

Transnational Strategies of Legitimation in the 1990s: The Togolese Regime and its Exiled Opposition in Ghana

Nathalie Raunet 

Abstract: After a failed transition to democracy in the 1990s in Togo, the opposition took refuge in Ghana, outside of the regime's reach. Why and how did the regime react to transnational dissent? Analyzing an unpublished RPT-produced press review and the opposition press in Ghana and Togo, Raunet argues that the Togolese regime used the foreign press, the language of legality, and the politics of belonging to consolidate itself and shape a public image of apparent legitimacy. She suggests that the skillful adaptation of legitimation narratives is key in understanding the "internal logic" of authoritarian regimes and their prospects of survival.

Résumé : Après l'échec d'une transition démocratique au Togo dans les années 1990, l'opposition s'est réfugiée au Ghana, hors de la portée du régime. Comment et pourquoi le régime a-t-il réagi à la dénonciation du régime par l'opposition à l'étranger? Basé sur l'analyse d'une revue de presse produite par le RPT (non-publiée) et la presse de l'opposition, Raunet démontre que le régime togolais a utilisé la presse étrangère, le langage du droit, et le thème de l'identité pour consolider son pouvoir et forger une image publique de légitimité apparente. Cet article suggère que l'adaptation habile des récits de légitimité par les régimes autoritaires est clé dans notre compréhension de « leur logique interne » et pour leurs perspectives de survie.

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Resumo : Após uma transição falhada para a democracia no Togo, na década de 1990, a oposição refugiou-se no Gana, foram do alcance do regime. Por que motivos e como reagiu o regime a esta dissidência transnacional? Com base na análise de uma resenha de imprensa produzida pelo RPT (Rally of the Togolese People), que não chegou a ser publicada, e na imprensa de oposição do Gana e do Togo, Raunet argumenta que o regime togolês utilizou a imprensa estrangeira, a linguagem legalista e as políticas de pertença para se consolidar e criar uma imagem pública de aparente legitimidade. No texto sugere-se que a hábil adaptação das narrativas de legitimação é a chave para compreender a “lógica interna” dos regimes autoritários e das suas perspectivas de sobrevivência.

Keywords: Ghana; Togo; democratization; authoritarianism; legitimacy; dissent; transnationalism; the press

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The period of democratization in Africa in the 1990s was a major turning point in the continent’s history. But in many countries, including Togo, democratization was never quite actualized. Instead, hybrid regimes combining elements of democracy and authoritarianism gained strength and never concluded the “democratic transition.” Thomas Carothers has criticized the “transition paradigm” (Carothers 2002), which implied a “democratizing bias” and, as Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way (2002) have argued, most post-Cold War regimes in the era of democratization moved toward authoritarianism rather than democracy. Various typologies of authoritarian regimes were devised (Geddes 1999; Kailitz 2013; Wahmann, Hadenius & Teorell 2013). However, despite the theorization, labels, and categories of different types of authoritarian and hybrid regimes (Osei 2018; Levitsky & Way 2002), Anja Osei has pointed out the limits of theoretical scholarship, given the opaqueness and consequent lack of knowledge about the “internal logic” (2018:1462) of non-democratic regimes, and hence the limited empirical knowledge explaining their strategies of consolidation—repression having been deemed an insufficient explanation (Gerschewski 2013; Kailitz 2013; Osei 2018).

Johannes Gerschewski (2013, 2018) has argued that there were three pillars essential to the durability of autocratic regimes: repression, co-optation, and legitimation. Since legitimation constitutes one of the three pillars of stability, does the weakening of this pillar constitute a means of destabilization? How do political regimes react while their pillar of legitimation is wobbling beyond their borders because of a vocal contingent of exiled opposition? It appears that the Togolese regime felt threatened enough to invest significant effort toward counteracting the narrative of its opposition in Accra by creating a new adapted legitimation narrative; the regime’s reputation had already been undermined by its blatant human rights abuses which

led to the suspension of international aid (Kohnert 2008:6), and the continued denunciation of the regime's undemocratic behavior by opponents in Accra confirmed this reputation and precluded the full resumption of aid.

With this article, I explore why and how the Togolese regime responded to its opposition in exile by analyzing one legitimating narrative. The Togolese regime adapted its legitimation narrative to the transnational dimension of dissent by using the language of legality, the politics of belonging, and the foreign press to back up its arguments in an effort to consolidate itself and fashion a public image of apparent legitimacy and democracy. Delegitimizing any other serious alternative contributed to legitimizing the Togolese regime. In this manner, the Togolese regime sought to appear more legitimate by comparison with an opposition that it presented as not worthy of people's trust. The stakes for the Togolese regime were high; multipartyism and elections threatened to dethrone Eyadéma in favor of his main opponent Gilchrist Olympio, whose popularity kept rising, supported by a well-known narrative of liberation: *Ablodé*.¹ The Togolese regime's narrative attempted to undermine its opposition operating from Ghana, to delegitimize Olympio, and to present Ghana's head of state J.J. Rawlings as the Togolese regime's own ally.

It is beyond the scope of this article to evaluate the efficiency of this legitimation strategy, and Gerschewski (2013, 2018) has pointed to the difficulties in doing so; however, it is safe to say that this narrative did not deceive international donors; the EU only re-established international aid in 2007. Yet, as has been observed in many cases (Fisher 2012; Cheeseman & Fisher 2021; Cheeseman & Klaas 2018), autocratic regimes almost always invest efforts in polishing their image in the face of criticism, whether they are credible or not, and the pattern of legitimation contributes to our knowledge about the durability of political regimes (Kailitz 2013). The main focus here is therefore to analyze a legitimation strategy in dealing with transnational dissent specifically—a non-negligible threat, given the location of the dissent and its continued impact on both international reputation and popular support. Nic Cheeseman and Jonathan Fisher argue that “authoritarian leaders have sought to look democratic in order to appear respectable, minimize criticism, and access international financial assistance” (2019:104). Yet, the link with transnationalism has not been made explicitly in this matter. The literature has generally limited itself to studying political transitions or the stabilization of authoritarian regimes domestically.² It is recently that Gerasimos Tsourapas adapted Gerschewski's pillars of stability to a transnational framework and theorized the new concept of “transnational authoritarianism,” which he defined as “any effort to prevent acts of political dissent against an authoritarian state by targeting one or more existing or potential members of its emigrant or diaspora communities” (2021:618). Building on Tsourapas, this article makes a theoretical contribution to the literature on democratization and authoritarianism in Africa in the 1990s by showing that transnational strategies of consolidation should also be considered in the study of the

durability of authoritarian regimes in Africa. Situated at the crossroads of border studies, political history, and political science, this study opens new avenues of inquiry for scholars working on political regimes, democracy, and transnationalism.

