Perspectives on Côte d’Ivoire: Between Political Breakdown and Post-Conflict Peace

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Introduction

Cyril I. Obi

Recent events point to a new impetus in the otherwise stalemated post-conflict transition in Côte d’Ivoire. The basis for this cautious optimism lies in the signing of the Ouagadougou Agreement (after several unsuccessful regional initiatives) by two of the leading (now war-weary) protagonists in the civil war that broke out in the country in September 2002: President Laurent Gbagbo and Guillaume Soro of the rebel New Forces (Forces Nouvelles or FN) in control of the northern part of the country, on March 4, 2007. According to the UN News Service (cited by allAfrica.com), the agreement is directed at “creating a new transitional Government; organising free and fair presidential elections, merging the Forces Nouvelles with the national defence and security forces through the establishment of an integrated command centre; dismantling the militia; disarming ex-combatants and enrolling them in civil services programmes; and replacing the so-called zone of confidence separating north and south with a green line to be monitored by UNOCI.”

In this latest peace deal, Soro was offered and took up the position of Prime Minister to his erstwhile enemy, in a power-sharing arrangement that is expected, with the support of regional and international organisations, to re-start the transition process(es) for national reconciliation and identification, security sector reform, elections, the return to democracy and peace in the country (ICG 2007). Rather than take the current effort at restoring peace in Côte d’Ivoire for granted, there is some awareness that a lot depends on the faithful implementation of the Ouagadougou Accord, and the rapprochement between Gbagbo and Soro on one hand, and Gbagbo and the Burkinabe leader, Blaise Compaore, whom Gbabgo had earlier suspected of being the main supporter of the rebels. An even greater challenge lies in healing the wounds and bitter memories of the war and re-building confidence in the Ivorian nation-state as well as resolving issues related to the exclusionary policy of Ivoirité—the youth, national identity and citizenship questions (Coulibaly 2003; Akindes 2004), which in the first instance, undergirded the slide to violent conflict.

Both Gbagbo and Soro have so far in their public statements and actions demonstrated a will to implement the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement. Soro has taken actions that have opened up the northern part of the country. In a public ceremony in Boauke (which was the headquarters of the FN), where arms were symbolically destroyed, and which witnessed by leaders from neighbouring countries, the South African President, representatives of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) as well as the United Nations (UN), both President Gbagbo who was visiting Bouake for the first time since the war broke out, accompanied by Soro, informed those present that the war had ended, signal-
ling the re-unification of the country. A rocket attack at Bouake’s airport on a plane carrying the new Prime Minister in June had reminded everyone of the fragility of the peace process and the risks confronting it, but the pronouncements at Bouake by both sides confirmed that the process is still on track, and Côte d’Ivoire, remains on the road to a rather challenging transition to democracy and peace. However, both Gbagbo and Soro, appear to loom large over the implementation of the peace process, while the people and the root causes of the conflict remain to be addressed. The critical question that will have to be addressed in the months and years to come is whether the “peace from above”, will succeed in opening up the space for popular participation in national reconciliation, reconstruction and democracy, or will merely paper over the cracks between the war-weary factions, without addressing the underlying tensions in Ivorian society.

The three contributions in this publication explore different perspectives on the complex roots of civil war in Côte d’Ivoire. The first by Guro Ålmas, examines the ramifications of the economic trigger for the eruption of civil war in 2002. She explores the ways in which the collapse of the cash crop economy in the late 1970’s was refracted into institutional weaknesses and the failure of development policy, leading to the instrumentalization of ethnic identities in the midst of intensified struggles by factions of the Ivorian elite for a greater share of shrinking national revenues. An important point relates to the way economic reforms—particularly the Structural Adjustment Programmeme (SAP) adopted in 1981, weakened the state, leading to the takeover of the policy arena by external financial actors, whose policies alienated and impoverished critical constituencies within the country and contributed to the deepening of social tensions and the descent into violent conflict. It is important to note that she does not claim that the roots of the war were only economic, rather she shows the inter-connectedness between economic and other factors: historical, socio-economic and political. Of note also, are the ways by which political elites manipulated ethnic identities during the period of economic crisis to maintain access to scarce resources and hold on to political power. Particular attention is focussed on the policy of Ivoirité, which sought to exclude/marginalize migrants from neighbouring countries and northerners, from the mainstream of political power and economic life in Côte d’Ivoire.

Exploring the policy dimension to its logical conclusion, Guro demonstrates how wrong-headed externally imposed economic reforms can contribute to political instability and violent conflict. On this basis, she draws attention to the need for African governments to be cautious about the wholesale and uncritical adoption of external reforms, and the need to remain accountable to their own citizens, which would in turn reinforce their own legitimacy and institutional capacity to act in ways that promote social welfare and cohesion, democracy and development in their various countries.
The second contribution by Volker Riehl, deploys a comparative perspective in providing explanations for why the neighbouring countries: Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana with broadly similar historical characteristics and socio-economic conditions, ended up responding differently to internal tensions. While Ghana was able to resolve the internal conflict in the northern part of the country, the case in Côte d’Ivoire was different, as the state became a site as well as an actor in the conflict, which rapidly descended down the slippery slope to full scale civil war, followed by the de facto division of the country. He makes the important point that types of governance which promote the integration of marginalised groups and equal citizenship, are more likely to lead to sustainable conflict resolution and peace as in the case of northern Ghana, while those that fail to do so, end up in intractable internal conflict as in the case of Côte d’Ivoire. In this way, Volker draws attention to the central role of the state in promoting specific kinds of governance and policies towards marginalised constituencies that could either promote peace or violent conflict. This is an important observation that should be noted by all stakeholders in the peace process in Africa, including international development/financial agencies whose policies sometimes impinge on the capacity of African states and institutions to deliver social policies that promote, rather than contradict, the “peace dividend” in post-conflict societies.

The third contribution by Henri-Michel Yéré provides a historical perspective to the citizenship and nationhood questions that are embedded in the roots of the Ivorian civil war. The essay traces the conflictive encounters between indigenes and foreigners back to the colonial period in the 1930’s, when Ivorian independence and nationhood were distant prospects. It provides an understanding of the construction of the conflicting and competing identities of indigene and foreigner, even in a colonial context, and the continuities after independence. An important aspect of the construction of such identities was the claim to resources and entitlements within a defined space, by virtue of being autochthonous to the territory. This fed into relations of inclusion and exclusion on the basis of identity, and also found expression in the class relations in a capitalist agro-based economy.

After undertaking a broad overview of the debates around the causes of the Ivorian civil war, particularly those that seek to explain it in the context of French imperialism or meddling or those that believe it is the outcome of ethnicity and discrimination against ‘northerners’ and foreigners, Henri-Michel explores “three moments” in Côte d’Ivoire’s history. This exploration tends to reflect both on the ways in which the construction of Côte d’Ivoire by French colonialism, the competition within the various groups in the country and the nature of independence, set the stage for the non-conclusion of the nation-state project. The major argument that emerges is one that defines the problem of conflict in terms of the inability of the post-colonial ruling elite to resolve the nation-state question, particularly as it relates to reaching a consensus on a just and inclusive basis for citizenship. It concludes that peace the
country will depend on the emergence of a new historic moment whose hallmark would be an inclusive, equitable, broadly acceptable and peaceful resolution of the critical questions related to citizenship and nationhood in Côte d’Ivoire.

While the contributions focus broadly on the Ivorian civil war, the different perspectives that they bring to bear on the subject provide a rich empirical material for challenging some of the misconceptions about the causes of civil war in Africa, particularly as it relates to the tendency towards mono-causal explanations and solutions, that more often than not, fail to address the specificities of the roots of violent conflict in various countries. They also shed some light on the inter-linkages between the various factors that contributed to the conflict, even if the empirical evidence of the international and regional dimensions of the conflict is not given prominent attention. It is however important to note that relations between Côte d’Ivoire and France have been completely re-defined by the war in which the latter’s influence over the former (hitherto, its most strategic ally in West Africa) has been considerably whittled down. This development has implications both for France’s African policy as well as Côte d’Ivoire’s role in the West African sub-region.

As Côte d’Ivoire makes yet another attempt at peace, the contributions in this volume draw attention to the root causes of the country’s descent into violent conflict. These explanations contribute to the debates and search for national reconciliation and sustainable peace in the country. They are also useful in interrogating the assumptions that inform explanations for the crisis of nation-statism in Africa and its possible resolution. How can the state be re-configured in the Ivorian context, what will be a fair basis for political representation, what kind of socio-economic reforms and policies can promote harmony and development in Côte d’Ivoire? At the core of these questions lies the role of the political elite—the very nature of their politics, their place in defining Côte d’Ivoire’s place in the transnational production of commodities for the world market (and the social distribution of the benefits) and the capacity of the Ivorian state to effectively mediate the competing and conflicting demands of the various groups in the interests of an “Ivorian (reconfigured) nation”.

Beyond this, the contributions in this volume are also relevant to the international policy community, whose assumptions and activities in African countries—though often driven by the desire to do good, sometimes end up achieving the exact opposite further complicating the problem that they originally intended to solve. Peace in Côte d’Ivoire ultimately depends on the Ivorian people and the factions of the governing elite, who will have to reach a new social contract on which a broadly acceptable and inclusive notion of Ivorian nationhood, political representation and citizenship can be (re)created and nurtured. However, they will need the support of civil society and the international community, whose actions, for better or for worse, will influence the prospects for peace in Côte d’Ivoire.
Introduction

Bibliography


Introduction

On September 19, 2002, Côte d’Ivoire experienced a military mutiny that quickly led to an attempted putsch against President Laurent Gbagbo. At the same time rebel groups attacked and progressively took control of the northern half of the country’s territory. What at first sight seemed like a mere uprising, soon degenerated into civil war and a de-facto division of the country, with the South controlled by the government and the North, held by the rebels. The conflict brought Côte d’Ivoire, previously regarded as a haven of peace in West Africa, to the attention of all those concerned with security in the region. While some reacted with shock, others interpreted the Ivorian crisis as the inevitable culmination of the contradictions and tensions that had been developing for decades, and had been deepened by the military coup d’état of December 1999. The descent of one of West Africa’s most prosperous and stable countries into civil war has necessitated an examination of the root causes of the political breakdown in Côte d’Ivoire. Through which processes, and based on which factors, have legitimacy, trust, and stability turned to political turmoil and civil war?

Most attempts at explaining the conflict in Côte d’Ivoire focus on inter-ethnic conflicts, tensions between the local/indigenous populations and immigrants/settlers, or North-South ethnic/religious cleavages (Chirot 2006; Langer 2005). Others rely on external influences in the form of support for rebels by neighbouring states, or meddling by the former colonial power, France, as the main factors explaining the political breakdown in Côte d’Ivoire. Yet, during the two decades preceding the rebellion the country also saw a deterioration of economic conditions, increasing poverty as well as the development of larger gaps in resources in the country. Easterly et al. (2001:202; 206) describes the country as having had one of the world’s worst economic collapses since 1978. This economic crisis contributed to the deepening political tensions as various groups and social forces struggled over increasingly scarce resources in the midst of growing poverty and an intense contest for political succession following the death of the country’s patriarch, Felix Houphouët-Boigny in 1993.

This article emphasizes the importance of economic factors to the direction and sustainability of political change. It explores the assumption that Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), first implemented in the case of Côte d’Ivoire in 1981, may have wide-ranging effects on political developments as well as on social
conditions in developing countries. In this regard, few analysts have examined the connection between economic decline and the crisis in Côte d’Ivoire. This article focuses on evaluating the extent to which the political breakdown in the country can be attributed to the economic crisis and the social and political impact of the policies adopted to address it, particularly the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP).

The data collection for this article was done during fieldwork in Abidjan in February/March 2004 as part of the data collecting aspect for the preparation of a Thesis for a Masters in Political Science at the University of Oslo. Altogether 25 interviews were conducted. The respondents included political actors, government officials, World Bank and IMF officials, researchers, and political commentators. The interviews provided crucial information and perspectives on the conflict.

The article is divided in four sections. The introduction describes the objectives and methodology for the study, and the second section provides a brief historical background, and gives an account of the major political developments leading up to the rebellion in 2002. The third section employs instrumentalist and institutionalist approaches to ethnicity as well as the theory of relative deprivation to present an analysis of the economic crisis, structural adjustment and political conflict in Côte d’Ivoire. In the final section, the findings of the study are summarized and some policy recommendations are made.

Political background: From stability to crisis

In sharp contrast to its neighbours, Côte d’Ivoire was for many years regarded as an African success story based on its economic progress and political stability. The country experienced remarkable economic growth in the first two decades after independence in 1960, and achieved an impressive level of prosperity and social welfare compared to the neighbouring countries. The economy was based on the export of primary commodities, with cocoa and coffee as the most important exports.¹ Côte d’Ivoire’s first president, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, managed to establish an image as the “Father of the Nation” or Le Vieux – the old man, who provided welfare for the people. According to Akindès (2003), he employed a political strategy called Le modèle houphouétiste, which was characterized by the image of a benevolent father or patriarch who believed in dialogue, negotiation and reward, but would none-the-less severely punish disobedience or disloyalty. The ample resources and economic prosperity of the country combined with his domination of its politics also enabled him to dispense patronage and ensure social stability.

