for France guaranteeing the CFA Franc's convertibility, Cote d'Ivoire agreed to deposit 65% of its foreign exchange reserves in a special account with the French Treasury, and another 20% to cover financial liabilities; and French veto over the franc zone's monetary policy. In turn, the French Treasury has invested African foreign reserves on the Paris Bourse. These decisions have had devastating consequences on Cote d'Ivoire for more than 45 years. The result has been a combination of currency convertibility, high interest rates, low inflation, and free capital movement.

Further, the CFA Franc's exchange rate which had remained unchanged since 1948, was devalued by 50% in 1994 by the regional central bank dominated by French and European banks. The effect of devaluation of the CFA franc precipitated economic depression and poverty in Cote d'Ivoire. Former Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo opposed the CFA arrangement and initiated a process for the Ivory Coast to have her own Central Bank and currency. This sparked anger in Paris and therefore marked the beginning of Ivorian political and economic destabilization.

Fourth, land and buildings of the Ivorian presidential palace and national assembly is considered French property with rent being paid to France as per colonial lease. France still controls Ivorian airline, telephone, electricity, infrastructure, water and banking sectors. The seaports including Abidjan, the leading transit port in West Africa and Ivorian-Burkinabe Railway are the properties of the French Bolloré and Delmas; airports belong to ADP (Aéroports De Paris); electricity companies to EDF (Electricité de France); telephone companies to France telecoms (Orange); water distribution and road construction and public works industry to Bouygues; oil and gas to Total (biggest French oil company); and the banking and insurance sector is controlled by Societe Generale, Credit Lyonnais and BNP-Paribas, AXA, Groupe Compagnie Francaise de l'Afrique de l'Ouest de Cote d'Ivoire (CFAO-CI) (Busch, 2010).

VI. MILITARY AND SECURITY COOPERATION

The military cooperation between France and her former African colonies is a colonial legacy, perpetuated under neo-colonialism. As earlier stated, the CPA enshrined a special preference for France in the political, economic and defence processes in Francophone Africa. The defence agreement provided for technical and military assistance for African militaries and police and the deployment of French (military and civilian) technical advisers. It also enables African states to invite France to ensure their external and internal security, including the prevention of putsches and other coups d'état" (N'Diaye, 2005:04). The defence pact had two components. First, open and non-binding agreement on military co-operation or Technical Military Aid (AMT). It covered education, training of servicemen and African security forces. Second, secret and binding agreements supervised and implemented by the French Ministry of Defence, serving as a legal basis for French interventions. These agreements allowed France to have pre-deployed troops in Africa. In other words, French army units are present permanently and by rotation in bases and military facilities in Africa run entirely by the French. Indeed, the importance of Cote d'Ivoire to France was unmistakable. Along with Senegal, it was singled out by General Charles de Gaulle as states in which France would intervene if necessary (N'Diaye, 2005:94).

The Franco-Ivoirian Technical Military Assistance Accord signed on April 24, 1961 provides for the permanent basing of troops, has ultra-secret clauses to guarantee the personal safety of heads of state and their families and has not been renegotiated for about 35 years (Chipman. 1989:119; N'Diaye. 2005:94). It also provided for the exchange of ambassadors between the two states and reserved a privileged position among diplomats in Paris for the Ivoirian ambassador. The treaty also called for regular consultations between the two states on foreign policy matters. France agreed to protect and represent Ivoirian interests in any state or international organization (N'Diaye, 2005:94).

Since independence, France has maintained hundreds of marines on its military base of Port-Bouet near Abidjan. The number of these troops steadily increased over the years to 600 in 1999, signalling a strengthening of the French

commitment to the survival of the Ivoirian regimes (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1999/2000). France also maintains a permanent military base in Abidjan (43rd Marine Infantry Battalion) ready for intervention to any threats against Cote d'Ivoire. This made President Houphouet-Boigny, during his 30 years dictatorship to maintain a small army (2,000). In addition, France has 47,000 Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) for quick deployment in Africa. Thus, every time an Ivorian regime has questioned or challenged the French domination, it has been met with military intervention and regime overthrow and coup d'états (N'Diaye, 2005:96).