In order to analyze the regime's transnational legitimation narrative, I draw from an 88-page booklet found in the RPT (Rally of the Togolese People) headquarters in which the regime used the press from across national borders to make itself appear more legitimate than its opposition in exile. Similar to a press review, this booklet presents the reader with a collage of selected newspaper articles drawn from both the Togolese press of the opposition (*La Vérité, Le Regard, Carrefour*) and Ghanaian newspapers (*Daily Graphic, The Mirror, Ghanaian Times, Free Press, The Statesman, The Ghanaian Chronicle, Crusading Guide, The Independent*).³ It is accompanied by a text that comments on the selected articles, retraces the Ghana-Togo relations, and emphasizes Gilchrist Olympio as the real problem. The patchwork of articles is sewn together with a specific interpretation that was intended to de-legitimize Olympio, opponents in exile, and the Togolese opposition press. I also draw on the opposition press found in the National Archives of Lomé (*Le Regard, Crocodile, La Parole*) dating from the 1990s and 2000s to frame the debate that prompted the regime to produce this specific RPT booklet.

This article only analyzes one specific legitimating narrative from an artifact produced by the RPT, which condenses a rationale otherwise disseminated through other media; it does not attempt to retrace all the political history of Togo from the 1990s to the demise of Gnassingbé Eyadéma or the Ghana-Togo relations during this period. Yet this source merits particular attention since it has been created in response to transnational dissent—and not in the absence of dissent—which denotes a regime that felt threatened by such criticism. It also addresses a major debate over the legitimacy of Togo's leader which took place during the critical period of democratization in Togo. As Wale Adebani (2016) and Frederick W. Mayer (2014) have argued, narratives in the press should be examined because they are at the root of collective action.

I first show why the legitimation narrative of the regime changed in the 1990s. Since its opposition took refuge in Accra and continued to express their dissent publicly from abroad, the regime needed to conceive of and implement a new strategy of legitimation in order to remain in control. This transnational turn marked a turning point in the regime's strategy to legitimate its power. In the following sections, I analyze how the regime used the press to advance its interests and adapt its narrative to transnational dissent by identifying three strategies: the use of the Ghanaian press and the figure of J.J. Rawlings to contradict the alleged Ghanaian support of the Togolese opposition; the language of legality as a source of legitimacy to undermine the political activities of the opposition; and the politics of belonging to stigmatize and turn the opposition in exile and Gilchrist Olympio into suspicious and disloyal individuals unworthy of popular trust.

The Displacement of Dissent into a Transnational Framework

From Unlimited Power to the National Conference of 1991

Gerschewski's theory on the durability of autocratic regimes sets out three pillars of stabilization: legitimation, repression, and co-optation. He defined repression as "the actual or threatened use of physical sanctions against an individual or organization, within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, for the purpose of imposing a cost on the target as well as deterring specific activities," and co-optation as "the capacity to tie strategically-relevant actors (or a group of actors) to the regime elite" (2013:21–22). Finally, he defined legitimation as a process that "seeks to guarantee active consent, compliance with the rules, passive obedience, or mere toleration within the population" (2013:18). Indeed, according to Gerschewski (2013:18) as well as Osei (2018:1462) and Steffen Kailitz (2013), autocratic leaders cannot rely solely on repression to remain in power. Legitimation is key to the process. This does not mean that autocratic leaders manage to truly legitimize their rule; but that they seek the support of their people and invest in legitimation efforts to justify their rule (Gerschewski 2018). Legitimation has also come to mean securing the support of the international community that conditioned aid to democratic advancements in the 1990s. It is difficult to evaluate the efficiency of legitimation when it comes to popular support. But Gerschewski (2013) and Osei (2018:1462) specify that economic and social performance make the ruler more legitimate in the eyes of the ruled.

These three pillars provide an accurate description of how power was exercised in Togo in the 1970s and 1980s. As a military regime, the government used repression to suppress dissent and co-optation in order to maintain Eyadéma's regime. But legitimation of power in particular was based on shaping the image of the regime in media content around three essential points of reference: a man (Eyadéma), a party (the RPT), and an institution (the army) (Agbobli 2004). The personality cult, the single-party political system, and the official means of communication all aimed at legitimizing Eyadéma's seizure of power, developing his popularity among the people, and securing their support. Before the 1990s, radio, television, and the press were used to present the ideological framework whereby the desired information would be broadcast.

The Eyadéma regime of that period was based on a one-party state and founded on a narrative that was well developed and propagated throughout the years.⁴ Etienne Gnassingbé Eyadéma was a Kabyé soldier from the north who came to power in 1967. In Eyadéma's mythmaking, he was presented as the savior from Sylvanus Olympio's post-independence authoritarianism and supposed pro-southern Ewe bias.⁵ Eyadéma claimed the authorship of Sylvanus Olympio's assassination, but other competing interpretations have arisen since then (see Skinner 2020). Sylvanus Olympio was identified as the troublemaker who had brought division to the country, and Eyadéma was

presented as restoring peace and unity to rebuild the Togolese nation.⁶ He was also depicted as a miraculous survivor with supernatural powers, protected by the gods (Toulabor 1986; Ellis 1993). He survived a plane crash on January 24, 1974, in Sarakawa (in the north of Togo), and attacks (allegedly from Ghana) on September 25–26, 1986. The regime exploited his survival by turning it into a religious and sacred symbol (Toulabor 1986:110–17). Eyadéma became the *Miraculé du Sarakawa*, embodying the triple function of divinity, high priest, and divine protector of Togo (Toulabor 1986:114; Rambaud 2006). His rule was highly personalized, and his politics were similar to Mobutu's anti-imperialist ideology, especially his "*politique de l'authenticité*," which instituted a return to "tradition" and the promotion of "African values" (Kakama 1983; Ellis 1993; Vieira 2019). Togo enjoyed relative prosperity during this period. By controlling the circulation of ideas with the press and the tools of repression with the army, and backing up his leadership with co-optation and relative stability and prosperity, Eyadéma enjoyed unlimited power (Hodges 1977).