Houphouët-Boigny enjoyed a high level of popularity throughout his presidency, which lasted until his death in 1993. He was also admired for his liberal policy and open attitude towards immigration from neighbouring countries. Immigration

¹. Côte d’Ivoire still accounts for about 40% of the world market in cocoa.
provided useful labour to Côte d’Ivoire’s plantation economy. An estimated thirty percent of the Ivorian population is believed to be first, second or third generation immigrants. The biggest group is from neighbouring Burkina Faso, but significant groups have also come from Mali, Guinea, Niger, Benin, Ghana, Liberia, Mauritania, Nigeria and Senegal. Under Houphouët-Boigny, his policy that ‘the land belonged to the one who worked it’ and the extension of some citizenship rights to immigrants attracted migrant labour to the coffee, cocoa, oil, coconut, and fruit plantations in the southern and central parts of Côte d’Ivoire and contributed to the country’s economic prosperity.

Thus, Côte d’Ivoire’s political history is intimately linked to its history of immigration. The history of immigration goes back to colonial times, when labour from Upper Volta (known as Burkina Faso since 1984), which was at the time an integral part of Côte d’Ivoire, was moved by force to work on plantations in the south, in a large-scale labour migration programme set up by the French colonial administration. After independence, the rapid development of export agriculture, the relatively high economic growth as well as political stability made the country a regional economic pole that attracted immigration from relatively poorer neighbours in the sub-region.

As from 1980 onwards, after world prices of cocoa and coffee plunged, the favourable economic trends in the country were reversed. Economic growth stagnated, and the country’s foreign debt rose dramatically. In 1981, Côte d’Ivoire was one of the first African countries to sign on to the economic reform package or Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the World Bank. During the 1980’s the country adopted several macroeconomic restructuring programmes with the aim of restoring economic growth. Yet by the end of the decade, economic conditions had worsened. In 1989, the Houphouët-Boigny government was forced to accept dramatic measures such as the halving of cocoa and coffee prices paid to producers as well as the abandoning of the price guarantee system. Salaries for new teachers at the primary, secondary, and university levels of education were halved overnight, and student welfare policies such as allowances, housing, and transport were abandoned. These measures had dramatic social consequences and provoked vehement protests by students, workers and opposition groups. The social crisis and protests strengthened demands for multiparty democracy and elections by the opposition. These internal demands for democracy were partly strengthened by the post-Cold War global trend towards multiparty democracy and a statement credited to France’s President François Mitterrand to the effect that Francophone countries should embrace democratic reforms. In May 1990, Houphouët-Boigny was pressured into legalizing opposition parties and announcing multiparty elections. The opposition was strongest in the cities and particularly at the universities. One of the leaders was the university history teacher Laurent Gbagbo, who was also the leader of the Front Populaire Ivoirien
In December 1993, President Houphouët-Boigny died. A succession struggle followed within the ruling party Parti démocratique de la Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI) between the constitutional successor Henri Konan Bédié, speaker of the National Assembly, and Prime Minister Alassane Dramane Ouattara. The latter had been appointed an economic advisor, then Prime Minister (also in charge of the Ministry of Finance), by Houphouët-Boigny in the turbulent months of 1990. Ouattara was a former IMF official and President of the West African Central Bank (BCEAO), but had no political history in Côte d’Ivoire before his high-profile appointment in the country. In addition, those opposed to his candidacy in the presidential elections disputed his nationality, as his father was said to be Burkinabè, thereby disqualifying him from contesting elections on the basis of his “non-citizenship”. Thus, Ouattara was regarded by many of his political opponents as an “intruder” in Ivorian politics or an agent of foreign powers that should be excluded from contesting elections. He had also become extremely unpopular among the opposition, as he had been responsible for the implementation of the socially harsh economic austerity measures as well as also being blamed for the repression of the opposition during the years of transition to multipartyism. He did, however, enjoy some support within the PDCI, especially among the younger generation, who felt that he represented a necessary modernization of both economic policies and party culture. After Bédié became president, and Ouattara left the country to take up a position in the IMF, this group broke out of the PDCI and created the Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR) to further Ouattara’s candidacy in the 1995 presidential election.

President Bédié, now faced with the splitting up of his party as well economic crisis, launched the political strategy of Ivoirité to mobilize a sense of national pride and unity. The aim was to promote the legitimacy of the PDCI, the Ivorian state and citizenship as well as his position as president and protector of a true Ivorian national identity. Many observers regard the Ivoirité discourse as the root cause of the political crisis in Côte d’Ivoire. The resort to an Ivoirité discourse by the political elite clearly led to an aggravation of xenophobia and an “ethnicitization” of the political debate, whereby immigrants or foreigners were used as scapegoats for the country’s economic and political problems. It also fed into the politics of exclusion based on national identity, and the non-extension of citizenship rights to those considered non-Ivorian. The ethno-sociologist Georges Niangoran Bouah defines the socio-cultural foundations of Ivoirité as follows:

Ivoirité is the set of socio-historical, geographic, and linguistic data which enables us to say that an individual is a citizen of Côte d’Ivoire or an Ivorian. The person who asserts his ‘Ivoirité’ is supposed to have Côte d’Ivoire as his country, be born of Ivorian parents belonging to one of the ethnic groups native to Côte d’Ivoire. Quoted in Akindès 2004:27.
The nationalist rhetoric used by the President provided the justification for radical changes in the country’s citizenship policy. In December 1994, the National Assembly passed a new electoral code. It restricted the right to vote to Ivorian nationals, and stated that candidates for the presidency must be Ivorian by birth, with both parents also being Ivorian by birth. In addition, candidates should not have been living outside the country for the last five years, and should never have renounced their Ivorian citizenship or taken the nationality of another state (Crook 1997:228). In 1998 a new Land Code restricted the right to buy land to Ivorian citizens.

The restrictions on eligibility were clearly designed to prevent Alassane Ouattara from presenting himself as a presidential candidate in the elections. In addition to suggesting that he was not qualified to contest because of his disputed nationality, Ouattara, who was living in the United States at the time, was also disqualified by the residency clause in the proposed legislative amendments. He was also criticized for having travelled on a Burkinabè passport in the past. The PDCI, in proposing these changes in legislation, was using the FPI’s protests against the elections four years before to their own advantage. The FPI, which had been campaigning to remove the non-citizens’ right to vote in 1990, could hardly protest when the PDCI now wanted to do precisely this (Crook 1997:228). During the run-up to the 1990 elections the FPI had also built up an anti-foreign sentiment that Bédié now exploited and further exacerbated.

In the run-up to the 1995 elections the FPI was weakened and politically marginalized. Its members had lost their seats in parliament, leaving the RDR as the official opposition (Crook 1997:229). They probably saw their chances of electoral success as marginal, and at the same time were critical of the way the government planned the elections. The FPI decided to join forces with the RDR to form the Front Républicain, to protest the Electoral Code and the exclusion of Ouattara, and to boycott the elections through what they called the Active Boycott, which included actively sabotaging the elections. Consequently, the two major opposition parties managed to discredit the elections within the country and internationally.

While nationalist and xenophobic sentiments were clearly provoked and manipulated by Bédié, the RDR may have contributed to the strengthening of ethnic and religious cleavages through their way of handling the political conflict. In their view, Alassane Ouattara was excluded from politics because he was a Northerner and a Muslim. Their strategy was to mobilize the support of Ivorians of the North, and Muslims in particular, by telling them that the political elite excluded them on grounds of their ethnic affiliation and their religion.

On December 24, 1999, President Bédié was overthrown in a military coup, and General Gueï headed a transitional government until new elections were held in October 2000. Gueï claimed to have no political ambitions, denounced Ivoirité, launched a “cleaning of the house” anti-corruption programme, and promised to

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1 Actually a Burkinabè diplomatic passport.
return the country through free and fair elections, to democratic rule. Halfway through the transitional period, however, he adopted some Ivoirité policies and positioned himself as a presidential candidate. In October 2000, Gueï, who had earlier indicated non-interest in the presidency, announced his candidacy in the presidential elections from which Ouattara had been barred by a ruling of the Supreme Court, citing his Burkinabè nationality, thus sparking protests in northern Côte d’Ivoire. When election results showed that Gbagbo was winning, Gueï interrupted the counting of votes and tried to carry out a coup, presenting himself as winner of the elections. But after vehement protests and street demonstrations, Gbagbo was sworn in as president, in accordance with the election results. However, Ouattara was again barred from participating in the legislative election that followed the presidential one, thereby lending credence to the view that Gbagbo had continued with the policy of Ivoirité, and this deepened the cleavages and tensions within the country.

In September 2002, a mutiny by some soldiers about to be demobilized led to an attempted military coup that failed to oust President Gbagbo, but was followed by the occupation of the northern and western two thirds of the country’s territory by rebel forces.

Dynamics of conflict: Deprivation, elite manipulation, and political violence

The political tensions during the 1990s, as manifest in disputes over citizenship, land rights, and eligibility for elections, provide the context for an exploration of the various explanations for the Ivorian crisis. Why did the leadership of the major political parties increasingly rely upon nationalist rhetoric and the politics of exclusion, and why did they succeed in getting the support of members of the public? While most analyses of Ivoirité focus on the historical tensions between ethnic groups and the personalization of politics and power struggles within the political elite, this article focuses on how changes in economic and social conditions influenced the Ivorian elite’s politics and the popular responses to such politics.

Elite manipulation

Mainstream analyses of the Ivorian conflict focus on the manipulation of identity by the elite through the Ivoirité discourse. These analyses suggest an instrumentalist perspective on ethnicity, which presents ethnic conflict as a result of political manipulation by the elite.¹ According to this perspective, ethnic identities are not

¹ A word of caution is due here on the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism. Ivoirité is about nationalism—a sense of belonging to the Ivorian nation, regardless in principle of ethnic affiliation. However, the “intellectual” basis of Ivoirité as defined by Bédié and his supporters, is closely linked to Akan identity (Houphouët’s and Bédié’s ethnic group). Moreover, Ivoirité is interpreted, not only by international observers, but also by Ivorians, as defining ethnic divisions. Accordingly it is hard to draw a sharp distinction between national and ethnic identity. We therefore find it justified to treat Ivorian nationalist policies as ethnic policies, although this involves a certain simplification.
objective or given, but rather dynamic and subject to social and political influence. Ethnicity is seen as a powerful tool in the hands of political leaders who can manipulate ethnic sentiments in order to mobilize people for a political cause. In Côte d’Ivoire, the three leaders after Houphouët – Bédié, General Gueï, and Gbagbo, have all used their version of Ivoirité as a political strategy, while Ouattara and the RDR have also mobilized ethnic identity to gain support from the large group of “Northern” Ivorians.

For Bédié and the PDCI, Ivoirité served several political purposes. It served as a strategic ideological pretext to oust Bédié’s strongest opponent, Alassane Ouattara. Furthermore, by starting an anti-foreign rhetoric, Bédié countered a challenge from the FPI and Gbagbo, who had been the first to use this type of “nationalist” rhetoric in the attempt to deprive “foreigners” or non-citizens of the vote in the 1990 elections. Bédié thereby “stole” one of Gbagbo’s mobilizing strategies. Lastly, Ivoirité served to legitimize Bédié’s accession to power. There is also a school of thought that believes that Ivoirité promoted the hegemony of the Akan ethnic group in government (Jolivet 2003:48). The Ivoirité rhetoric can also be seen as a theorization of who had the right to control and access the increasingly scarce national resources. (Akindès 2004:20).

Robert Gueï’s sudden shift from morally denouncing Ivoirité to incorporating a slightly modified version of it, to most observers demonstrated how he was pursuing his own personal gain and trying to prepare his own accession to the presidency. This also seemed to be the interpretation of many Ivorians, who turned their backs on the man in whom many of them had placed their hopes to clean up the corrupt practices in Ivorian politics and government.

Laurent Gbagbo and the FPI have been criticized for “abandoning their principles” when failing to break with the Ivoirité ideology after Bédié’s exit from power. However, the nationalism in FPI had its own history, going back before Bédié started using the term Ivoirité. The use of xenophobic rhetoric and policies on the FPI’s part was born out of the struggle against the one-party regime, when they wanted to rid the PDCI-friendly “immigrant” population of their voting rights. Gbagbo wanted to be seen as the one defending ordinary Ivorians’ interests against the single party elite and against foreign interests, be they French “neo-colonial” interests, World Bank and IMF “Western imperialist” interests or the interests of other neighbouring West African countries and their nationals residing in Côte d’Ivoire.

The RDR, originally founded by disappointed PDCI supporters who disagreed with the party’s economic policies and party culture, soon found their major source of support in the population of the northern regions. Responding to the Ivoirité discourse and capitalizing on the growing sentiment in the North of social and political exclusion, the RDR chose to focus its political mobilization on groups that were inclined to feel victimized and marginalized by these policies.
The discontent and the feeling of exclusion in the North and among immigrants and Muslims were not created by Ouattara and the RDR, but were probably enhanced by them. As early as 1992, two years before the RDR broke away from the PDCI, a “Charter of the Great North” started circulating, which claimed better political representation from the North (Akindès 2004:18). Ouattara managed to canalize a great deal of this discontent into support for himself.

In summary, all the three post-Houphouët leaders, as well as the opposition leader Ouattara, used Ivoirité – in different versions – as a tool for their own personal and political gain. To this end, they all adopted an instrumentalist approach in their struggle for power. The primary goal was to attain political power, by all means, including “playing the ethnic card”. The questions that remain, however, are why this personalization of politics developed and became dominating, and to what extent the elite’s strategies succeeded or failed.

An institutional approach to conflict: A weakened state?

In the book “The Myth of Ethnic Conflict”, Beverly Crawford investigates the relationship between economic changes and ethnic conflict, arguing that what is often perceived as conflict spurred by ethnic or cultural differences might better be understood in terms of weakened institutional capacity to uphold a social contract in a situation of economic crisis (Crawford 1998). Crawford further argues that globalization and liberalization¹, deprive the state of a) the possibility to uphold the social contract, through reducing its role in the economy, and b) the possibility to repress dissent. With the state left with less legitimacy and less repressive power, the space is opened for ethnic entrepreneurs to operate. In the Ivorian case, the resort to nationalist and ethnic rhetoric can be interpreted as a strategy to maintain political support despite the government’s inability to uphold the social contract.