VII. PERSONAL RULE, IMPUNITY AND POLITICAL MILITARIZATION

Given Houphouet-Boigny's central role in the post-colonial political and security affairs, a notable characteristic of the CPA implies a commitment to regimes, as opposed to states (Crocker, 1969:497-498). Due to the legacy of CPA the Ivoirian security sector inherited the features, philosophies and structures of France's conception of a state security. The Ivoirian security apparatus and its role in the stability of the Houphouet-Boigny's regime was created from the remnants of the colonial army in 1961 by the law which organized the national defence, following the French government's 1960 *plan raisonnable*, establishing armies in its former colonies (N'Diaye, 2005:93). This essentially means a tradition of the army as the great mute; that is strictly apolitical, republican, loyal to the state in charge of national defence under the leadership of a head of state, who is "chief of the armies with extensive formal and discretionary prerogatives in matters of state security" (Crocker, 1969:497-498).

Subsequently, Francophone African states are ruled by authoritarian regimes and neopatrimonialism. This is ostensibly to perpetuate the French hegemony and neo-colonialism. As earlier mentioned, France ensures that all-natural resources remain under her control and exploitation by imposing and protecting corrupt dictators and fomenting rebellions and coups against unpopular leaders. In return, they are rewarded with immunity and the maintenance of hereditary leadership. For example, Omar Bongo ruled oil-rich Gabon for 42 years, crushing all opponents with French assistance, while granting exploitation of huge oil reserves to French oil MNCs and consigning Gabon into abject poverty. In 2008, after his death, his son, Omar Ali Bongo was installed as president by France to perpetuate the regime and maintain imperial colonial structures.

Second, in Togo, former French army Sergeant Gnassingbé Eyadema came to power after killing President Sylvania Olympio in a bloody coup. Eyadema seized power with French help and ruled for 38 years with an iron fist, crushing all opposition until his death in 2005. France installed his son, Faure Eyadema to perpetuate its hegemony. In Burkina Faso, Captain Blaise Compaoré came to power in 1987, after killing Thomas Sankara and remained in power for 23 years. Third, the oil discoveries in Chad are lucrative to French MNCs and this has maintained President Idriss Deby in power for 25 years. Lastly, in the Democratic Republic of

Congo (DRC), the French puppet, General Denis Sassou Nguesso has ruled for 30 years and in Cameroon, Paul Biya has ruled for 35 years.

The origin of French-Ivorian relationship lies in the former French President, Charles de Gaulle's determination that France would not lose its influence in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) after losing wars of independence in Algeria and Indochina. The French model in Africa was one of stable authoritarianism, influenced by Gaullist views on the dangers of parliamentary democracy. It was therefore strongly challenged by the wave of democracy movements in Africa in the 1990s. France's failure to fully support democratization in the 1990s has profoundly marked its image on Africa (Moncrieff, 2012:8). A constant feature of Ivorian politics since independence has been the tendency of the successive regimes relying on French support and personal rule to manipulate, politicize and interfere with the professionalism of the military and police to keep power.

Founding President Felix Houphouët-Boigny pursued pro-Western, capitalist economic strategy and foreign policy in defence and promotion of French interests in Africa. Houphouët-Boigny and his Party Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), was the principal architect of every major policy orientation and decision of the Cote d'Ivoire over the last half century (Zolberg, 1969:265-271). During the reign of President Houphouët-Boigny and President Henry Konan Bedié, the affairs of the state were conducted with authoritarianism, extra-judicial killings and corruption. The two regimes were characterised by detentions, torture, mistreatment, torture and killing of opposition politicians and journalists in Ivory Coast. Houphouët-Boigny surrounded himself with French advisors and technicians; kept the French army for defence; and defended with France in influencing post-colonial African domestic, regional and international politics.

On his part, Konan Bédié promoted the nationalist concept of Ivoirité and changed the constitution to allow only '100 per cent' Ivoirians to stand for the presidency. He claimed that Ouattara's family came from Burkina Faso and that he had faked his identity papers to hide the fact. Security agents tore up northerners' documents or made it impossible to renew them, effectively depriving them of their nationality. Bédié's first act as President included expelling 12,000 Ivory Coast residents on the grounds that they were from Burkina Faso (Busch, 2010).

Many scholars attribute the economic crisis in Ivory Coast to the wasteful, corrupt and neopatrimonial practices associated with Houphouët-Boigny (Faure, 1998:59-73; William, 1988:54). The Sage of Africa had accumulated a personal fortune of \$11 billion and had become 'thief Boigny' and 'corrupt Boigny'. He once publicly urged his ministers to enrich themselves and most of them were self-serving and corrupt (William, 1988:5). This partially explains why over 130 billion CFA Francs were annually embezzled and expropriated and countless multi-billion CFA Francs financial scandals involving political elites, including Bedié (Ayyiteh, 1992:241-2). In addition, through undemocratic means and elaborate clientelist scheme, Houphouët-Boigny sought the loyalty and devotion of the intellectuals and business classes.