However, when economic prosperity started to wane and the end of the Cold War approached, the co-optation pillar as well as the legitimacy pillar started to wane as well. As in other countries (such as Benin), public discontent increased, and international pressure for the reintroduction of multiparty elections initiated another trend. On October 5, 1990, the authors of political tracts judged seditious by the regime were put on trial (Ellis 1993). The people contested the accusation by chanting the national anthem that was used under Sylvanus Olympio's rule and had later been banned by the Eyadéma regime for a decade. This event constituted the beginning of the contestation movement in Togo which brought about the National Conference of 1991 (Ellis 1993). When the National Conference took place, Gilchrist Olympio, who had already been in exile since 1967, came back to Togo and founded the UFC party (*Union des Forces pour le Changement*) on February 1, 1992. On October 5, 1992, an assassination attempt against him occurred in Soudou (Togo), which forced him to leave the country again and take refuge in Benin, Paris, and finally Ghana. These changes led Eyadéma to adapt his strategy for the regime's survival. After the Conference, in order to remain in power, Eyadéma retaliated with brutal repression. But his coup against the transitional government forced it to reinstate the RPT and establish a coalition government. The ensuing brutality of the army led hundreds of thousands of people to take refuge in neighboring countries (Kohnert 2008).

In the 1990s: Opposition Press, Competition, and Mirror Effect

The newly authorized opposition newspapers in November 1990 contradicted the domination of the narrative previously generated by the regime in the 1970s and 80s and were an opportunity for intense public debate (Ellis 1993). Eyadéma suddenly had to face open and explicit criticism. The satirical newspaper *La Parole* called him "*Eyademon*," the "*Demon of Pya*,"

and the “*Ignare-Cinglé*.”⁷ Gilchrist Olympio was, on the contrary, depicted as a hero (*Le Regard* n°331, April 28, 2003), as “the Olympio legend” or “the Gil effect” (*Le Regard* n°339, June 3, 2003). Authors ridiculed Eyadéma by underlining his lack of education (*La Parole* n°25, July 31, 1991).⁸ They openly accused him of political crimes, economic crimes, and crimes against humanity. Reports from Amnesty International were republished in opposition newspapers. Both the opposition and the regime believed that control of the narrative in newspapers was crucial to shaping opinions, and that political loyalties would lead either to continuity or political change (Adebanwi 2016). Establishing legitimacy through the press was therefore crucial to securing the support of the people and the trust of the international community.

Eyadéma was no longer the only contender to be depicted as a godly figure; Gilchrist Olympio emerged in the press as a much-acclaimed savior. Both the regime and the opposition used the same strategies of legitimation in the press (Agbobli 2004), staging their heroes and delegitimizing and ridiculing their enemies. In his analysis of the Togolese press, Agbobli remarked that, while the process of democratization brought about a plurality of newspapers, it did not introduce a new approach to the dissemination of information. On the contrary, the mirror effect between strategies of the party in power and the opposition was striking (Agbobli 2004:294). Newly founded newspapers were largely backed by the opposition; they represented an outlet for the opposition’s activism and an opportunity to challenge the official narrative rather than an opportunity to develop objective and well-researched journalism. The private opposition newspaper *Le Regard* dedicated much of its news and opinions to Gilchrist Olympio’s actions and “good word.” Gilchrist Olympio always concluded his speeches with “Ablodé Gbadja,” a slogan that made his political party, the UFC, the new “Ablodé party.”⁹ The concept of *Ablodé* had already been used before independence.¹⁰ Using the term in the 1990s enabled Gilchrist Olympio to refer to key moments of Togolese history (the opposition to any form of colonization and the fight for independence) and key individuals (such as Sylvanus Olympio, the father of Togolese independence and the martyr of Eyadéma’s regime). In Gilchrist Olympio’s speech on April 27, 1999 (the 41st anniversary of the electoral victory of Sylvanus Olympio that took place on April 27, 1958, and the 39th anniversary of independence), Sylvanus Olympio was recalled as a hero. Gilchrist Olympio aimed to follow him as the spiritual guide or the Founding Father of Ablodé. He posed himself as the direct heir to his father’s fight:

Once more, I want to thank you. “You” who are guarding the house while we go into all the world, and spread the Ablodé.¹¹ Because as you know, we discuss the issues of our country everywhere in the world so that the whole world knows about the twists and turns of our adventures. (...) And if we win, we will put our government in place. It will be the greatest victory of Ablodé after 40 years.¹² (...) Ablodé ! Ablodé ! Ablodé Gbadja! (*Le Regard* n°331, April 28, 2003)¹³

“Ablodé” resonated like a prayer, a mystical and spiritual goal, and spreading the Ablodé echoed the Bible and how Christ and his apostles spread the gospel, clearly setting out the UFC’s agenda to gather support abroad and thereby undermine the Togolese regime. The use of Ablodé made a connection between the fight for independence in the 1960s and the fight for the liberation from dictatorship in the 1990s and the early 2000s. The press was no longer solely the prerogative of Eyadéma, in which he could convey his own myth and legitimation, nor was he the only figure to be depicted as the savior of the nation.

Transnational Dissent in the Press and the Regime’s Legitimacy in Question

By seeking refuge in neighboring countries, the Togolese opposition members took the struggle outside of the national territory and the regime’s direct reach. The exile of political opponents enabled members of the opposition to operate in a safer environment. Gerschewski (2013:21) did define one of the pillars of stability—repression—as occurring “within the territorial jurisdiction of the state.” As repression intensified within Togo, it was increasingly risky for the opposition to voice their dissent at home. In Benjamin Lawrance’s (2018) analysis of the testimonies of Togolese asylum-seekers, political persecution is reported as comprising torture, harassment, detainment, demonstrations disrupted by violence, and mass killings in each electoral year of the Eyadéma era (1993, 1998, 2003, 2005). As Lawrance estimated (2018:288), the “politically motivated deaths and disappearances during the four decades of Eyadéma may be in the tens of thousands.” On top of this violent repression, Gilchrist Olympio was prevented from running for election in 1993 because he refused to travel to Togo to get his medical condition certified. The opposition boycotted the election; Eyadéma was the sole candidate and won.