In the first two decades after independence the Ivorian political elite maintained a strong grip on power with the combined help of steady economic growth, economic distribution and favourable external circumstances. With the economic recession and a growing external debt burden, coupled with stronger pressures for democratization from within and outside, the old strategies for maintaining power could no longer hold, and new strategies were needed. State resources, which had been systematically used to “buy” political support, had drastically diminished, leading to increased struggles over scarce resources. Accordingly, the political elite sought strategies for maintaining their hold on power, including increased authoritarianism. This showed that the elite was losing control and had to adopt repressive means to stay in power, as could be seen from the turbulent last days of the Houphouët era, as well as in Bédié’s presidency.

¹. In African countries, Structural Adjustment has been the main external influence leading to economic liberalization.
The early years of the 1990s did not bring any economic relief to Côte d’Ivoire. Jarret and Mahieu (2002) blame the economic failure largely on the policies of Allassane Ouattara as economic adviser and Prime Minister between 1990 and 1993. Ouattara’s government was labelled “the government of the IMF boys”, and his identification with the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) contributed to his unpopularity. Without doubt, Ouattara’s IMF past contributed to his image as a “foreign intruder”. The introduction of nationalism in the political rhetoric around 1990 was partly a defensive reaction against Alassane Ouattara as a “foreign intruder” in Ivorian politics as well as to the strategic use of the immigrant population by Houpouët’s PDCI.

Apart from a lack of popularity, the Ouattara government was subject to a lot of influence from the IFIs (Jarret and Mahieu 2002). There seems to be little doubt that the influence of the IFIs in this period (1990–1993) had the effect of weakening the state’s capacity to make independent policy choices. This was one step in the gradual delegitimization of the state in the eyes of the public.

One of the consequences of the narrowed space for economic policy was the reduction of the political debate into an ethnic discourse, where the PDCI accused the FPI of being an ethno-regional party pursuing narrow local interests, while the FPI portrayed the PDCI as a “cover for domination by the President’s ethnic group, the Baoulé” (Campbell 2003:8). The liberalization programmes left politicians with little choice in economic policy matters, while the nature of the programmes themselves caused dissatisfaction, making it difficult to build cohesion (ibid.). It was a curious paradox that although the liberalization programmes led to the halving of official cocoa and coffee producer prices between 1988–89 and 1989–90, the main political debate did not focus on this, but on who would succeed Houphouët-Boigny (Campbell 2003).

According to Crawford, resource scarcity may tempt the political elite to privilege particular groups over others because they can no longer afford to uphold general welfare policies (Crawford 1998:25). In Côte d’Ivoire, Bédié increasingly favoured his ethnic group the Baoulé – and did so in a more explicit way than had his predecessor Houpouët. This could be interpreted as a response to diminishing distributive capacity. Deprived of his predecessor’s possibility to “buy support” from a nation-wide constituency, he chose to focus on a Baoulé constituency, so that they, at least, would continue to support him.

Crawford describes this logic for “new or fragile democracies”:

> With regard to the institutions of representation in new or fragile democracies where resources are scarce and the legacies of ethnic machines still linger, the requirement for electoral support may provide more of an incentive for political entrepreneurs to make

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1. In the beginning it was like: ‘A financier, he comes like that from New York, he wants to disturb us here, he doesn’t know the country...’ (Kontaté Sidiki 2004: Interview).
2. Baoulé is a subgroup of Akan.
extremist appeals that promise more benefits to the targeted ethnic group than for them
to make moderate appeals to a wider population (Crawford 1998:25).

Economic deterioration and political violence

Statistically, there exists a negative relationship between economic development and
violent conflict. Collier, in his extensive quantitative study of civil wars, identifies
the “failure of economic development” as the key root cause of conflict (Collier et al.
2003). However, poor countries are not doomed to violent conflict. Côte d’Ivoire,
although among the world’s poor states, is richer than most of its neighbours, in-
cluding Mali, Burkina Faso, and Ghana, none of which have experienced violent
conflict in the last decade. If we seek an explanation for the outbreak of violent con-
flict in Côte d’Ivoire in economic factors, we need to take a closer look at the actual
economic changes, including changes in resource distribution and how economic
changes have affected different groups.

The theory of relative deprivation provides a useful framework for analyzing
the relationship between economic changes and political violence. Ted Robert Gurr
(1970) defines relative deprivation as “actors’ perception of discrepancy between their
value expectations and their value capabilities”. Value expectations of a collectivity
are defined here as “the average value positions to which its members believe they
are justifiably entitled”, and value capabilities as “the average value positions [a col-
lectivity’s] members perceive themselves capable of attaining or maintaining”. The
sources of an individual’s value standards can be a reference group, the individual’s
past condition, an abstract ideal, or the standards articulated by a leader (Gurr
1970:25). Political violence is thus seen as a result of people’s frustration over their
living conditions. It is not the level of material welfare in itself that determines con-
flict, but rather the extent to which the level of welfare is perceived as unjust.

Gurr identifies three patterns of relative deprivation. *Decremental deprivation* is
where deprivation is experienced in relation to past conditions; that is, when condi-
tions have worsened over time. *Aspirational deprivation* refers to a situation where
value expectations rise while value capabilities remain constant. This can happen
when traditional societies are exposed to, or come to know of, better material ways
of life. It can also happen when industrialization and growth in a society give some
people better living conditions, whereas the majority do not experience this change.
Finally, *progressive deprivation* refers to the mechanism showed by Davies’ J-curve:
Where “a prolonged period of objective economic and social development is followed
by a short period of sharp reversal” (Davies quoted in Gurr 1970:52).

To put economic developments in Côte d’Ivoire in a comparative perspective,
we have chosen to compare changes over the last 25 years in a number of African
countries on a few indicators. Developments in economic growth are identified to
show how the economic situation in the country has developed, in comparison with
other countries. Furthermore, we look at trends in extreme poverty. More than comparing the countries on actual levels of growth and poverty, we are interested in comparing the countries’ changes over time on these indicators.

Fig. 3.1: Average annual GDP growth rate (%)

Figure 3.1 shows the average annual growth rate for six selected African countries. Côte d’Ivoire had an average growth rate of 8% between the years 1960–1970; while for the years 1980–1990 the rate had dropped to 0.9% (Figure 3.1.) Although all our selected countries except Senegal experienced reduced growth over these two decades, in none of the other cases was the deterioration as severe as for Côte d’Ivoire. The fall in the growth rate was particularly sharp from the 1970s to the 1980s. The reduced growth levels reflect the deteriorating terms of trade for primary commodities and a growing debt crisis which hit most African countries in the 1980s. The figure suggests that Côte d’Ivoire was harder hit than other countries by this crisis.

For the years 1990–1997, on the other hand, Côte d’Ivoire saw a return to a relatively high growth rate (3%), unlike the other countries. This probably reflects a positive development in cocoa and coffee prices during the period, as well as effects of the 1994 devaluation of the CFA Franc. The growth rate fell sharply again, however, in 2001–2002, a trend not typical among the selected countries, which in general experienced stabilization or increased growth. The rate for 2001–2002 was probably not affected by the September 2002 rebellion, but on the other hand, could have been one of the consequences of the economic uncertainties after the 1999 coup d’état.
Figure 3.2 shows the development of extreme poverty, defined as the percentage of the population living on under $1 a day,\(^1\) for the same countries.

It can be observed that Côte d’Ivoire started off with very low absolute poverty in 1981, the lowest among the six countries. Extreme poverty however rose to 11% in 1990 and 20% in 1999. While Côte d’Ivoire had significantly less extreme poverty than most of the other countries throughout the period, the steady increase in extreme poverty was dramatic. Moreover, it is reasonable to believe that the increase in extreme poverty was accompanied by a general rise in poverty, even for groups that were above the one-dollar a day limit.\(^2\)

The gradual rise in poverty shown by the figure is compatible with the theoretical notion of decremental deprivation, where conditions deteriorate over time. According to the theory, such a development creates frustration and may give rise to rebellion. One should of course not interpret this mechanically, for example by interpreting the rebellion in 2002 as a direct consequence of rising poverty. However, a dramatic increase in poverty over time may have given rise to protests and a growing level of social discontent, decreasing the trust in policymakers and increasing the general level of tension in the country.

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1. The one US dollar a day standard is an international measure of extreme poverty used by the World Bank and other institutions. The poverty line is measured in 1993 international prices and adjusted to local currency using purchasing power parities (PPPs).
2. Statistics that show the development of the two-dollar a day poverty line over the period are not available.
The increase in poverty moreover meant that it spread to areas not previously affected by it. The growth was particularly high in the cities and in the West Forest (Kayizzi-Mugerwa 2001:5). While the areas affected by the highest levels of poverty were rural, particularly in the Savannah region in the northern part of the country, the increase in poverty was higher in urban than in rural areas. The increase in poverty was particularly marked in Abidjan, rising from 0.7% in 1985 to 5.1% in 1993, 20.2% in 1995, before falling to 11.1% in 1998 (UNECA 2005) Michael Grimm et al (2001), found that average real monthly wages of civil servants fell by 44% in Abidjan and 56% in other urban centres from 1985 to 1995 (Grimm et al 2001:8). They further found a strong increasing poverty trend in urban areas in the same period, then a weak declining poverty trend after 1995 (ibid.) Rising poverty in urban areas may be more politically destabilizing than in other areas because urban dwellers were more exposed to wealth and had more political resources.

It seems plausible to apply a combined perspective of decremental and progressive deprivation to an understanding of developments in Côte d’Ivoire in the 1980s. The decline in economic conditions was significant, causing increased poverty and harsher living conditions. This decline occurred after two decades of fast and steady growth, creating shocks in the system and dashing hopes built on expectations of further growth. People in Côte d’Ivoire had seen themselves as being better off than their neighbours. Then basking in the pride of the “Ivoirian Miracle”, the country’s elite and the outside world (particularly the French) expected that Côte d’Ivoire would continue to prosper. This expectation made the impact of the sudden deterioration in the standard of living even harder for the population to bear, with politically explosive consequences for the country.

The cocoa and coffee sector
Under the “Houphouëtian system” the income of cocoa and coffee producers was regulated in times of high world prices and drew on these resources when prices fell. Through the Price Stabilization Fund, which saved export income, producers were protected from fluctuations in world prices and enjoyed a guaranteed price for their products. However, as cocoa and coffee prices plunged in the 1980s, this stabilization policy was no longer sustainable as the Stabilization Fund was depleted of funds. The IMF demanded the liberalization of prices paid to producers and the abandoning of the price guarantee system. In 1989 the state had to give in to these demands, and as a result, the cocoa and coffee prices paid to producers were halved. Other agricultural support policies were also abandoned.

According to Chauveau (2000), the crisis that followed the liberalization of the cocoa and coffee sectors contributed to making visible the relative success of the many immigrants in the western forest zone of the country. Consequently, the question of land occupation and ownership by foreigners was highlighted. This led to the stigmatization of the migrants, and particularly of the Burkinabè, as scapegoats
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for the rural crisis, and accelerated the tensions in the forest zone as indigenes of the area began to lay claim to the ownership of the land. During the 1990s, tensions between the local and immigrant populations in this area increased, and gave rise to disputes about the country’s land legislation. In 1998 a new land code limited the right of land purchase to citizens. If the dramatic economic changes that took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s were taken into account, it would be understood that this conflict was not just an “ethnic” one. Rather, it was a conflict linked to demographic and economic developments, particularly in the case where liberalization policies played a catalyzing role in producing resource scarcities and intensified struggles for the control of such limited resources.

Student mobilization and violence

The students, together with the university teachers, were probably the one group hardest hit by the economic reforms. A privileged group in the 1970s and early 1980s, the students experienced a sudden and dramatic deterioration of studying and living conditions. As a result of the economic crisis and World Bank induced reforms, study grants, free housing and transport facilities were abolished. At the same time the educational quality was threatened as teachers’ salaries were halved over night and general spending on higher education was neglected as a result of the economic crisis. Evidently, such a dramatic deterioration of students’ conditions provoked vehement protest. The students played an important role in the mobilization against economic reform measures and against the one-party system that eventually led to the announcement of the first multiparty elections in May 1990.

In 1991 the student movement FESCI was created as a federation of several student organizations. The movement continued to protest conditions at the university as well as broader political issues in the fight for democratization. In the following years FESCI increasingly took control of different aspects of life at the campus of the university in Abidjan. Using slingshots and home-made pepper-grenades, they ordered students to leave classrooms when they organized strikes, and left little space for those who did not agree with their policies (Konaté 2003:53). In June 1991, FESCI was banned, and the General Secretary, Martial Ahipeaud thrown in prison. The organization thus operated clandestinely for three years. This may well have contributed further to their radicalization and increased use of violence to pursue their objectives.

Yakouba Konaté is among those who have argued that the crisis starting in September 2002 revealed the political role of the youth and in particular the university students. According to him, the rebellion on the one hand and the ultra-nationalism that accompanied it on the other could both be seen as part of the culture of violence prevalent at the university since 1991 (Konaté 2003:49). The leadership of the rebellion and the youth militia both consisted largely of former FESCI activists. Soro Guillaume, leader of the New Forces (alliance of the rebel groups in control of the
North after the 2002 rebellion), was president of FESCI from 1995 to 1998. Charles Blé Goudé succeeded him as FESCI President from 1998 to 2001. Blé Goudé ended up heading the Congress of Young Patriots, the leading pro-Gbagbo militia.