He used PDCI to maintain control over the state (N'Diaye, 2005:92-101).

In 1990 after much resistance, violent demonstrations and resolution of the *La Baule France-Africa Summit*, Houphouët-Boigny dissolved the one-party state system and accepted multiparty elections and political reforms (N'Diaye, 2005:92-101). Although the introduction of multiparty politics signified the process of democratization, it did not entrench democratization and desired political reforms as Laurent Gbagbo lost the 1990 elections to Houphouët-Boigny. In 1991, during the pro-democracy demonstrations, the military brutally repressed university students; and in 1995, the military was again suppressed the political opposition during the succession struggle, leading to the killing at the city of Gagnoa. The politicization of the Ivorian military was already deepened by charging it with the "civic and moral education" (New York Times, December 9, 1993). After succeeding Houphouët-Boigny on December 9, 1993, with the support of France, Henri Konan Bédié displayed authoritarian tendencies as Ivory Coast remained undemocratic and repressive (French, 1995). During the succession struggle between Bédié and Alassane Dramane Ouattara (Houphouët-Boigny's last Prime Minister), the army aligned itself against Bédié (New York Times, December 9, 1993).

VIII. DEMOCRATIZATION AND IVORIAN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

Edouard Bustin (1982:1) has forcefully argued that in the domain of civil-military relations, African states are ultimately the losers in the neo-colonial arrangements. First, the defence agreements typically vest in the French President the ultimate decision to intervene and undermine national sovereignty. It is indeed dangerous to protégé regimes, for France has been known to overthrow leaders who refuse to serve its interests as in the December 24, 1999 coup against Bedié. Reliance on CPA for external guarantor (France) places the Ivorian military into confusion and loyalty dilemma on whether to serve the French military, itself or the regime (N'Diaye, 2005:99). In addition, the presence of French military advisors perversely places French nationals to sensitive positions in African militaries and gives them access to information for influencing domestic politics (Chipman, 1989:24-25). This has negatively affected the morale, institutional pride and corporate image of the Ivorian military.

Houphouët-Boigny and Bédié policies and strategies for the demise of civilian regime failed to eliminate military restiveness and instil civilian regime in the military (N'Diaye, 2005:99). While the Ivorian military succeeded in displacing the civilian regime in the 1999 coup, it had a long history of various forms of intervention in the political process through coup attempts and conspiracies. In 1962, 1963, 1973 and 1980, the Ivorian military conspired and attempted to overthrow the government (Sigel, 1970:18-21; Welch, 1987:180). Other forms of military interference in the political process were mutinies and overt political insubordination. In 1991, the military went on strike demanding higher wages and in 1990, soldiers occupied Abidjan Airport and roamed the

streets at night engaging in acts of banditry (Whiteman, 1990:19-19).

Consequently, the authoritarian and dictatorial policies pursued and implemented by the PDCI regime under President Houphouet-Boigny and Henri Konan-Bédié for over 40 years have had negative implications on the Ivorian political system especially on civil-military relations. First, the survival of the regime rested on the will of the French government. Houphouet-Boigny's close relationship with France was the 'soundest insurance against a successful coup' (First, 1970:424). There is no doubt that PDCI regime owes most of its maintenance and longevity to the presence of the French military forces and advisors in Cote d'Ivoire. This "external guarantee strategy involved stationing of French military troops and advisors in Abidjan and training of Ivorian military to prevent coups and gather intelligence" (French, 1994:21); and thus, undermined the professionalization, autonomy and political insulation of the Ivorian military (Decalo, 1989:575).

Second, Houphouet-Boigny and his successor Henri Konan-Bédié pursued a strategy of ethnic and political manipulation, machinations and co-optation of the military into the political and administrative system and exploitation of inter-service rivalries to maintain power. This degraded the military's professional corporate self-image and heightened its political and social awareness of the flaws of the system and the regime. Evidence suggests that it is the alienation of the Ivorian military, its politicization and long history of restiveness that culminated into the December 24, 1999 coup against President Bedie. The Ivorian military was compromised by the regime in the mismanagement of the political economy in order to neutralize it (N'Diaye, 2005:96-97). Top military officers joined the government in 1974 as heads of parastatals, state-owned companies and diplomatic missions for personal enrichment. Houphouet-Boigny also made political reliability the dominant criterion for military promotion (Welch, 1987:182-184).