In this context of loaded dice, intimidation, and violent repression, it was difficult for the opposition to participate in the democratic game from within the Togolese territory. By operating from abroad, members of the opposition who had taken refuge in neighboring countries found a way “to do politics” from afar, and they used the press to advance their interests. The Togolese opposition in Ghana openly and publicly denounced the abuses of the regime, hence exposing its lack of legitimacy to the international community and the electorate. This strategy killed more than two birds with one stone: by voicing their dissent transnationally, the opposition in Accra avoided Eyadéma’s direct repression, denounced and criticized the regime on the international scene, ensuring that international donors or heads of state would not support him, and curtailed potential popular support for Eyadéma in Togo ahead of the next elections in 1998. In fact, members of the opposition in exile managed to undermine the legitimation pillar of the regime by evading the reach of its repression pillar.¹⁴

Gilchrist Olympio’s popular support across borders was strongly emphasized in the press, particularly in *Le Regard* and *Crocodile*. The description of

Olympio's border-crossing at Aflao at his return to Lomé ahead of the 1998 elections suggests a growing, perhaps overwhelming, popular support in both Ghana and Togo (*Crocodile* n°247 April 30–May 6, 1998). Since Gilchrist Olympio fled the country in 1992, his popularity had continued to grow in his absence, encouraged by the opposition press that relayed his actions abroad. His return to Lomé in 1998 represented an opportunity to demonstrate to the Eyadéma regime that Olympio was still very popular on both sides of the Ghana-Togo border.

Beyond popular support, the opposition also claimed that Gilchrist Olympio had the support of J.J. Rawlings, the head of the Ghanaian state. Since Gilchrist Olympio was operating from Accra, and J.J. Rawlings had had an almost belligerent relationship with Eyadéma—attempted coups and attacks allegedly fomented by Togolese opponents came from Ghanaian territory in 1977, 1986, 1993, and 1994—Ghanaian support from the highest spheres of authority represented a strategic argument to threaten the Togolese regime. For instance, *La Parole* humorously suggested that Ghana would come to the rescue after the coup against the transitional government in 1991 (*La Parole* n°35, October 9, 1991): “Joe Koko [Prime Minister Koffigoh] wonders whether he should call Rawlings to the rescue” [my translation]; and called for help from the armies of the two neighbouring countries in 1992: “True friends, Togo has got some. (...) So, Armies from Benin and Ghana, stand up to free your brothers, who are hostages of the Demon of Pya!” (*La Parole* n°79, August 19, 1992). By implying that the opposition had international backing from a hostile state located just across the border, the opposition press insinuated that the Togolese regime was no longer safe, and played on the “subversion psychosis” of Eyadéma being overthrown because of an attack led by Togolese opponents trained in Ghana.

In the 1998 elections, the opposition had a good chance to win the elections. Although absent from the Togolese territory, Gilchrist Olympio was chosen as a candidate. A former Togolese diplomat speaking to me on strict condition of anonymity said that due to international pressure, Eyadéma decided not to rig these elections “too much.”¹⁵ His political entourage had convinced him that he would win, fair and square.¹⁶ However, when the electoral counting of the ballots started, and it became clear that Gilchrist Olympio had overwhelmingly defeated Eyadéma, the regime stole the victory from Olympio's party, and declared Eyadéma the winner.¹⁷ The UFC held a press conference in Accra (*Crocodile* n°348, November 16, 1998) to denounce the electoral robbery, and loudly accused the regime of electoral rigging, on the international scene.

To a certain extent, Eyadéma believed the regime's mythmaking of the 1970s and 1980s which had established him as a mythical hero and savior, supported by his people. While Eyadéma's regime always functioned with the promotion of zealous attitudes toward the regime, Eyadéma believed that he was popular among the people (Dégli 1996:107–8). After the 1998 elections, he knew he could not win an election, and that Gilchrist Olympio, from Accra, could well succeed in gaining the presidency.

The displacement of dissent from a domestic framework to a transnational framework made it difficult for the regime to control it. This nurtured the regime's fear that its international reputation would be further undermined, that popular support for Gilchrist Olympio would continue to grow, backed by powerful allies such as J. J. Rawlings, and that its opposition would then be in a position to overthrow Eyadéma at the next election. The Togolese regime had to adapt, create a new strategy of legitimation that could not remain domestic anymore, and responded with an "eye for an eye strategy."

The Regime's Transnational Legitimation Strategy: Overturning the Arguments of the Opposition

The Use of the Ghanaian Press and the Figure of J.J. Rawlings

The regime was forced to adapt to the transnational dissent. "Adaptation" refers to the capacity of the regime to initiate change according to a new situation. As Gerschewski (2013) pointed out, the pillars of stability are pillars of stabilization involving a dynamic process. Concerning adaptation, Evgeny Finkel and Yitzhak M. Brudny (2012) have analyzed how autocratic regimes have adapted to democratic pressures; Honorata Mazeus et al. (2016) compared three hybrid regimes' adaptation of legitimation narratives; and Osei (2018) demonstrated how the modes of power exercised by Faure Gnassingbé Eyadéma (the son) since 2005 were an adaptation of the modes of power previously established by his father, according to the needs of regime survival. We are looking at how a regime's legitimation narrative adapted to the transnational dimension of dissent.

Tsourapas used Gerschewski's theory to create a framework explaining "how autocracies adapt to growing cross-border mobility" (2021:618). He conceptualized "transnational authoritarianism" along four main strategies of authoritarian regimes abroad: transnational legitimation, repression, co-optation, and cooperation between non-state actors (such as diaspora communities serving the interests of autocracies abroad). Concerning legitimation, Tsourapas lists examples of authoritarian state strategies against nationals in exile: autocratic leaders call political exiles disloyal, unpatriotic, or traitors (2021:630–31). While these labels are useful for characterizing transnational legitimation strategies, Tsourapas did not elaborate on the role of the press as a space of national debate and contestation (Adebanwi 2016). Yet, the press has always been an important instrument for the dissemination of ideas, and narratives in the press can be powerful in mobilizing people (Mayer 2014). Wale Adebanwi (2016) and Kate Skinner and Wilson Yayoh (2019) have analyzed the press as a privileged space for different visions of nationhood. Building on this scholarship, I explore how the Togolese regime used the press to advance its interests and articulate its adapted legitimation narrative in response to its opponents in exile.