One of the reasons that the educational sector and students were subjected to the most severe budget cuts was that they were a particularly privileged group at the outset. Relative deprivation is, however, about the discrepancy between what groups are capable of attaining, and what they see themselves as “justifiably entitled to” (Gurr 1970:25). It should not surprise us that the sudden removal of privileges of the sort the Ivorian students experienced in the early 1990s provoked the feeling of deception, especially as they felt being harder hit than any other group. Adding to the feeling of deprivation was the brutality that students’ protests were met with by the security forces. The students’ situation can be interpreted as a combination of aspirational and progressive deprivation. On the one hand, the students were a group with expectations for the future, which were suddenly dashed. On the other hand, their living standards had declined considerably, corresponding to a situation of progressive deprivation.

Major findings: Structural adjustment and political destabilization

At the elite level, structural adjustment policies accelerated the process of the weakening of the Ivorian state. While the economic crisis was already threatening the old system of patronage politics, undermining state legitimacy and reducing the policy space, the intervention of the World Bank and the IMF in 1989–90 further undermined the autonomy of the Ivorian state. The policies of austerity put forward by the financial institutions favoured the introduction of multipartyism, because their social effects were so unbearable for the population that they provoked an unprecedented pressure for change. While the effect of political liberalization in itself is judged by most as positive, political analysts and political actors alike, however, tend to describe these events as destabilizing from a holistic perspective. When dealing with the transition to multipartyism, none of the political actors or analysts interviewed used the words “democracy” or “democratization”. Rather, they tended to describe these developments as being more negative than positive (N’Guessan Nyamien Messou 2004, interview; Venance Konan 2004, interview).

Following Campbell, Ivoirité could be understood as a strategy used by the elite to divert attention from an unmanageable economic and social situation and divert political aggression away from the political elite. Thus, Bédié, deprived of the possibilities of his predecessor to create legitimacy based on the distribution of increasing resources, tried to secure the support of at least his own ethnic constituency through the construction of a nationalist project. Gbagbo, on his part, capitalized on the anti-French, anti-imperialist, and anti-PDCI sentiments in the opposition movement by presenting an image of fighting against the “victimization” of “ordinary Ivoirians”.

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This project included blaming people’s problems on the immigrants welcomed by Houphouët, and seeking to exclude this group from politics as non-citizens. The deployment of nationality by these leaders reflected their personal political calculations (instrumentalism), but more than this, was the result of deepening social contradictions arising from economic decline and growing poverty alongside a weakening of the state and the shrinking of the policy space.

At the popular level, the increased level of protest and political violence was clearly related to the falling standard of living. Reform policies in many instances aggravated the negative impact of the economic crisis. Through the use of the Ivoirité discourse, popular discontent and protest were increasingly channelled into ethnic and nationalist violence. However, the anti-imperialist aspect of the conflict surfaced frequently, as in the case of the November 2004 anti-French demonstrations that led to an almost total evacuation of European citizens.

As earlier noted, in the forest region in the South, the liberalization in the cocoa and coffee sector increased poverty, bringing to the fore tensions between indigenes and immigrants. The aggression by indigenes was turned towards the relatively economically successful immigrants who were perceived by locals to have been unjustly privileged by the Houphouët-Boigny government. Moreover, generational conflicts arose as young people returned to their villages after failing to find employment in the cities. This group faced a double disappointment: first, higher education and exposure to higher living standards in the cities had created an expectation of a standard of living that they were unable to obtain, as they graduated and could not find jobs. Second, upon returning to their villages, they faced problems in gaining access to what they perceived as “their” land, as the older generation preferred to sell such land to immigrants (or people from other parts of the country). Thus, economic and social crisis in the cities further accelerated rural conflict, as returning city dwellers became a destabilizing factor.

The limits of economic explanations

While the article has analyzed the linkage between the economic and political crises, it should be noted that economic factors alone are not sufficient to explain Côte d’Ivoire’s political breakdown. Certain socio-historical factors are relevant in this regard. Effects of economic changes on political stability are necessarily mediated by political choices, which cannot be explained on the basis of economic factors alone. Thus while elites respond to the economic challenges, their strategies to meet these challenges are based on political choices and cannot be calculated on the basis of the economic situation alone. Likewise, while great changes in living conditions are likely to cause public reaction, the form and reach of reactions depend on various political and institutional factors and will vary between different societies and situations.
Elite strategies such as Ivoirité, which weakened political legitimacy and destabilized the Ivorian society, were responses to a legitimacy crisis connected to economic decline and one-party rule. Another important factor was the nature of the political leadership. In the face of weakening state institutions and a reduced capacity to formulate political policies/projects, leaders often chose the “easy option” of appealing to ethnic and nationalistic sentiments. Likewise, while popular protest and violence were responses to an economic and social crisis, the character of the protest, particularly the extreme nationalistic form it took was both the result of historical factors as well as of elite manipulation.

Are the mechanisms of relative deprivation leading to violence that we have seen in Côte d’Ivoire representative of countries experiencing dramatic economic degradation? In Zambia, extreme poverty rose from 45 to 74 percent from 1987 to 1993 (Figure 3.2). This was a case of extreme economic deterioration that did not lead to destabilization as happened in Côte d’Ivoire. Trends in growth and poverty cannot alone explain political breakdown. Regime stability also depends on how the political elite manages the economic and social crisis, just as the response of the opposition, civil society and other group, is equally important. Political strategies (both of the elite and the public) are influenced by many other factors in addition to the economy, such as historical and demographic factors, institutional factors, and political culture.

From the foregoing, it has been shown that the economic factor was a critical trigger for the social crises and the eventual destabilization of Côte d’Ivoire in the 1990s. However, the conflict cannot be explained by the economic factor alone. Rather, the analysis shows the importance of looking into the interconnectedness of economic, social, political and institutional factors. The Ivorian case illustrates that in order to understand political conflict we need to look behind appearances and analyze the historical background and the socio-economic conditions underlying the behaviour of the various groups involved in conflict.

Implications for policy

It is important to note that economic change and dramatic economic reforms can trigger political destabilization and conflict. Economic reform policies should always consider the social and political context into which reforms are to be introduced, and the potential social impact of such policies. A profound understanding of the need for local ownership, and sensitivity towards the social and political dynamics is a prerequisite for successful economic reform. The lesson from the Ivorian experience is that the potential for destabilization is neither a function of growth nor poverty, but depends on changes in people’s living conditions, changes in relations between groups, and on how economic changes affect existing conflicts.
The impact of reform policies depends upon the strength and legitimacy of the state, which is in turn affected by the social response to its policies and actions. The high level of dependency upon the IFIs during the administration of Ouattara as Prime Minister contributed to a weakened institutional capacity, leading to a delegitimization of the state with destabilizing consequences. The effect that reforms have on state legitimacy further depends on the power relations between the state, the political class and the lending institutions. In the 1980s, the Ivorian state had considerable bargaining power in its dealings with the IFIs, and was able to put off, and to a certain degree manipulate the outcome of the reform processes (Contamin and Fauré 1990). The strongest example of this was Houphouët’s ability to avoid the devaluation of the CFA Franc during his presidency. However, by 1989 the severity of the economic crisis had weakened the autonomy of the Ivorian state, and the IFIs had a much more direct role in policymaking. The abandonment of the agricultural price guarantee system, leading to the halving of cocoa and coffee prices, as well as severe wage cuts, were signs that Houphouët had finally given in to World Bank and IMF demands.

The weakening of institutions as a consequence of IFI reforms draws attention to the need for African states to be extremely sensitive to the possible effects of the wholesale adoption of reforms from the outside. Moreover, institutional strengthening should be the major priority of policy reforms, especially when other aspects of the reforms confront the state with new political and administrative challenges. For instance, the current Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) tend to place a stronger emphasis on institutional strengthening, capacity building and accountability than did the earlier Structural Adjustment Programmes. However, if these concepts are – or are perceived to be – defined externally, they might not get us very far from where we started. While accountability in itself is undoubtedly a valuable cause, it immediately raises the question: Accountability to whom? If governments are perceived to be more accountable to external actors than to the population of their countries, this might well have the effect of weakening, instead of strengthening, the internal political legitimacy and stability that constitute the necessary elements for peace, democracy and development.
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New War – Old Peace
About the Descent into Civil War in Côte d’Ivoire and Its Absence in Ghana

Volker Riehl

In the 1950s and 1960s Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire were widely regarded as among the continent’s most promising and prosperous states. Time, however, has not been so generous (Boone 2003:143 f).

Introduction

The term ‘new wars’ postulated by the renowned London School of Economics scholar Mary Kaldor in the year 2000 – especially as it is applied in the African context – seems to have propelled a ‘new wave’ of interest among analysts of development theory and sociology. Together with the theories of failed and failing states, debates about “new wars” have opened up front lines between academics seeking to scrutinize this new sociologic paradigm in all its scholarly ramifications.

The veracity of Kaldor’s analysis notwithstanding, it should be noted that the majority of ethnic groups, regions, and states in Africa live relatively peacefully, and experience varying degrees of positive development. Yet, ‘new wars’ seem to be so attractive as a novel paradigm for analyzing failure of development.

This article will examine those societal conditions in specific African regions or states that appear to have prevented the outbreak of systematic warfare. In some eras of African history, there have been periods of peace that lasted as long as a century. Both Ghana and Tanzania experienced such epochs. This paper is based on a comparative study of the evolution and eruption of violent conflict in northern Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire, and provides explanations as to why it was resolved in the case of Ghana, but evolved into full-blown civil war and the de-facto division of Côte d’Ivoire.

According to sociological development theory as well as humanitarian agencies, the ‘old peace’ is not very attractive to deal with (Matthies 2003). The inhabitants of Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Angola, Sierra Leone, Liberia, etc., who have experienced the horrors of prolonged war and the degradation of humanity for so long, are doubtlessly in dire need of humanitarian assistance, peace and security. However we can observe that the majority of the news media, politi-

1. This article is based on scholarly research using academic sources, my own observations in Ghana in the late 1980s and various interviews with witnesses of negotiating teams in the North of Ghana.

I am grateful to Fr. Rohrmayer, who served for the congregation Missionaries of Africa – White Fathers in Ghana for over thirty years, specifically in Tamale in the Northern Region. He provided me with valuable facts about the peace-reinforcing role of the church institutions during the outbreak of fighting between the Dagomba and the Konkomba in the 1980s and 1990s. Furthermore I am indebted to my MISEREOR colleagues Birgit Felleisen, Corinna Broeckmann, Anna Dirksmeier, Dr. Guenter Thie, and especially to Dr. Paul Simon Handy, who revised the article and provided various useful remarks.
cians, and humanitarian agencies apparently prefer to follow man-made or natural
catastrophic events, while ignoring conditions of ‘boring’ peace and attempts at
conflict transformation and prevention.

The ‘old peace’ neither guarantees a significant audience quota nor serves as
a magnet for considerable donations. What it represents is the relatively stable and
peaceful life of many millions and a barrier to prevent hot conflicts from developing
and spilling over into neighbouring areas. This alone should be reason enough to
take a closer look at the conflict management methods and peace reinforcing capaci-
ties of ethnic groups, state administration, and development agencies.

Intra-state, resource-based, and asymmetric ‘new wars’ – especially in Africa
– have partly been the result of failed developmental processes. Consequently field
research and sociological analysis of successful attempts at conflict transformation
and resolution can provide development agencies, governments, and traditional in-
stitutions of self-organisation with a higher degree of self-awareness regarding the
way forward when early warning systems indicate that a conflict situation might
threaten the peace in a country. State executives as well as development NGOs and
traditional office holders have to realise their responsibility for the well-being and
security of their citizens and residents.

International borders in Africa are notoriously porous, and border areas of con-
tiguous countries normally manifest similar socio-economic conditions, even if the
official languages are different. This is the case, for instance, between Uganda and
the DRC, Nigeria and Benin, and Senegal and Gambia. In cases of insecurity or
war in one country, the spill-over effects of tension, lawlessness, and terrorism seem
to prove a more profitable export industry than other, more civil commodities (Ot-
taway, Herbst and Mills 2004). Liberia and Sierra Leone, Sudan and Chad as well as
Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire are fitting examples of societies with a ‘booming sec-
tor’ of informal war industries that export “insecurities” to neighbouring countries.
An important question that arises from the foregoing cases is the exception: the case
where the possible spillover effects of civil war and insecurity and deterioration have
been blocked, and the border between two countries: Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana, has
experienced remarkable peace and stability.

“The Ivory Coast, until the 1990s, a country with a booming economy and a
‘show case’ of a politically stable and economically successful African state” [author’s
translation] (Hofmeier/Mehler 2004:56), has since then become a fading nation
drowning in war with corrupt and war-mongering leaders. At the same time neigh-
bouring Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire’s ‘poor brother’, a former British colony, emerging
from a history of military dictatorships and economic crises has developed into the
current ‘hope of Africa’. Today’s Ghana enjoys economic growth and social develop-
ment, political stability with free and fair elections. Democracy has been consoli-
dated through the peaceful transfer of power to a new opposition government, ethnic
conciliation, the rule of law, and effective institutions.
So far scholarly efforts have been made that attempt to explain the contrasting developments in Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana in the light of:

(1) regionally distinct economic and societal organisations that might lead to disequilibrium in conflict management (MacLean 2004),

(2) war-causing political stability vs. instability in the two countries (Bergstresser 2003), and

(3) differences in religious and ethnic patterns between south and north in the two countries, whereby the Ivory Coast has dealt with its minorities myopically and with ill-considered harshness (Mehler 2004).