Third, the frequent interference of the military in politics against the opposition politicized the military as it regarded itself as a legitimate player in the political process. This increased the likelihood of its political intervention for its own corporate interests. Houphouet-Boigny sought the assistance of the French to help him retain power. In the 1970s 1980s and 1990s, both Houphouet-Boigny and Bedié used the military to suppress political opposition (Huband, 1992:55-57). In 1971, the Ivorian army and French troops intervened and massacred members of the Bete ethnic group accused of separatism and opposition to the Houphouet-Boigny regime (Welch, 1987:324; William, 1988:54). In the face of a combined civilian and military threat in 1990, Houphouet-Boigny solicited French intervention. Again in 1990, during agitation for democratization and multiparty politics by pro-democracy movements and political parties, President Houphouet-Boigny used the military to brutally suppress the opposition. Colonel Robert Guei, the future junta leader executed the mission and extended it under his presidency against the opposition in the 1995 presidential elections.

IX. DEMOCRATIZATION AND POLITICAL MILITARIZATION

France has successfully used its military presence since decolonization to pursue its interest and influence by maintaining both regional hegemony and order and stability. The continuous political and military dependency of Cote d'Ivoire on France, fostered by its African political elites has undermined political development in Cote d'Ivoire. France has constantly intervened militarily in the political and internal affairs of Cote d'Ivoire and thus hindered democratization and good governance. One of the mechanisms that France has used to maintain her presence and neo-colonial interests is conflict resolution and peace-keeping by intervening as a mediator, between rebels, tribes and the government of Cote d'Ivoire, disguised under the protection of French nationals. During the French colonial rule in Africa, the protection of nationals and national interests has been the most frequent justification of direct imperial control.

Most of the political unrests in Cote d'Ivoire can be attributed to the destructive military assistance received from France. In fact, Military assistance marks the last stage of neo-colonialism in Cote d'Ivoire. The military weaponry has been used by political factions in conflicts and civil war, causing deaths and misery to the people. Unfortunately, France has been drawn into the conflicts, despite its main aim of only protecting and evacuating French nationals and expatriates.

In 2000, Laurent Gbagbo ousted General Robert Guéi after a disputed election with French military support. However, President Gbagbo banned Alassane Dramane Ouattara from the elections and this plunged Cote d'Ivoire into civil war in September 2002 as Ouattara's rebel Forces Nouvelles (FN) took over the north. The civil war led to partitioning of Cote d'Ivoire between the North and the Centre controlled by the New Forces (FN) and the South held by the National Armed Forces of Ivory Coast (FANCI), loyal to President Gbagbo. The conflict escalated on April 4, 2011, when the French army (*Unicorn Force*) backed by 11,000 UN troops (UNOCI) launched massive air strikes and destroyed defence forces (FANCI) in favour of Ouattara's FN forces. The conflict led to mass killing of over 10,000 civilians, human rights violation, destruction of property and displacement of civilians.

President Gbagbo accused the French for masterminding the rebels in the North. In other words, a Quatarra presidency was another name for French control of Côte d'Ivoire. This explains why France, its allies and Quatarra rejected President Gbagbo's complaints of massive electoral fraud in the north in favour of Quatarra. President Gbagbo had also demanded for an international panel to investigate and analyze the electoral process and results to settle the dispute. This action elicited condemnation from President Gbagbo's supporters as echoed by Koffi Charles:

The military, the police and the people are all solidly behind President Gbagbo. We will resist any foreign intervention with the last drop of our blood and till the last man falls. No one should underestimate our resolve to defend our constitutionally elected president, our country and its sovereignty. Any attempt by Ecowas or any foreign power to forcibly remove president Gbagbo will lead to a bloody civil

war that may engulf the whole of West Africa. About a third of the Ivorian population is from the neighbouring countries: Burkinabes alone number about three million (Quoted in Mbakwe, 2011:12).

The overthrow of President Gbagbo in favour of his rival, Ouattara is a testimony of French imperial hegemony in Ivorian politics. The Ivorian state has become the major source of patronage whose control for the battles to seize power has become a zero-sum game. Ouattara, a Muslim Northerner and a former IMF Deputy Managing Director is a French protégé, married to Dominique Folloreau, a French woman, and has very close personal and cultural ties with France and former President, Nicholas Sarkozy (Busch, 2010). This makes him a French puppet for perpetuating French neo-colonial agenda in Cote d'Ivoire. Before the military intervention, France blocked Cote d'Ivoire from the West African Central Bank to destabilize its economy. The largest French owned banks closed to paralyze the financial system. Further, France and the European Union (EU) imposed an embargo on all goods, including medicine and health care products in Cote d'Ivoire to weaken President Gbagbo.