While the RPT used a variety of outlets, I will focus on the RPT booklet. The booklet was a special issue titled “Gilchrist Olympio: Ghanaians are fed up with him!” (my translation), produced after the 1998 election results were contested by the opposition.¹⁸ It is an example of a series of booklets of the same kind produced by the RPT, not findable in the *Archives Nationales*, and whose target audience was most probably the Togolese people, RPT stalwarts, as well as Western and international actors to produce a positive public image of Eyadéma and his regime.¹⁹ Human rights infringements had led to the interruption of European Union aid since 1993, and the loud and open criticism and denunciation of rigged elections by the opposition in 1998 only confirmed to the international community that the situation had not improved in Togo.

At first glance, the source and the main narrative of the booklet are clearly identifiable. The booklet is a press review, which makes the debate about legitimacy between the opposition press and the official press evident. This booklet is a synthesis of the general narrative which was also disseminated through other means (television, official press, and radio) by the regime with respect to its exiled opposition in Ghana.²⁰ It looks like a standard press review, presenting a selection of articles from both the opposition press and the Ghanaian press. As is often the case with press reviews, the carefully selected articles aim to convince the audience of a particular opinion that claims to be supported by evidence from other sources. In this case, the Togolese narrative is not clearly identifiable as biased by its audience. The information seems to come from other sources than the Togolese regime, but these other sources were chosen to justify the Togolese regime’s interpretation of events and legitimating narrative.

Included in these sources are several newspaper articles from Ghana. Many from *The Daily Graphic* and *The Ghanaian Times* report on the campaign of official rapprochement between Ghana and Togo, with speeches from Eyadéma and Rawlings. By including them in the booklet and translating some of them into French, the reconciliation discourse between Ghana and Togo is being relayed by the Ghanaian press and broadcast in Togo. But certain articles written in the private Ghanaian press may have been secretly influenced by the Togolese regime. While Togo had been a place of exile for political opponents in the Nkrumah era (Skinner 2018), Ghanaian journalists from the Ghanaian opposition had also taken refuge in Lomé during the PNDC (Provisional National Defense Council) regime (1981–1992) under the leadership of J.J. Rawlings.²¹ In the 1990s, President Rawlings in Ghana suspected that “a foreign country” might have used some of the private press of the opposition (*Ghanaian Voice*, *Ghanaian Chronicle*, *The Independent*, and *Free Press*) to broadcast criticism against him in the context of tense relations with Togo. The management of the *Ghanaian Voice* challenged President Rawlings to provide evidence of the alleged sponsorship of the newspaper by a neighboring country.²² *Le Regard* (n°101, September 20–27, 1998) expressed similar doubts.

Ghanaian articles chosen by the Togolese regime in the RPT booklet could thus originate more from Togo than from Ghana. Both the regime and its opposition thought Ghana's support was important enough to convince public opinion and international actors of their political legitimacy. The regime responded to the opposition's claim of Ghanaian support with mirroring arguments, backing its own version with Ghanaian articles. The regime presented these articles as if they were straightforward reflections of Ghanaian public opinion, whereas this process of selection was in fact creating representations of Ghanaian public opinion influenced by the Togolese regime and conducive to its interests. The same process has been identified in strategies used by authoritarian leaders to appear "good enough" after rigged elections: "In the world of political theatre, this is the equivalent of the magician who plants a member of their team in the audience to collude with their trick so that it seems more credible to everyone else" (Cheeseman & Klaas 2018:186). The efforts of the Togolese regime demonstrate to what extent the press, even more so the Ghanaian press, was believed to influence perceptions, public opinion, political loyalties, and behaviors, and convince readers of the state's legitimation narrative.

More concretely, the Togolese regime aimed to overturn the opposition's alleged Ghanaian support by displaying proof of the regime's peaceful relations with Ghana. Gilchrist Olympio, on the contrary, was targeted as the agitator endangering these seemingly promising and newly established neighborly relations and plunging Togo into a latent war with Ghana. The narrative presented in the booklet emphasized how improved the Ghana-Togo relations were, and argued that the real problem was in fact Gilchrist Olympio himself. By comparison, the Togolese regime then legitimizes its own power by displaying improved diplomatic relations with Ghana that the opposition was endangering with its activism.

According to the booklet, while the diplomatic relations between the two countries had been tense between 1972 (when Eyadéma was installed through a presidential referendum) and 1995 (when Rawlings visited Eyadéma in Kara, Togo), Eyadéma and Rawlings had finally found a middle ground despite the alleged attempts of Gilchrist Olympio and the opposition in exile to destabilize Togo from Ghanaian territory. Eyadéma had just visited Rawlings in May 1998 after Rawlings' visit to Togo in 1995. It was essential for the regime to present the Ghana-Togo relations as improved, lest rising tensions between the two countries encourage Ghana to support the Togolese opposition openly. In this context of apparent improved diplomatic relations, Eyadéma and Rawlings decided to deescalate their threats toward each other.²³ In the booklet, both heads of state are presented as the heroes of peace who managed to introduce "a new era of concord, solidarity and good neighborliness." The heads of state had generated "reassurance, relief and hope" (my translation, p. 6).

The Togolese regime used images that were highly valued by the Togolese people to woo them. The Ghanaian press was considered freer and fairer by the Togolese people since Rawlings had willingly organized multiparty

elections in Ghana in 1992 and 1996 and would later leave power in 2000 after these two presidential terms without resistance. The Ghanaian press did not appear to originate from the authoritarian state of Togo, and hence bore the mark of credibility. By showing an image of alliance with Rawlings' Ghana, the booklet attempted to show the "true" diplomatic relations between Ghana and Togo in contrast to the "propaganda" of opposition newspapers used to make sure that "the Togolese government (...) behaves" (booklet p. 71). Mirroring this disclaimer, the opposition retaliated on the exact same issue, proclaiming Gilchrist Olympio as the rightful head of state after the "robbed" 1998 elections:

President Gilchrist Olympio's speech on the national Ghanaian television channel has not pleased the supporters of the old order.²⁴ At Lomé 2, one is disappointed that, despite all the plots and fabricated accusations to convince the Ghanaian authorities to expel the leader of the UFC from the Ghanaian territory, Gilchrist Olympio feels at ease in Ghana. (...) Crazy rumors that were fabricated at Lomé 2 aimed to make people believe that the leader of the UFC is unwanted in Ghana and about to be expelled to another destination. This is untrue. (My translation, pp.73–74 of the booklet, from *Le Regard* N°99, September 8–15, 1998)

The regime and the opposition press were engaged in a power struggle. One mirrors the other, arguing the exact opposite, and accusing each other of lying and misinforming the public about which side Ghana would support. The regime's strategy consisted of denying the claim of Ghanaian support for the opposition and displaying an improvement in the Ghana-Togo relations, hence making the narrative of the opposition in exile a lie. In this respect, the use of the *Ghanaian Chronicle* or Ghanaian newspapers with anti-Rawlings stances could have been counter-productive for the Togolese regime, since it aimed to only target Olympio and to present Rawlings as an ally. However, as an article in *Le Regard* n°101 commented, the Togolese regime purposely used a biased Ghanaian press without indicating its anti-Rawlings stance to its target audience. Also, despite the so-called improvement in Ghana-Togo relations that the booklet sought to emphasize, the Togolese regime still regularly accused Ghana of allowing Togolese political opponents to be trained seditiously in the Ghanaian territory.