All these explanations are valid within their respective fields of analysis. However the unanswered question relates to the kind of governance policies which could promote the integration of marginalized regions in the two West African states in ways that could facilitate equal citizenship, national unity and development. Which conflict preventive/fostering role have the traditional value systems had in the peripheral areas in the north of the two countries and what impact have church-related, developmental or secular NGOs had on the conciliation process in the north of Ghana?

More than a decade has passed since the outbreak of violent conflicts in the northern areas of the two neighbouring countries. In the case of northern Ghana, various ethnic groups were armed with modern guns. In the violent conflicts that followed, an estimated 10,000 people were killed. More than 50,000 people either became refugees fleeing into the neighbouring countries or internally displaced persons in adjacent safe areas in the southern part of the country. However unlike the case of Côte d’Ivoire, Ghanaian civil society and government were able to limit the force behind the civil unrest and channel it towards successful peace efforts.

In Côte d’Ivoire, the situation remains tense and divided. As such it has been left out of the global initiative of debt cancellation (G-8 decision on debt cancellation in Gleanes in 2005), and is no longer part of regional initiatives for development such as, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) (Melber 2004). Even the peace treaty brokered between the Ivorian government and rebels by South Africa in April 2005 made no real sustainable impact on the peace effort beyond sustaining the stalemate after the cessation of hostilities (Hettmann 2005). Only recently, in March 2007, have the warring parties reached another agreement in Burkina Faso, based on a power sharing arrangement that will hopefully lead to the disarming of fighters, the resolution of the national identity question and the holding of national elections.

Côte d’Ivoire: From an “Economic Miracle” to “State Failure”

The French colonial power left Côte d’Ivoire with the doctrine of extreme political centralisation. In the south, the French ‘administration dirècte’ survived in the new post-colonial administrative legislative institutions. The north, and especially the
ethnic group Senoufo, was ruled with the opposite concept, which was closer to the 
British administrative concept of ‘indirect rule’. This ‘divide and rule’ colonial legacy 
was later adopted by the Houphouët-Boigny regime in order to increase control and 
enhance chances of getting more revenues (taxation) for the north. The first post-
colonial regime generally tolerated the traditional norms, land-use, and land-tenure 
customs of the immigrant inhabitants in the north as well as their direct and indirect 
participation in elections and government.

According to Woods (2003:648), “in the early 1990s, the position of immi-
grants/foreigners changed abruptly. Until then, they had enjoyed similar rights to cit-
izens. Migrants were allowed to vote, to purchase land, and to participate in national 
politics as members of government. This was possible because a precise definition of 
citizenship and national identity had not been formulated. The notion of who was 
an Ivorian remained vague. In a multi-ethnic society with different religious com-
munities and an immigrant population estimated at a quarter of the total population, 
such a fluid conception of national identity and citizenship was useful”.

By encouraging immigrants/foreigners to come into the country, Houphouët-
Boigny was also following a political reasoning, which consisted of discriminating 
against the allegedly obdurate ethnic group, the Bété in the west. This group, from 
which President Gbagbo is said to originate, has according to certain sources, never 
welcomed migrant workers on their land (the western cocoa belt).

The beginning of the 1990s witnessed a shift in the international development 
policies towards more decentralisation, privatisation, and regional autonomy. These 
were seen as the new panacea for economic and political crises, by international 
financial institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, and the African Development 
Bank (ADB). The appropriateness of these new reform policies is certainly open to 
debate. However, Abidjan adopted some of these policies in the 1980’s but failed 
to integrate the peripheral regions into the process. Thus, they ended up with even 
fewer political and economic opportunities than the old regime under Houphouët-
Boigny had offered and also faced increasing hostility from those communities in 
the south where they were increasingly seen as foreigners or strangers to be excluded 
from all political and economic benefits of Ivorian citizenship.

The north/south divide was the consequence rather than the cause of the Ivo-
rian crisis. This could be seen from the kind of volatile politics that attended the 
distribution of ‘scarce resources’ during the economic crisis. The Ivorian conflict had 
its roots in the imbalance of wealth which came about through the export orientation 
of coffee and cocoa in the south and cotton in the north after independence. This 
process was accompanied by an exclusion of the planters/labourers from political 
power. The workforce that made this Ivorian economic ‘miracle’ possible was largely 
made up of immigrants originating from the north of Côte d’Ivoire and from northern 
neighbours such as Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta) and Mali. As long as 
the exploitation of the forest soil (with logging and the shifting agriculture of cocoa
plantations) provided enough income for the planters, squatters, workers, and gardeners, the rivalry was kept under control. But Côte d’Ivoire reached the structural limits of its agricultural growth when costs outgrew profits as international cash crop prices collapsed, and land became a relatively ‘scarce’ resource. From that point onwards, marginalized groups (northerners and migrants) were used as scapegoats and deprived of their economic and political rights.

The actual descent to violent conflict in the country began with the adoption of a national(ist) dogma of ‘Ivoirité’ by Houphouët-Boigny’s immediate successor Konan Bédié. Citizens of Côte d’Ivoire had to prove their ‘pure’ Ivorian ancestry in order to enjoy all the political rights of a true full and legal *citoyen* of the country. ‘Ivoirité’ meant the forced exclusion of indigenes from the north and immigrants from Côte d’Ivoire’s northern neighbours from elections and land ownership. At the time of migration, the final demarcation of national boundaries of French West African countries had not yet been completed, which meant that people born in French West Africa were later declared foreigners belonging to a country which in many cases had not existed when their ancestors migrated. By the mid-1990s the discrimination against foreigners was being applied to northerners born after independence. The northern population suffered from de facto ethnic and religious exclusion. Through this ‘secular excommunication’, the property and national identity rights of the so-called ‘Muslim immigrants’ were effectively abolished. As a result, more than twenty percent of the Ivorian population were no longer politically and juridically citizens of the country.

During Houphouët-Boigny’s rule, an inhabitant legally owned the land as long as he or she cultivated it for the livelihood of the family. Thus, when such people were deprived of their nationality by birth (in Côte d’Ivoire), they also automatically lost the agricultural means for a sustainable livelihood. The post-Boigny rulers’ decision to segregate (after half a century of national post-colonial consolidation under Houphouët-Boigny) was based on the erroneous belief that their ethnic cronies’ political support would result in a smooth continuation of personal political rule and economic privileges. But reinforced regional exclusion from political participation on the national, district, and local levels backfired to the extent that Côte d’Ivoire went into crisis, part of which led to the direct questioning of the legitimacy of the state and the outbreak of civil war. The political strategy of the Ivorian ruling elite was hinged upon xenophobia, which was clearly designed to promote its exclusive class and economic interests, and was underscored by the desire to remain in power at all cost. The immediate result was the polarisation of society by violent means, the division into segmented territories of influence, and a state in total crisis.

The present political situation is characterised by the rupturing of the Ivorian state, in which it is not in control of the northern part of the country. It is not yet clear if the current stalemate in the de-facto division of the country between the rebel-held north and the government-controlled south, will be unlocked by the re-
cent March 2007 peace agreement signed in the Burkina capital, Ouagadougou, in which Guillaume Soro, leader of the rebel New Forces, was appointed Prime Minister to President Gbagbo.

It is possible to trace the outbreak of the civil war to the ways in which the contradictions embedded in the politics of “ethnic balancing” by Boigny unravelled in the face of economic crisis and undermined the legitimacy and authority of the state. The ‘founding father’ of the nation Félix Houphouët-Boigny led the country autocratically, but with a sensitive ethnic-balancing policy. His immense political success was the decades-long stability of the nation. This, however, does not excuse the high degree of political injustice and inadequate standard of human rights during his regime.

However, as far as traditional political structures were concerned, they suffered from their dependence on the state administrative structures. Since colonial times, the system of direct rule integrated them into local administrations but at a rather symbolic level. The inherent capabilities of traditional societies to maintain peace were deformed by their being forced to comply to meeting the requirements of war. Their social capital (lineage relations, festivals, etc.), which is based on sustainable peaceful relations, has been perverted into superficial and substandard ‘ethnic glue’.

Ethnicity therefore became a vehicle of hatred and grief. The negotiating capacities of national and international NGOs and churches were in turn washed away by the dominance of (ethnic) violence. Churches were not excluded from the process, and many of them even became part of the xenophobic dynamics instigated by the government. Neutral NGOs and Church members never had a real opportunity to intervene among the warring parties and also had little chance to approach more moderate representatives of the Muslim community.

Ghana: Traditional political systems as causes of conflict and solutions for its peaceful transformation

Ghana may be said to possess a number of features of a weak state. In some instances, weak states are poor, and also tend to marginalize peripheral regions. This is the case of Ghana’s north. However despite inadequate provision of public services such as health and education, and minimal infrastructure investments, there has never been massive, systematic political suppression from Accra.

The ethnic conflict in northern Ghana that became a full-fledged inter-communal armed conflict in 1994–95 was a culmination of disagreements from a decade earlier. Sporadic unrest and fighting with some casualties could be observed between the Konkomba and the Nanumba as early as 1981. The root-causes of the conflict are manifold: the land question and the political power to control its ownership and tenure, representation in political assemblies such as the Regional and National
House of Chiefs, and the recognition of the political authority of acephalous units have all been significant factors.

The ethnic map of northern Ghana is the result of national and international migration of ethnic groups or lineages of various sizes and a product of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial histories. The local interpretations of traditional authority, rights and duties concerning religious obligations and the juridical position towards the earth (land) and property also feature across ethnic discourses. Such considerations of the ethno-demographic characteristics are a core cause of unrest in Africa. The demographic results of migration are so ethnically complicated, traditionally inter-linked, and economically interwoven that even the most detailed map of ethnic distribution does not effectively reflect the web of inter-related dependencies. For example, sub-segments of ethnic groups such as the Tallensi in the Upper-East Region consist of various immigrant clans or clusters of clans. One immigrant segment from the Mamprusi area plays a decisive role in the enstoolment of the paramount chieftaincy. In fact, the ethnic situation of the Tallensi is typical of the ‘sub-ethnic patchwork’ in northern Ghana and can serve as an illustration:

Box 1: The Tallensi in the Upper-East Region of Ghana

Consist of about 120,000 people. Their political structure is a segmentary clan organisation: their political system is acephalous. The clans therefore represent the highest manifestation of political will. The Namoos were immigrants from Mamprusi area south of the White Volta centuries ago. They imported chieftaincies that are recognised among the descendants of their clans but not by the autochthonous population. The chief of a Namoo settlement, Tongo, was appointed by the British colonial administration to serve as head-chief of the Tallensi as a whole. Today, he is appointed by the paramount chief of the Mamprusi in Nanlerigo (Mamprusi District, Northern Region), but since the departure of the British, he is no longer regarded as paramount to other traditional political or ritual office or title-holders. The autochthonous Talis do not have the political office of chiefs but tendaanas (Earth priests). These ‘custodians of the earth’ of the Talis claim the right to own the land (as being the representatives of the autochthonous clans) as well as the ‘chieffy’ Namoos who claim to rule (and therefore own) the land as well. In a nutshell, the sub-ethnic kaleidoscope of the Tallensi represents the core cause of the violent troubles and solutions in the north from the mid-1990s. It is important to note that the Tallensi have never fought over land.

1 Unresolved issues of migration are the starting points of many conflicts: Tutsi–Hutu in Rwanda and Burundi, Lendu–Hema and Banyamulenge in Eastern DR Congo, Azande–Dinka in South Sudan, and the Luo issue in Kenya.
In the Northern Region, the centralised ethnic groups such as the Dagomba, Nanumba, Gonja, and Mamprusi (mostly Muslim orientation) claim to have the prime right to land-ownership. Formal land sales (with a recognised title deed) are limited to urban areas or for agro-business. The acquisition of land for private (not industrial) farming is tied to the land-user. Unfarmed land can be re-allocated. The right to allocate land is linked to the chiefs or tendaanas (earth priests). Acephalous societies that happen to live in an area that is part of the territory of an ethnic group whose chief is recognised by the government undoubtedly face a dilemma. “For acephalous groups to acquire land, they are required to participate in a process which recognises that the land belongs to others” (van der Linde and Naylor 1999:16). In the pre-colonial period, the political equilibrium between acephalous and centralised ethnic groups was relatively stable. The element of disparity in political power was however introduced when an external power (the Ghanaian state) decided not to recognise the fundamental rights of the acephalous ethnic groups.

The Ghanaian administration did not recognise the executive authority of office bearers such as clan elders and earth priests of acephalous societies. They recognised only the political dominance of ‘real chiefs’. This was the first error of the Ghanaian government based on an ignorant and a-historic opinion of political anthropology. The acephalous Konkombas were migrants to ‘chiefly’ Nanumbaland. They had migrated generations earlier into vacant (but fertile) areas and lived in a loose aggregation of scattered hamlets. For a century these two ethnic groups lived together peacefully. The Nanumba paramount chief represents his people in the National House of Chiefs (together with the chiefs of the Gonja, Dagomba, and Mamprusi). ‘Tribes without rulers’ such as the Konkomba also demanded their seats in the Traditional Chamber of Ghana to gain a hold on developmental processes, land access, and funds. The Ghanaian state denied this wish, thus sowing the seeds for future violent conflict.