Under the French pressure in 2010, Cote d'Ivoire held fresh elections supervised by the UN. President Gbagbo won the elections in the first round, but controversially lost to Ouattara in the run off by 46% and 54% respectively. The declaration of Ouattara as the winner by Electoral Commission and subsequent nullification by the Constitutional Council precipitated a leadership crisis that plunged the Cote d'Ivoire into a full-scale civil war. France had been accused for meddling in the elections by supporting Ouattara and manipulating the Electoral Commission, while President Gbagbo was blamed for manipulated the Constitutional Council for the election nullification. Nevertheless, the French assisted Ouattara to steal the elections in order to serve their interests. This view is shared by President Gbagbo's former legal advisor, Augustin Douguih:

To better understand the complexity of the Ivorian crisis, one has to know the role and culpability of the French in it and the French hidden agenda beneath all the noise going on is a quite struggle by president Gbagbo to free Côte d'Ivoire from French economic exploitation and a vicious French government using any means necessary to bring him down (Quoted in Mbakwe, 2011:12).

In a bid to solve the Ivorian conflict, France introduced a *UN Security Council Resolution 1975* for the protection of its 12,000 civilians and manipulated the African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to overthrow President Gbagbo in favour of Ouattara. Four presidents of the 16 member ECOWAS states met in Abuja, Nigeria after the disputed elections and hastily suspended Côte d'Ivoire from ECOWAS and threatened to use military force against President Gbagbo if he failed to hand over power peacefully to Ouattara (Mbakwe, 2011:8-10). Consequently, the French forces invaded the presidential palace and installed Ouattara as president and President Gbagbo was arrested by French forces and hauled to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to face charges of crime and crimes against humanity.

In a nutshell, the real problem in the Ivorian conflict was not about the rivalry between President Gbagbo and Ouattara,

but between President Gbagbo and France, whose colonial roots are still firmly grounded in Côte d'Ivoire and 13 other African states. It has been argued that until the French connection is well understood and addressed, political instability in Côte d'Ivoire will persist by definition. This view is shared by Koffi Charles, former ambassador to the UN:

The core of the problem in Côte d'Ivoire is conspiracy by the French government to use any means necessary to remove Gbagbo from power because they think he is dangerous and inimical to their interests in Francophone Africa. But Gbagbo will not allow the French to control and run Côte d'Ivoire in their own terms (Cited in Mbakwe, 2011:10).

Under his regime, President Gbagbo hated the colonial CPA and had attempted to break away from the French colonial yoke in Côte d'Ivoire. However, France has vigorously opposed any move for disengagement, including the other 13 CFA states as it would affect the French clout in the international system and domestic economy. France would therefore resort to military strategies and regime overthrow to maintain its ties and colonial interests. For instance, the coup attempt that nearly overthrew President Gbagbo in 2002, while on a visit to Italy had the mark of French hands. He was offered an attractive political asylum in France by President Jacques Chirac to relinquish power, but refused (Mbakwe, 2011:11).

X. CONCLUSION

Personal rule, corruption and French external interference remain a daunting challenge in Francophone African states. The political, military and economic interventions of France in the domestic and international affairs of Cote d'Ivoire to a greater extent have contributed to underdevelopment, militarization, authoritarianism and political instability of Cote d'Ivoire. As long as France continues to assert its imperial dominance and hegemony as the principal actor and guarantor of Cote d'Ivoire's political, military and economic system, Cote d'Ivoire will continue to remain a failed and undemocratic state without political power, sovereignty and influence in the domestic, regional and international system.

Despite the undeniable effects of the legacy of French colonialism and neo-colonialism, personal rule, neopatrimonialism, corruption, militarization and authoritarian political system remain a daunting challenge for Francophone Africa, especially, Cote d'Ivoire. These domestic and external factors have contributed to the crisis of state failure, bad governance, political underdevelopment and dependency in Cote d'Ivoire. With the realization that colonial systems were detrimental to African sovereignty, political power and development, it is the responsibility of Ivorian political elites and the political system to reject the legacy of French neo-colonialism and neopatrimonialism in favour of democracy and good governance. The experience of Cote d'Ivoire with French neocolonialism and its negative consequences should suffice for a rethink of the relevance of the post-colonial state in Africa. Cote d'Ivoire and other African Francophone states should borrow a leaf from the experience of Asia and Latin America with neo-colonialism.

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