In December 1997, the Ghanaian embassy published disclaimers regarding these repeated accusations in *Le Regard* (following the alleged refusal of *Togo Presse* and the TVT to broadcast them) (*Le Regard* n°66, December 9–15, 1997, and n°105, October 20–26, 1998). The government of Ghana was in a delicate position, and it attempted to deescalate the tension provoked by the presence of the Togolese opposition in Accra. It had to deal with the steady wariness of the Togolese regime, the debate in Togo about Ghanaian support, and finally the debates in its own newspapers regarding Olympio's presence in Ghana.²⁵ The transnational legitimation strategy of the regime meant using the Ghanaian press, the figure of J.J. Rawlings, and the image of

improved Ghana-Togo relations to discredit the claim of potential Ghanaian backing of the opposition. Undermining the opposition narrative of Ghanaian support meant undermining the potential galvanization and mobilization of the opposition against Eyadéma.

Legality as a Source of Legitimacy

The use of the Ghanaian media by the Togolese opposition in Ghana (on the BBC radio, Ghanaian television, and the press) de-legitimized the regime and undermined its image on the international scene. As Jonathan Fisher's work (2012) demonstrated in Uganda, "image management" of African regimes in relation to donors' perceptions is central in understanding the donor-receiver relationship. By exposing human rights violations and the failure to establish democratic institutions, the opposition publicly demonstrated to international donors that Togo did not respect the rule of political conditionality, despite its efforts in appearing to do so. This endangered the international aid that the regime claimed to have secured back in 1997—from the World Bank, the IMF, and Japan (*The Independent* February 5–11, 1997, booklet p. 2). The European Union's aid had stopped in 1993 and would resume only in 2007. From the regime's point of view, the opposition's actions precluded the resumption of most of the aid.

The Togolese regime therefore was forced to respond. In order to do so, it also accused the opposition of not following the rules. It used legal arguments to discredit the opposition and silence it, even if it was physically out of reach. After reminding the public that the Togolese government was legitimate because it had been elected, contrarily to the opposition that had contested the results, it used international law. In this respect, international law has contributed to the control of dissent abroad by ensuring that political refugees do not undermine leaders of their origin country. The booklet makes a sustained legal argument about the rights and duties of political refugees. It cites the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 establishing the right of asylum, the *raison d'être* of the UNHCR, the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the UN declaration on territorial asylum in 1967. Most importantly, it relies on the OAU Convention adopted in 1969 and ratified in 1974:

Article III Prohibition of Subversive Activities: 1. Every refugee has duties to the country in which he finds himself, which require in particular that he conforms with its laws and regulations as well as with measures taken for the maintenance of public order. He shall also abstain from any subversive activities against any Member State of the OAU. 2. Signatory States undertake to prohibit refugees residing in their respective territories from attacking any State Member of the OAU, by any activity likely to cause tension between Member States, and in particular by use of arms, through the press, or by radio.

By using international law and international bodies as legal references, the booklet then renders the political statements voiced by Togolese refugees in Ghana illegal. They were accused of organizing “subversion,” being traitors to their country and guilty of the illegal practice of politics. As Nic Cheeseman (2015:151) has pointed out, the opposition could only use the space that had been left by the regime to participate in the democratic game. If no space is available within the country, it is logical to find it displaced abroad. The regime’s recourse to supra-national instances and the OAU Convention not only criminalized the political activities of refugees in Ghana, it also reminded Ghana of its obligations to contain them, lest it might be punished by the international community (Cheeseman & Klaas 2018). Yet, after the press conference held in Accra by Gilchrist Olympio following the results of the 1998 elections, the Ghanaian Ministry of Foreign Affairs pointed out that “Olympio did nothing wrong” (*Daily Graphic*, July 25, 1998), and that it was agreed with the government of Togo that Olympio would contest the presidency while domiciled in Ghana, adding that the EU, the OAU, and the US all deplored the lack of transparency which characterized the process of ballot counting. By accusing the opposition of illegal political practices, the Togolese regime then omitted that the activities carried out by Olympio had in fact been permitted by the Togolese regime.

The language of legality contributes to shaping a veneer of respectability for “counterfeit democracies” (Cheeseman & Klaas 2018:12), but it hardly hides the violations of human rights, electoral rigging, and democratic deficits of the regime. Despite the cut in aid, some countries had an ambiguous relationship with Togo, as was evident by France’s attitude and willingness to preserve its diplomatic relation with Togo since the beginning of the 1990s (Toulabor & Heilbrunn 1995; Kohnert 2008). It appears that the Togolese refugees in Ghana deemed the international community’s behavior ambiguous also; a petition signed in Accra on March 15, 1997, protested the hosting of a summit of OAU heads of state in Lomé organized by the OAU and the UN. The petition implicitly stated that by allowing such an important event to be hosted in Lomé, both the UN and the OAU “came to Eyadéma’s rescue to help rebuild a tarnished image” (p. 25 of the booklet, my translation). Hybrid regimes invested considerable effort to appear democratic, as doing so improved the potential survival of the regime (Cheeseman & Klaas 2018:187) by securing international aid.

Unworthy of People’s Trust? Gilchrist Olympio and the Politics of Belonging

The escape of political adversaries to neighboring countries gave the Togolese regime the opportunity to cast doubt on their belonging and loyalty. As Dirk Kohnert (2008:5) has pointed out, refugees were often labeled “stateless vagabonds” or “traitors.” They were treated as “foreigners” following the constitutional changes of 2002, and were no longer eligible to run for public office. Ghanaian articles compiled in the booklet complained about

foreigners infiltrating the Ghanaian citizenry.²⁶ An article from *The Statesman* (August 13, 1995, booklet p. 22) pointed at Togolese refugees suspected of infiltrating the Ghanaian voters' rolls in Ghanaian presidential elections in the 1990s, insinuating that they were rude guests, profiting from Ghanaian hospitality. This depiction suggested that the opposition in Ghana was unworthy of people's trust. More particularly, the booklet focused on the figure of Gilchrist Olympio. His reputation, belonging, status, and loyalty were described as suspicious:

Refugee, political leader, trader, businessman, University Professor, Togolese, Ghanaian, Beninese, Ivorian, Afro-brazilian, Gilchrist who claims to possess dozens of passports, is everything and its opposite, at least that's the impression he gives (booklet, p. 38, my translation).