In the northern regions of Ghana, traditional patterns of conflict resolution and means of constructively dealing with crises are well developed and still widely intact. The lineage-based political structure and the cephalous system foster a political equilibrium between clan and inter-ethnic groups. War, defined as a systematic military effort to occupy a territory for the sake of suppressing the people, has never occurred in the north of Ghana. Historical research has proven that the north of the country has been a ‘war-free zone’. As various examples in Africa have shown, the mere existence of traditional political structures cannot guarantee peaceful conflict resolution (Riehl 2003). Traditional societies are extremely vulnerable to external influences, which curtail their fields of political administration and competence in self-rule. If a relatively weak state tries to impose laws of decentralisation without solid recogni-

\[1\] This definition does not include violent encounters for self-defence. In the nineteenth century, the Bulsa of the Upper-East Region fought against slave-raiders. The Tallensi and the Bulsa in the Upper-East Region were among the last ethnic groups to be defeated by the British colonialists at the beginning of the twentieth century.
tion and integration of traditional patterns of authority into the execution of power, social unrest could be the consequence. In many instances, the efforts by African states to overcome traditional political systems by disrespecting them as ‘backward’ have proven to be counterproductive. The existence of the de facto administration by traditional authorities in the marginalized areas in African states is in many instances an unintended side effect of limited funds and resources, negligence, or poor communication with the central state. In northern Ghana, the implementation of decentralised political structures has remained relatively lax and slow. Consequently, it has never seriously questioned the traditional political authority of the chiefs and custodians of the earth, the ‘tendaanas’. Significantly, in terms of land management/ownership, traditional jurisdiction, and the organs of the local organisations, the nucleus of political identity has remained widely intact and functional.

Box 2: The ‘dynamics of peace’ – a traditional way of keeping peaceful stability

The north of Ghana is covered by a web of trans-clan and trans-ethnic relationships, of checks and balances of peace. Reciprocal ritual dependencies guarantee the relative peace in the area. One example of these ‘dynamics of peace’ is the ritual importance of the Tallensi in the Upper-East-Region. During their golib festival, the dogma of peace and non-violence covers an area that goes far beyond the ethnic boundaries of the Tallensi. Also the neighbouring ethnic groups such as the Nabdam, the Goresi, the Bulsa, and others follow the ritual obligations of this six-week-long event. Loud voices, fights, and other acts of aggression are among the forbidden activities. The shedding of blood, though, is the most serious violation of rules during this time. It causes the imbalance of the transcendental world of the ancestors and threatens the survival of the people. A serious consequence of committing this sin might be hunger, death, and misery. The simple logic of this dogma is that any bloodshed and violence that occurs during the festival cycle will ultimately have negative consequences for the existence of the lineages and the web of ethnic groups.

During this time all ethnic groups who are part of this amphictionic cycle have to observe certain rules (Fortes 1945, 1949). This ‘olympic peace’ is surrounded by specific ritual activities of various ethnic groups in the region. These religious cycles have one thing in common: they express the understanding of the people that a sustainable livelihood and peaceful coexistence are based on a rigorous respect for a traditional value system (Riehl 1993, 2003). These traditional conflict prevention strategies have in fact helped maintain the peaceful equilibrium among the ethnic groups and the socio-political stability of the Tallensi. It is one of the core reasons, besides egalitarian economic distribution, why systematic warfare has never occurred in the north of Ghana.
In Ghana the administration of the Northern Regions was based on a soft and slow introduction and weak implementation of a decentralisation policy that embraced and respected the demarcation of ethnic boundaries and authorities. Its unintended structural weakness became a blessing: The ‘nonchalance’ of implementation of decentralisation policies in the three Northern Regions of Ghana left the traditional authority and its institutions (land issues, courts, traditional offices, etc.) widely undisputed. Yet cooperation between the ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ political actors could rarely be found. Relations were rather based on reciprocal respect than joint administrative actions.

Unlike the decentralisation process in Uganda, the Ghanaian government is trying to set district borders to match the ethnic territories. This process has brought about a number of conflicts and violent encounters. With the rising standard of education, new demands are being made for representation in a traditional central institution. When traditional political representation is being enlarged on the national level with a higher impact on funding and decision-making, conflicts are foreseeable.

After the conflict threatened to get out of hand and had produced many thousands of casualties, the Ghanaian government corrected its mistake of not allowing access to representation of acephalous groups in the Regional and National House of Chiefs. This step meant removing traditional domination of a certain area. As a result, it contributed to the creation of more problems. However, on the positive side, this effort showed the Ghanaian state’s capability to react dynamically to changing patterns and demands of traditional representation and legal necessities. Nonetheless, it was only successful due to the help of indigenous and international NGOs such as the Catholic Relief Services and OXFAM, which supported negotiations with the population, organised training for community leaders/organisations, facilitated inter-group dialogue, provided resources and information to enable them see that insisting on inherited positions was outdated and could threaten the stability of the region and human security as a whole.

‘Early quenching of bush fires’: The development and appeasement policy of churches and NGOs in creating sustainable peace

Even when conflicts such as those in the Mano River Area, the Great Lakes Region, Sudan, and Uganda seem to have distinctly political roots, ultimately the issue of who is able to gain a monopoly over the profits of exploitation of resources tends to dominate the conflicts and is decisive for their resolution. Resources are not necessarily only of a mineral nature. Various violent scenarios are apparently fuelled by the aid industry, where international humanitarian NGOs and other aid organisations

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1 In May 2005 the Tallensi-Nabdam District was cut out of the Fra-Fra District in Ghana’s Upper-East Region. It will therefore possess its own district assembly supplied with state funds allocated for the institutional development of the district.
play the unholy role of creating the basis of supply for the dominant group in their area of operation. A legitimate state monopoly that executes its power and is recognised as the rightful and trusted organ of political centralisation does not exist in some parts of the country, or does not even exist as in the case of Somalia. Moreover, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and the mobility of young fighters add fuel to the raging fire of violent conflict.

Every intra-state conflict identified by the code word ‘new war’ was instigated by a combination of reasons, but they all had one thing in common: once sparked off, they were very difficult to end or resolve. Each year of continued violence results in an even longer period of (in so many cases) unsuccessful cease-fires or protracted peace negotiations that go through a rather long cycle of being restarted each time the agreement is violated by one or all of the feuding sides involved in such conflicts.

In the case of Ghana, experienced representatives of local NGOs and church leaders (the staff of the Catholic Secretariat, church congregations) formed mobile task forces to meet the leaders of the various armed ethnic groups to negotiate local ceasefires to enable them to provide humanitarian support for the sick, the injured and the homeless. Fr. Rohrmayer, who was in Tamale (northern Ghana) at the time the conflict erupted, took part in the organisation of such peace task forces. He underlined that the quick response (less than six weeks after the first lootings and casualties were witnessed) was essential to their mediation efforts being successful. These ‘peace task forces’ initiated their local ‘shuttle diplomacy’ to calm the leaders of the uprising. The ‘peace task forces’ were active in the Tamale area, and also in the Upper-East Region. The issues they faced and had to overcome ranged from the grievances of the alienated ethnic groups, limited access to schools, or unequal distribution of services, and also issues of land distribution and land-use rights. The successes of the negotiations were not necessarily immediately applicable solutions. The ‘round-table factor’ that the various parties were able to meet and seriously discuss issues of fundamental importance with due respect to the importance of the topics set the ground for what finally proved to be successful negotiations.

An expert on the ethnic and political map of northern Ghana, Fr. John Kirby (2003), described how a number of core ethnic leaders of the warring groups gathered in the capital Accra to learn about the socio-psychological dimension of their reciprocal hatred. The Catholic Church opened up a ‘new front’ of diversified attempts at negotiations and contacts with local decision makers.

The warring parties accepted all the foregoing initiatives by indigenous and international staff of the Catholic Church. This was because they were considered to be neutral and ‘understood the language’ of the people. ‘Understanding the language’ was not only meant linguistically. Some of the church and NGO leaders had been working with the people affected for decades and had authentic expertise concerning their lineage background, cultural heritage, and the cultural-political ‘grief and
grievances’ (Collier and Hoeffler 2003) that had been violated or not respected, and led to the outbreak of the crisis.

The core issue for a successful peace accord is linked to the role of the state, and whether this role is constructive or otherwise. Civil society and NGO or church leaders cannot be successful if a state remains determined to go to war. Nonetheless, their special expertise and closeness to the people give them some advantages in filling the gaps left by a “distant” government (in the case of Ghana), and also win them considerable governmental recognition (van der Linde/Naylor 1999:43).

NGOs and churches have in many instances a fair talent for bridging the gaps in communication between the various parties to a conflict. Indigenous NGOs, and in this case, NORYDA1 (the Northern Region Youth Development Association) have also played an equally important role in building post-conflict peace. The founding of NORYDA was a direct result of the peace process. Their special role was to implement reconciliation and peace initiatives after the formal peace agreement, in many cases with the financial and infrastructural assistance of international NGOs such as the German-based MISEREOR, Catholic Relief Services, OXFAM and others.

In March 1996, only two years after the conflict became violent and one year after the cease-fire agreement, the ‘Kumasi Peace Agreement’ was signed. After initial disagreement, the government finally supported the accord and acknowledged that NGO initiatives had paved the way for a comprehensive peace settlement in northern Ghana.

Why did the virus of state crisis in neighbouring Côte d’Ivoire not spread to Ghana?

The north of Ghana, during the colonial period referred to as the ‘hinterland’ in contrast to the South Gold Coast ‘colony’, may be described as ‘a different kettle of fish’ to deal. In terms of infrastructure and institutions, the south was better developed than the north of the country In the north; there was hardly any significant taxation of the population due to resistance or lack of resources. The costs of administration were almost entirely covered by the central state. The north (the former Northern Territories as they were called during the later period of the colonial era) was a different country in terms of state effectiveness, central governance, and national inclusion. As noted earlier, the government in Ghana contributed to the communal conflict in the north (by not respecting indigenous political representation), but it did not allow the situation to degenerate into a full-scale civil war, as was the case of Côte d’Ivoire.

To sum up, even after independence in 1956 the northern part of Ghana was regarded as a neglected and less-developed region due to its distance from the industrialised South and its capital and universities, its ethnic orientation, and a (per-

1 On the important role of indigenous NGOs (‘INGOS’) in the conflict area of south Sudan, see Riehl (2001).
ceived) hopeless fixation on traditional beliefs. The greater share of administrative and infrastructure investment ended up in the southern part of the country. This arguably fostered the situation in which Ghana imitated the policies of other African countries towards its peripheral, marginalized territories, for example:

1. rigorous, violent implementation of state power policies;
2. mistaking the germinating voices of obvious socio-economic imbalances as threats to its own political power;
3. exploitation of material and human resources without allocating shares of the national budget according to the needs of marginalized areas.

Mehler’s (2003) paradigm of Côte d’Ivoire’s traditionally based ‘legitimate oligopolies’ of power through public trust that are not in the hands of the central state can be aptly applied to northern Ghana.¹ In Côte d’Ivoire, the solid consolidation of these oligopolies was fostered by the xenophobic ambitions of the ruling party and government, the military uprising that followed, and the division of the country along north-south lines. Houphouët-Boigny’s “openness to the outside world”, which resulted in solid economic growth and relative prosperity (Akindès 2004:11) and included political participation of the immigrants due to electoral advantages given to them, found its unholy negative equivalent in his successor’s credo of xenophobia and the socio-political and economic² isolation of the north of the country.

Although it proved possible for Ghana to avoid this fate, after acephalous groups were denied equal participation in the National House of Chiefs, the government did not intervene blindly in favour of one ethnic group. Rather, it decided to separate the warring parties and bring the fighting to an end. This was accompanied by the government’s clever move to revise its former decision on participation of the acephalous groups (which are the autochthonous Nanumbas) in the National House of Chiefs. Although the immigrant Konkombas were accused by the Nanumbas of having settled on their most fertile soil, at the same time the Nanumbas were denied political representation in the traditional council. The government took the lead by embracing the demands of the groups (in this case the Nanumbas) without losing face by having surrendered to the pressure of ethnic violence. ‘Giving in’ by the state was not seen as a defeat, but as recognition of changed demographic and political developments. The above mentioned legitimate oligopolies did not, in contrast to

¹ Legitimate oligopolies occurred in the north of Côte d’Ivoire when the central state was neither willing nor able to provide the citizens in the respective regions with protection and security. These legitimate oligopolies turned out to be self-defence forces and they continue to surface especially in situations when the military powers of the central state act against ethnic groups without reason and in an unjust manner. Therefore legitimate oligopolies are replacing a wrong-headed policy of a weak state, that is not prepared or willing to provide a justified monopoly of power within its institutions.

² With the exception of the “Dioulas”, who are well known business people and who made solid investments in the transport sector. Their relative economic success is one of the reasons why they are envied by the Southerners.
Côte d’Ivoire, take root in the north of Ghana, because the government decided to accept their ‘legitimate’ political demands.

If the civil unrest had continued and a protracted ‘new war’ had erupted, the demands for a peace settlement would have most likely resulted in the sharing of power in Accra, a waste of already immensely scarce resources, continuous instability of the country, and huge profits for arms traders. Legitimate oligopolies of power can only work in an environment where the justified demands made by a social group of a central state cannot, even partly, be met. By accepting the demands of minorities in the North to have legal control over their land and political representation in the Traditional Council, the Ghanaian state let the wind out of the ‘sails of violent conflict’ and showed considerable respect for the democratic rights and demands of the people.

Conclusion

Why are there no warlords in Ghana? In the case of Côte d’Ivoire, some warlords or local big men do not only claim to have the monopoly of power in their area of control. They in fact have the trust of the population to act as the rightful and legitimate oligopolistic institutions of law and order (Mehler 2003). The weakness of the central state combined with the reinforced alienation of the ‘Muslim’ immigrants opened up a Pandora’s box in the country.

When governments choose to dismantle or scale back state presence in the countryside, they incur new political risks, most notably when this allows rural social groups to organize autonomously in opposition to the centre or with the goal of supporting a takeover of the centre (Boone 2003:31).

Central state rulers decide upon the strategies towards marginal areas and ethnic groups according to their political and economic interests. In Côte d’Ivoire in the 1990s, the regime tried to marginalise the North by excluding those it labelled immigrants/foreigners/strangers or non-citizens from exercising any socio-economic rights in the country. The fundamental mistake of the Ivorian state was not only the ‘scaling back of state presence’ but ‘scaling down’ citizenship in order to create a second class composed of “excluded” “alien” rural dwellers.

A state’s main function and source of legitimacy lies in its capacity to ensure the welfare and security of its citizens. The rejection of this fundamental responsibility was the starting point for the civil war in Côte d’Ivoire. It essentially divided the country into various ethnically based rebel-held territories that almost led to the dissolution of the country as a nation-state. This has fed into a prolonged political stalemate, which several peace agreements have so far been unable to fully resolve. At the heart of this unresolved situation lies the citizenship and nationality question.
At the national level, defining who was a citizen and who was not became central to excluding certain individuals from competing in national elections. At the village level, competition and conflict surfaced over land, along with growing calls by those who saw themselves as ‘indigenous’ to restrict the rights of foreigners to acquire land and to vote (Woods 2003:648).

By the mid-1990s, Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana faced profound ethnic violence, mainly in the northern regions of their respective countries. The Ivorian crisis was fomented by the government’s policy of Ivorité, which sought to exclude “foreigners/migrants” from political and economic life. The Ghanaian crisis was sparked off without direct, active state involvement in fuelling the war. Conflicts over land, political influence, and land tenure were left on the local agenda and not operationalised and used for national power struggles.

It has been widely recognised that ‘greed and grievance’ (Collier/Hoeffler 2003) are decisive motivations to start an intra-state conflict that might lead to a ‘new war’. Marginalized segments of a population might accept participating in warfare once they are deprived of their fundamental rights to gain and benefit from natural resources. The above-mentioned inherent xenophobia of the ruling class might have arisen from the fear of being deprived of their political dominance and economic privileges – the effect, however, is comparable to conflicts that are strictly resource based (as in Angola, Sudan, and Liberia).

Various stakeholders either within the Ghanaian community or from outside institutions prevented the conflict from being perpetuated. In the case of Côte d’Ivoire, the conflict developed into a protracted internal war with long-term negative consequences for the developmental process and regional security.

Both encounters have shown their destructive capacity. In Côte d’Ivoire, the fighting resulted in the destruction of internal institutions and in a fading state. However, in northern Ghana the former fighting parties were persuaded that the enemy actually only existed in their minds and that through intensified synergetic cooperation, a much higher degree of development and harmony (physically and politically) could be achieved.

The Ghanaian government did not prepare the political ground for the conflict. Contrary to the conflict in the Côte d’Ivoire, the Ghanaian army was not one of the parties to the conflict. On the contrary, the army facilitated the work of the NGOs and multilateral donors when the security situation permitted. The intervention of the Ghanaian army was not the reason for NGO peace building activities but rather provided security support for resolving the crisis by introducing Permanent Peace Negotiating Teams (PPNT), which finally brokered peace treaties and reconciliation ceremonies. The military complemented the above-mentioned Peace Task Forces, which were established by NGOs immediately after the crisis erupted. At the end of the day, the success of the PPNT could not have been achieved without the initiative,
coordination, and communication of the NGOs with the warring parties (van der Linde/Naylor 1999:34).

The way forward: The Ghanaian “model”

The Ghanaian success story in conflict-resolution offers important lessons to other states seeking to end violent internal conflict. The local peace-building process has been widely praised by international organisations and Ghanaian civil society (von der Linde/Naylor 1999). Applause for a state reaction in a crisis from these two players is hard to learn. The Ghanaian state acted complementarily to the activities of humanitarian NGOs when the situation in the crisis area appeared about to endanger its very existence. In the same way, it foreclosed intervention from neighbouring countries, unlike the cases of Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone, where neighbouring states provided support for rebel forces.

The international community and the African Union should consequently use all means at their disposal to make sure that the fuelling of war by neighbouring states is discouraged and subjected to the imposition of sanctions. The International Criminal Court (ICC) should also reinforce its commitment to initiate legal action against states as well as warlords when their activities systematically threaten people’s security and wellbeing. International financial transactions as well as the movements of individuals have to be monitored and possibly sanctioned, assets frozen, and representatives of terrorist rebel groups blocked from access to safe heavens abroad. A higher degree of internationally harmonized efforts to act on developing conflicts is necessary.

Developing countries such as Ghana, Tanzania, and Botswana where ‘old peace’ is prevailing need substantial international assistance and should not be forgotten among the needs of threshold countries and humanitarian assistance for war zones and natural disaster areas. International donors and development NGOs should not lean back and relegate peaceful countries to the sidelines as successful past test cases. The population in the peripheral areas of potential unrest should see human development assistance as a win–win case and as a potential reward for their deciding in favour of peace.

African states in pre-conflict situations should realise that any serious effort towards decentralisation involving and strengthening traditional political institutions is not a loss of political and material capacity, but rather a chance for gaining political stability that will pay off in the long run. Results of this win–win situation for the central government will lead to a higher degree of security and stability through increased political trust and the acceptance of rural decision making by the local population. Granting local authority for some political decisions, allowing self-administration of small, local administrative units, and engendering a high level of preparedness for taking responsibility usually result in relatively small transaction
costs for the state and have a high value-added effect in terms of political stability, human security, as well as for functioning institutions that enhance the wellbeing of the people. Ghana however was able to overcome the menace of a ‘new war’ and is developing – compared to human development indices in Africa – on a high level.

Ultimately the traditional political system, the various political and religious titleholders, and dignitaries demonstrated openness for negotiations and a balanced settlement of the conflict. The relative strength of their position in the society could outweigh the ‘attraction’ of continued warfare as had happened at that point in time when the economic benefits of war were surpassing gains from stability and peace. Traditional societies in the northern areas of Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire abstain per se from systematic warfare: the idea of occupying a “foreign” territory in order to suppress the defeated enemy is an unknown paradigm in the traditional understanding of stateless societies (Riehl 2003).

The church-related and secular developmental NGOs were able to identify the root causes of the conflict very quickly and reacted swiftly by assuming the role of facilitator in bringing together the key players who were at loggerheads. They were recognised by the government and the traditional authorities as mediators, and their staff had earned the respect that enabled them to be viewed as neutral.

Traditional political institutions as well as the negotiating capacities of civil society, NGOs and churches should pro-actively be used to make sure that various facets of the peace process can be enforced and realised. The valuable expertise and grass-root orientation of development projects of the church and their humanitarian and developmental NGOs contributed immensely to the consolidation of post-conflict peace in northern Ghana. The asymmetry of the ‘new wars’ calls for a reinforced peer-role of church institutions and traditional societies so that asymmetric counter-weights towards peace can be established.

Regional bodies such as the ECOWAS or SADC should realise that they are alternatives to military intervention in problem areas. Member-countries of regional institutions should use their influence to intervene and use their influence on states where an imbalance of ethnic representation is foreseeable.

The Peace Task Forces which were acting in the North of Ghana to understand the root causes of the conflict and contribute to peace-building can be seen as working examples. Northern Ghana is not yet stable. In 2007 new reports appeared that conflicts erupted between these two groups. Ghana should think about a constant peace-building institution which is permanently on alert when conflicts threaten to start again.
Bibliography


Reconfiguring Nationhood in Côte d’Ivoire?

Henri-Michel Yéré

Introduction

The paper explores the current challenges confronting Ivorian nationhood as shaped by historical factors since Côte d’Ivoire came into (official) existence in 1893. This is based on the belief that the root causes of the Ivorian civil war that broke out in 2002 cannot be understood outside of the unresolved national and citizenship questions in Côte d’Ivoire. By focussing on how encounters between indigenes and foreigners evolved over time in the context of the colonial and post-colonial state politics, this paper analyzes the history of national consciousness, not just as a consequence of the nationalist struggles that resulted in independence (Mbembe, 1996), but also in connection with the migration patterns that characterised the making of the peoples of Côte d’Ivoire as we know it today (Loucou, 1984; Kipré, 1992). A key aspect of those encounters and the contestations around Ivorian identity had to do with the question of land ownership, civil rights and entitlements. By the same token this study intends to analyse the relativity of the notion of the “foreigner” and show how it is defined contextually rather than independently of any social situation (Skinner, 1963; Skinner and Schack, 1979; Challoner, 1979). It is expected that this approach will open up a fresh historically informed perspective to the unfolding developments in Côte d’Ivoire.

Historical background

Côte d’Ivoire was for long regarded as a haven of political stability and economic prosperity in West Africa. The country benefited from the increased prices of cash crops such as cocoa and coffee from the early 1950s till the late 1970s. Its gradual economic ascendance made it possible for Côte d’Ivoire to overtake Senegal as the richest colony in French West Africa (Afrique Occidentale Française) from the early 1950s onwards (Gbagbo, 1982; Kipré Tirefort, 1992). The political leader of the colony, Félix Houphouët-Boigny (1905–1993) was decisively pro-France, a position that became the trademark of his long political career: namely his belief that Côte d’Ivoire territory’s fate was directly linked to that of the colonial métropole, France (Grah Mel, 2003). It was a position that was further reinforced after Independence in August 1960. Another aspect that remained a cornerstone of Ivorian socio-economic life was agriculture: as cocoa and coffee became the main cash crops that sustained

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1. I want to thank Rita Kesselring for her valuable help and advice for this paper.
the Ivorian economy and prosperity. This agro-based economy was dependent on a labour force drawn from different parts of the country, and neighbouring countries: Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) and French Sudan (Mali). Houphouët-Boigny had as a policy opened the door to migrant labour from neighbouring countries to work in the cocoa and coffee plantations, and also extended some citizenship rights to them. Moreover, an investment code whose main emphasis was promoting investments by foreign companies in Côte d’Ivoire was put in place. It created an enabling environment for such companies to do business in the country and repatriate all their profits (Médard and Fauré, 1982). This largely benefited French corporations, which enjoyed a quasi-monopoly over the access to public markets in Côte d’Ivoire. In addition to French dominance of the economy, a defence agreement specifying that any external attack directed against the Ivorian territory compelled France to intervene, cemented the close ties between the governments of France and Côte d’Ivoire. This agreement was symbolised by the presence of the 43e BIMA, a French battalion stationed in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire’s main city (Koulibaly, 2004). In this manner, France was able to retain its dominance of its former colony, after the latter’s independence.

The foregoing constituted the broad context for the miracle ivoirien the period of economic prosperity that made the country appear as a beacon of stability and prosperity in the West African region (Amin, 1967). However, the structural weaknesses and contradictions that underpinned the period of economic prosperity began to unravel as a result of falling international cash crop prices, and the resultant decline in national revenues, and the immense strain that it placed on Houphouët-Boigny’s brand of patrimonial politics.

The sudden decrease in cash crops prices in the late 1970s, combined with economic mismanagement brought the economy to its knees, and in 1983 the IMF proposed a structural adjustment programme (SAP), which was followed by several others. The economic crisis, and the economic reforms, that emphasised removal of subsidies on state welfare programmes, contributed to the deepening of social tensions and protests by students and labour organisations. These also fed into demands for democratization and an end to one-party rule under Houphouët-Boigny’s leadership. Under immense pressures from within the country and also from outside, the President eventually gave in, and the 1990s ushered in democratic reforms, allowing multiparty politics for the first time since 1957. An unusual challenge confronted Félix Houphouët-Boigny in his long tenure as president of Côte d’Ivoire: for the first time, he had to face an opponent in a presidential election, the leader of Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI), Laurent Gbagbo.

Houphouët’s death in 1993 occurred at a time of heightened social tensions, mainly due to the acuteness of the economic and financial crisis in a country where the state was by far the main employer. The succession of the first president of Côte d’Ivoire occasioned a struggle within his own party, PDCI (Parti Démocratique de
Côte d’Ivoire), mainly between two men: the Speaker of the National Assembly, Henri Konan Bédié, and Prime Minister, Alassane Dramane Ouattara. Backed by the Constitution, Bédié emerged the winner of that contest. In 1994 Ouattara was appointed the Deputy Managing Director of the IMF. In the meantime, his supporters founded a political party, which in fact was a splinter movement from PDCI, the Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR). Bédié’s supporters by then had started to make the accusation that Alassane Ouattara was not a ‘true’ Ivorian citizen and that therefore should not even consider running for the presidency of Côte d’Ivoire (see below for more). In December 1999, a military coup put an end to the Bédié regime. Following the coup, Brigadier Guéi assumed power during a ‘military transition’ that lasted ten months. In the course of that transition, a new constitution was approved by a referendum, under whose terms “to be a candidate to the presidency of the Republic, one has to be born of a father and a mother, themselves Ivorian-born” (Constitution, 23 July 2000: Article 35). In October 2000, after an election in which he defeated the head of the military junta (who contested and tried to manipulate the results), Laurent Gbagbo became the president of Côte d’Ivoire.

“Why was there a war in Côte d’Ivoire?” Contemporary debates in a divided country

Since the failed coup attempt of September 2002, Côte d’Ivoire has been divided in two (or three) parts. Within a short period, the failed coup was rapidly transformed into a fully-fledged civil war. A little more than two weeks after the onset of hostilities the Mouvement Patriotique de Côte d’Ivoire (MPCI) was born and quickly emerged as the political wing of the rebellion. The former student activist Guillaume Soro became its secretary-general. Active fighting significantly subsided over the main fronts with the signing of the first Lome agreements of October–November 2003. The country has remained divided since that date. There are various explanations for the outbreak of a war in Côte d’Ivoire. A review of the following perspectives and debates can facilitate an understanding of the major issues at stake in the conflict.