It is a well-known strategy to question the belonging of potential presidential candidates to prevent them from running in elections (Whitaker 2005; Marshall-Fratani 2006; Geschiere & Jackson 2006) or to discredit them.²⁷ Just as Rawlings' citizenship had been challenged during the first presidential elections of the 1990s in Ghana,²⁸ Olympio's citizenship was also questioned but in a wider narrative of de-legitimization (other technicalities prevented his running for office). In an interview broadcast on Joy FM, Olympio commented on his own citizenship status: "My mother was born and raised in Keta. She is from Ghana, from the royal family of Amegashie. I am a Ghanaian citizen, if I choose to be so. I am a Togolese citizen, if I choose to be so" (booklet p. 64, my translation). But in the context of the regime's discourse on "Togolité" since the 1970s, being a "true" Togolese also meant having ancestry that originated from within Togo. It argued that the "true" Togolese came from northern Togo (where Eyadéma came from), because of a north-south ancestral migration that remained within the boundaries of present-day Togo, while the peoples of the south (predominantly Ewe-speaking) ended up within Togo after horizontal east-west ancestral migration that took place across these boundaries, which made them migrants and weakened their bond to the nation (Toulabor 1986:34–36; Kohnert 2008). In addition, the Olympio family in particular was targeted by the regime because of its Brazilian descent (Kohnert 2008:5; Seely & Decalo 2021:92). The implicit claim is that "true" Togolese are those who can claim indigenous ancestry, and that that was not the case with Gilchrist Olympio.

The Ghanaian press was once again used to strengthen and back up these claims of dubious belonging and suspicious character. Articles from the Ghanaian private press titled "Who invited Olympio?" (*Free Press* March 14–20, 1997, booklet p. 44), "Why give Diplomatic passport to Togolese National?" (*Free Press* October 22–28, 1997, booklet p. 46), "Olympio is the problem" (*Ghanaian Chronicle* August 31–September 1, 1998, booklet p. 83). The Ghanaian press was presented as "the reflection of national public opinion" (my translation, booklet p. 1). However, the newspapers used to reflect the opinion of the people in Ghana about Gilchrist Olympio were

mainly from the Ghanaian private press (*Free Press*, *The Statesman*, *The Ghanaian Chronicle*), whereas the newspapers chosen to glorify the positive turn in the diplomatic relations between Eyadéma and Rawlings were the *Daily Graphic* and the *Ghanaian Times*, state-owned newspapers. The articles used in the booklet from the Ghanaian private press pertained to topics more sensational, subjective, and likely to be controversial, while the articles of the state-owned press used in the booklet tackled official matters and gave factual narratives of events. The decision to only select articles that criticized Olympio to demonstrate his unpopularity in Ghana is limiting and manipulative. The Togolese regime clearly aimed to shape the knowledge and perceptions of the Togolese people about how Gilchrist Olympio was perceived in Ghana and to reveal his “true” nature. This strategy was intended to undermine the popular backing of Olympio and limit the reach of transnational dissent.

Conclusion

Why and how did the Togolese regime adapt its legitimation narrative to the transnational expression of dissent? The new legitimating narrative took a transnational turn after members of the Togolese opposition took refuge in Accra and attempted to undermine the legitimacy of Eyadéma from afar. The regime could not allow the opposition to control a narrative that could galvanize enough popular support to win the next elections, encourage resistance and coups against the regime, and undermine the image of the regime on the international scene. Similarly to Nic Cheeseman and Brian Klaas’ (2018) description of “Potemkin elections” (rigged elections that appear to be democratic), the Togolese regime endeavored to discredit any narrative that would challenge its appearance of legitimacy. By analyzing how and why the Togolese regime responded to attacks on its legitimacy, this article seeks to explore strategies of consolidation that are employed when regimes’ pillars of stability (Gerschewski 2013) are destabilized. The skillful adaptation of legitimation narratives indicates that the reactions of regimes when their weak spots are in question are an interesting avenue of research for understanding the “internal logic” of authoritarian regimes and their prospects for survival.

Both the Togolese regime and the opposition press thought that newspapers were a crucial space of debate for shaping perceptions and political loyalties and for gathering support. The Togolese regime’s strategy reveals Eyadéma’s quest for legitimacy while he was in power, and Gilchrist Olympio’s strategy reveals a quest for recognition of his legitimacy through elections. While the efficiency of the regime’s strategy is difficult to evaluate, the opposition continued to describe Gilchrist Olympio as a legend and much-awaited savior welcomed by popular euphoria ahead of the 2003 elections:

Dozens of thousands of Togolese took over the western border of Lomé to welcome the leader of the UFC. However, we had been told several weeks earlier, that the man was politically dead. He had been thoroughly insulted.

Newspaper articles had presented him like the “Togolese disease.” We now realize that all this was mere water poured on a duck’s back. A pointless task. More than four years of absence from the Togolese territory has not undermined the determination of the UFC leader’s supporters. (*Le Regard* n°331, April 28, 2003, my translation)²⁹

Gilchrist Olympio was prevented from participating in the 2003 elections following constitutional changes.³⁰ Both Eyadéma and Gilchrist Olympio lost their fight and did not manage to fully meet their goals: Eyadéma was not able to dismantle Olympio’s popular support and had to resort to other means to prevent him from running, and Olympio was not able to actually assume power through elections. It was after the death of Eyadéma in 2005, when his son Faure Gnassingbé Eyadéma took over Togo’s presidency, that Gilchrist Olympio accepted the offer to take part in the coalition government in 2010, to the dissatisfaction of much of the opposition which judged this compromise traitorous.

In addition to filling one of the numerous gaps in the recent political history of Togo, this article contributes to the literature on democratization and the persistence of authoritarianism in hybrid regimes of the post-Cold War period by foregrounding the transnational strategies of a regime and its opposition to undermine the legitimacy of their opponent. This case study points up the necessity of exploring other legitimating narratives produced in reaction to threats, so that weak spots of authoritarian regimes are analyzed in relation to their strategy of stabilization. Here, the transnational character of strategies provides new avenues of research for the study of authoritarian regimes in other contexts.

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n°25, July 31, 1991

n°35, October 9, 1991

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Le Regard

n°66, December 9–15, 1997

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 n°128, April 28, 1999–May 3, 1999
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Notes

1. The correct *Ewe* spelling is *Abblɔ̃*, but Ablodé is commonly used in Togo. In *Ewe*, “Ablodé” means freedom. In the 1950s and 1960s, it equated to independence. Here, the same term is used to seek liberation from dictatorship (Skinner 2007; Toulabor 1996).
2. Heilbrunn 1993; Nwajiaku 1994; Widner 1994; Toulabor & Heilbrunn 1995; Monga 1996; Bratton & van de Walle 1997; Decalo 1997; Joseph 1997; Toulabor 1999; Iwata 2000; Seely 2005; Lynch & VonDoepp 2019.
3. Brice Rambaud’s (2006) study of the Togolese press between 1967 and 2005 in Togo specified that *Carrefour* was created in 1991, *Crocodile* in 1993, and *Le Regard* in 1996. While these newspapers were mainly produced in Lomé, newspapers were also distributed in other towns of the country. *Le Regard* was the mostly read newspaper with 3,500 copies printed a week (Rambaud 2006:7). As has been said by Jenifer Hasty (2005) about Ghana, L. White (2000) about East Africa, and Brice Rambaud about Togo (Rambaud 2006:8), the press was also read collectively, which ensured a wider coverage in rural areas.
4. The elections that were held during Eyadéma’s regime confirmed the RPT as a one-party system, and Eyadéma was re-elected unopposed.
5. On this topic, see also Wen’saa Yagla Omaa (1978). Sylvanus Olympio had advocated for the unification of all Ewes and had been the spokesman for the All Ewe Conference petition at the United Nations in 1947.
6. Sylvanus Olympio was the father of independence, first president of Togo; he was assassinated on January 13, 1963, in Africa’s first military coup (see Skinner 2020). The RPT (*Rassemblement du Peuple Togolais*), Eyadéma’s party, was created with the explicit goal of bringing back together a people divided by so-called tribalism. This rhetoric of unity was a variation on the same themes that can be found elsewhere on the continent in the 1960s–1980s to justify single-party systems and military rule (Decalo 1976, 1992).
7. The ‘*Ignare-Cinglé*’ means: the mad or loony ignoramous.
8. For an analysis of political derision in the Ewe-speaking region of Togo, see Toulabor (1981), and for a more recent analysis of Togolese political satire see Frisch (2021).
9. “Ablodé Gbadja” means total freedom, independence, liberty in the Ewe language.
10. “Ablode Gbadja” first referred to the claim for radical independence from the French. It was a common chant at political rallies during the 1950s (Skinner 2007; Toulabor 1996).
11. This expression is close to the biblical quotation: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).
12. The assassination of Sylvanus Olympio occurred in 1963, exactly forty years earlier.
13. All translations from French-speaking newspapers are those of the author.
14. This is not to say that Togolese political intimidation did not occur in Ghana, but it was arguably more complex to carry out than within Togo.
15. Former Togolese diplomat (interview, Paris, November 2, 2018). See also Toulabor (1999:113n13). There were, however, allegations of electoral malpractice, especially in terms of vote-buying (*Daily Graphic*, June 22, 1998). For an analysis of election rigging strategies, see Cheeseman and Klaas (2018).

16. Same former Togolese diplomat (interview, Paris, November 2, 2018); Dégli (1996:108).
17. The Togolese Army seized the ballot boxes and declared President Eyadema the winner with 52% of the vote. Not one outside observer was allowed to witness the alleged ballot counting. <http://psephos.adam-carr.net/countries/t/togo/togo.txt>. This echoes how the Ghanaian opposition described the NDC victory in 1992 as a “stolen verdict.” (See Nugent 1995).
18. It is not dated. However the latest date of newspaper articles used in the booklet date from September 1998.
19. According to the informant who entrusted me with this booklet and wishes to remain anonymous.
20. Other articles published in the public domain suggest that the RPT-produced press review condensed the strategy of the Togolese regime otherwise carried out through other media before and after the 1998 elections. For example, *Le Regard* N°99, September 8–15, 1998, refers to the “crazy rumors that were fabricated at Lomé 2 aimed to make people believe that the leader of the UFC is unwanted in Ghana.”
21. Ebow Godwin, for example, was the former editor of *The Ghanaian Punch*. A fierce critic of Rawlings, he went into exile in Togo in the early 1980s. He reported news from Lomé to Ghanaian newspapers. When Eyadéma died, Ebow Godwin published an obituary of Eyadéma in the *Ghanaian Chronicle* (February 7, 2005), repeating much of the Togolese propaganda of the 1970s and 1980s.
22. *The Ghanaian Voice* n°207, June 24–27, 1993, in a statement issued on Monday June 21, 1993, by the management of the newspaper.
23. Same former Togolese diplomat (interview, Paris, November 2, 2018).
24. Eyadéma and his party.
25. According to certain articles, there was a debate in Ghana between the press and the government concerning the presence of Gilchrist Olympio in Ghana. The *Daily Graphic*, June 27, 1998, *Daily Graphic* July 25, 1998, *Free Press* Oct. 1998 (7–13) and the reaction of the Ghanaian embassy in Togo (*Le Regard* n°105, October 20–26, 1998).
26. Raunet Robert-Nicoud 2019; Adotey 2020; Raunet 2021.
27. Among others, this was the case of Alassane Ouattara in Côte d’Ivoire in 1995, when the debate about *‘Ivoirité’* took place.
28. Judgment of the High Court, JLP 69624, October 21, 1992, Essilfie-Bondzie on behalf of Bilson v. Rawlings and another.
29. This is similar to the border crossing of G. Olympio in 1998. See *Le Regard* n°128, April 28, 1999–May 3, 1999.
30. In the 2003 elections, the RPT claimed it had garnered 57.22% of the vote, which did not match the unofficial counts carried out by the UFC that counted 70.77% of the vote in favor of the UFC (presidential candidate Akitani). <https://www.refworld.org/docid/403f57b64.html>.