The Case against France

Adolphe Blé Kessé has written a book whose title is a clear accusation: La Côte d’Ivoire en Guerre: Le Sens de l’Imposture française. He states that the war in Côte d’Ivoire is part of a wider historical movement that he identifies as the end of a particular mode of exploitation and economic regulation by France in Côte d’Ivoire since 1951, which he calls système houphouëtiste. This system, put in place after the end of the alliance between Houphouët’s party, RDA, and the French Communist Party, was underscored by an active collaboration between the most prominent political leader of the then colony and the M métropole (Késsé, 2005:36). Houphouët’s ascendancy to the presidency of the Republic after independence in 1960 further
entrenched that system, a system that has been seriously challenged since the military coup that terminated Bédié’s regime in 1999 (Késsé, 2005: 76). Its most serious challenger has been Houphouët-Boigny’s historic opponent, Laurent Gbagbo, whose ascension to power in October 2000 put into serious question the ways in which France and Côte d’Ivoire had conducted their relations (Késsé, 2005: 93).

In this respect, Blé Kessé is no different from the Speaker of the Ivorian National Assembly Mamadou Koulibaly, who is even more explicit in his accusations against the French. His spectacular departure from the negotiation table at Linas Marcoussis in January 2003 was the beginning of a relentless and constant indictment of France’s position in the Ivorian conflict and more generally of the role of France in the history of Côte d’Ivoire. In a series of books Koulibaly (2003, 2004, 2005), took it upon himself to characterise the relationship between the former colonial power and his country as being a neo-colonial one. The most salient features of this neo-colonial subjugation are the massive military presence of France in the country and the exclusive rights of French businesses to have access to Ivorian resources and public markets. According to this view, the war is nothing more than a way for France to re-assert its dominant position in Côte d’Ivoire, all the more so because the government of Laurent Gbagbo would never consent to the type of relations that France wants to impose upon the country. Côte d’Ivoire in the long run has nothing to gain in engaging in such a subordinate relationship with Paris. “Je ne m’adresse pas à des marionettes” , was the National Assembly Speaker Koulibaly’s response to the question about whether he was prepared to enter into a dialogue with the rebel leadership in September 2005, implying that Guillaume Soro’s MPCI is a proxy movement for French hegemonic interests.

To those holding the view that France’s (imperialist) role in Côte d’Ivoire was the real cause of the war, the showdown of November 2004 exemplifies better than anything else the reality of the tense relationship between the two countries. At that time, the war had been stalemated, a situation that was becoming less and less bearable for the government. On 4 November 2004, it launched a simultaneous air raid on the rebel positions in Bouaké and Korogho. The early reports made it appear that the rebel forces were being routed. Then suddenly, two days later, the French announced that nine of their soldiers positioned in Bouaké had been hit and killed by the fighter jets of Opération Dignité. By way of reprisal, the French president Jacques Chirac ordered the destruction of the entire fleet of the Ivorian Air Force. The French soldiers of the Licorne Force carried out his orders. In the confusion of those troubled times, French tanks surrounded the residence of Laurent Gbagbo in Abidjan. The swift reaction of the crowd of Abidjanais was to invade the streets of the main city of the country and to confront the French soldiers. The tension reached a high point when French soldiers started shooting into the crowd, reportedly killing more than sixty unarmed demonstrators. At the same time, the French citizens living
in Abidjan had their houses and their businesses looted by rampaging mobs. Eight thousand of them were evacuated and repatriated.

To those who see France as the main reason behind the crisis, the fact that more than sixty unarmed Ivorian demonstrators were killed by the French troops stationed in Abidjan, following Jacques Chirac’s order that the Ivorian fleet be destroyed was clear evidence that France was the complicit instigator of the rebellion. Hadn’t the rebellion been routed in Bouaké a little before Chirac’s intervention came and undid the rapport de force in favour of Gbagbo’s government in the wake of Opération Dignité? Indeed, long after these sad events, many in Côte d’Ivoire implied that the nine dead French soldiers were in fact an invention, and a mere justification for the destruction of Côte d’Ivoire’s military capabilities.

In the wake of these events, the Senegalese writer Boris Boubacar Diop expressed the view that the case of Côte d’Ivoire represented a stark warning to “Françafrique” (Diop, 2005): the Ivorian situation, he noted, was a clear sign that many in formerly French-colonised Africa were tired of the shadowy nature of the relations between French public and private interests and their respective countries and governments. While he took care not to turn Laurent Gbagbo into an icon of anti-colonial resistance – “M. Gbagbo ne fait pas rêver: personne ne s’avisrait de le prendre pour Sankara ou Lumumba”1 – Diop, nonetheless positioned him clearly in an anti-imperialist posture.

When asked the question about the November 2004 events, the French political scientist Jean François Bayart said that he regarded this moment as a struggle of the Ivorian people for a “second independence”. In his estimation, many in Côte d’Ivoire had the feeling that what had happened in August 1960 (independence) had been more of a compromise, underlined by Houphouët-Boigny’s collaborative stance towards France. Writers like Bernard Doza (1991) and Marcel Amondji (1984, 1986) who contest the reality of Côte d’Ivoire’s status as a sovereign nation, also hold this view. They charge that the territory remained a French overseas dependency, and that independence was in fact a charade.

What is common to the foregoing explanations of the crisis is that France is at the heart of the problem. The fact that France – and not Germany, or Norway, for instance – is mentioned places this entire confrontation in the context of the long history of colonialism between the two countries. The denunciation of France’s intervention is regarded as a response to its belittling of the sovereign status of Côte d’Ivoire as a nation equal to its peers in the international order. The ultimate denial of nationhood can only come from the former colonial power trying to assert the reality of its power over its former colony. These positions reveal a unanimous indictment of Françafrique—the informal network of political and business interests

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1 Mr Gbagbo shouldn’t dream: no one is going to get it into their heads to take him for Sankara or Lumumba.
linking the ruling circles in France to many of its African counterparts, with a clear view to maintaining strategic influence and making as much profit as possible.

Mongo Beti was among the first African intellectuals to openly criticize this state of affairs in his Main Basse sur le Cameroun, a book that was banned in France when it first came out in 1972. Since then, the writings of François-Xavier Verschave (2004, 2005) made the existence of these networks clear for all to see. “Why should a foreign power decide for us?” is the fundamental question posed by those pushing the position that the war in Côte d’Ivoire is the result of French meddling in the country’s affairs. By posing the question this way, they are expressing their feelings that Ivorian sovereign nationhood has been denied and violated by France. This raises the following questions: Where does sovereignty start, when does nationhood end, and how can it be asserted and respected in Côte d’Ivoire with a long history of encounters between indigenes and migrants?

Ethnicity and marginalization at fault

According to some observers, the current crisis in Côte d’Ivoire is the result of the politicisation of ethnic identities and xenophobia in the wake of a deep-seated socio-economic and political crisis. They reject the explanations that place the complete blame for the crisis on French imperialism. To these writers, the problem is that of the politicization of the ‘ethnic amalgam’ of Ivorians. An amalgam in which some dominant groups have justified all sorts of abuses against those they identify as the “Northern” or “migrant” populations of Côte d’Ivoire.

It is however important to note that the notion of a “North” in Côte d’Ivoire is a contested one. An intellectual from the FPI, a former Minister of Tertiary Education, Séry Bailly (2005) engaged a number of intellectuals “from the North” on the issue of their place in the wider Ivorian space. He conceptualised the “North” as an ideological project seeking to create symbolic figures of its own (through historic figures such as Samory Touré for instance, and by emulation of Abrah Pokou for the Baoulé) (Bailly, 2005: 44). He then placed the “North” within the context of a victimhood strategy, symbolised by the Charte du Nord, a document that came out in 1991 and was phrased as a declaration of the secession of the Northern ethnic groups of the country from the Ivorian nation-state. That declaration was underscored by a litany of complaints in relation to the under-representation of Northern luminaries in key government positions (2005: 73). Bailly also attempted to deconstruct the writings of “Northern” intellectuals whom he suspects, participated in the construction of this ideology of the North. Notwithstanding the fact that he himself did much to draw and reinforce the ideological battle lines that he sought to undo, Bailly responded to writers such as Ousmane Dembélé and Tiémoko Coulibaly on the basis of their appreciation of the construction of the figure of the “foreigner” in Côte d’Ivoire.
Ousmane Dembélé has devoted his attention towards explaining the contemporary crisis in Côte d’Ivoire through the lens of the complicated relationship between “indigenes” and “foreigners”. The critical migratory flows since the 1920s were a direct consequence of the labour-intensive, small-scale peasant farming which constituted the basis of the Ivorian cash crop economy. Experimented upon by the first French Resident Arthur Verdier in the Côte d’Ivoire in the 1880s, the cultivation of cash crops had been taken up by Governor Angoulvant and encouraged by the French colonial administration in the 1920s, thus emulating the example of the neighbouring Gold Coast (Kipré-Tirefort, 1992: 310). The south-eastern region of the Côte d’Ivoire was the first one to experience the massive cultivation of coffee and cocoa. This was where the Mossi farm workers from the southern regions of the colony of Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) migrated to in the 1930s and 1940s. The flow of new migrants at that period in turn prompted the indigenous ethnic groups from the south-eastern region of Côte d’Ivoire to reconfigure their land ownership systems: from a lineage-based system of ownership to an ownership system based on the nuclear family’s property rights, thus generating new patterns of social behaviour (Dembélé, 2002: 140). Dembélé also insists that the notion of “foreigner” in Côte d’Ivoire does not only refer to migrants from outside the borders of the territory. It also refers to people (internal migrants) from other parts of Côte d’Ivoire who have moved to another region of the country altogether. As an example, he cites the Malinké-speaking populations of the north eastern region of the country who settled in large numbers in many cities located in the south of the country, or the Baoulé that relocated to the mid-west of the country after its independence. He points out that the urban spatialisation of Ivorian cities from the colonial days onwards favoured the emergence of ‘ghettos’ identifiable by the ethnicity of their inhabitants (2002: 152–53). The particular feature of this ‘ghettoisation’ was that people were grouped not just according to their common ethnicity, but also by “cultural proximity”: Malinké, Sénoufo, Lobi people from the North of Côte d’Ivoire would be grouped within the same space as Mossis from Burkina Faso, or Bambaras from Mali, or Sososos from Guinea – the common cultural feature here being Islam.

Dembélé maintains that this is the reason why Ivorians of the ‘South’ had always associated Ivorians from the North with “foreigners”, and that the economic prosperity inherent to their profession as traders (especially Malinké-speaking people, also known as ‘Dioula’) made them the target of all sorts of accusations and other forms of stigmatisation, especially in the 1980s and 1990s when the economic and political crisis peaked. Malinké, Sénoufo, Lobi on the one hand, and Malians, Burkinabé, and Guineans on the other: all were taken to be the same people and were treated as such. The problems started to arise when in the different urban centres, some of the “Northerners”, who were always seen by the “autochthons” as their “guests” (in accordance with the ideal of fraternité africaine dear to Félix Houphouët-Boigny), decided to enter the political arena, and vie for political power. “This amounted to
abusing the locals’ sense of hospitality”, asserts Dembélé (2002:162). He also surmises that the Ivorian State, by appealing to national citizenship as a mode of national construction only as of 1990, left the many foreigners in the country confused as to where they belonged in the social map of the would-be nation. The invention and promotion of Ivoirité did not help in clarifying matters, on the contrary, it deepened the confusion and crisis.

Tiémoko Coulibaly goes further than Ousmane Dembélé in his characterisation of the Ivorian crisis. In Coulibaly’s view, the problem lies in the very fabric of the post-independence Ivorian State (Coulibaly, 2002). In his view, the 2002 war was nothing more than a demonstration of the inherent weakness of a state built on the basis of ethnic prejudice. The fact that the first president of the country was a Baoulé, and that his successor came from the same ethnic group exemplified the belief in the inherent superiority of the Akan over all the other ethnic groups of the country. An ideology that Coulibaly refers to as ‘Akanité’ promoted that assumed superiority (of the Akan) over the other groups: the Bété are said to be ‘violent’, ‘unpredictable’, and hence ‘unable to rule the country’. As for the Northerners, they are seen as “more or less foreigners, destined to serve as manpower in cocoa farms or as domestic workers in households in the South of the country”. ‘Akanité’, which had always had an insidious existence, transformed itself in the mid-1990’s into Ivoirité, “a Sudiste ideology, mobilising the Southerners against the people from the North of the country; which in turn provoked the emergence of Northern nationalism” (2002).

According to Francis Akindès, the novelty in this nativist conceptualisation of Ivorian citizenship comes from the fact that for the first time citizenship was accounted for in a formalised ideological setting. This was unlike the case in the past (that is between 1960 and 1990) when the notion of an Ivorian citizenship was deliberately left undefined, and in any case was never publicly challenged (Akindès, 2004: 35). This very formalisation – in the shape of the Ivoirité ideology – announced a renewed determination on the part of the Akan elites to retain political power (2004: 15). Akindès also makes the point that this conception of Ivorian citizenship – which he calls “slice’ citizenship” (2004: 40) – takes it away from where it should belong, that is the juridical field, and transforms national citizenship into the birthright of those born of Ivorian parents, (preferably) on Ivorian soil exclusively (2004: 43). This autochtonisation of Ivorian citizenship in turn made a substantial part of the population feel excluded from its fold. This situation adversely affected the political ambition of Alassane Dramane Ouattara, in that his repeated exclusion from standing in elections in Côte d’Ivoire which, adversely affected his bid for the presidency of the Republic symbolised the injustice of the Ivoirité ideology. The passionate debates that have accompanied that bid only show that this question was the ‘permanent soundtrack’ of the domestic Ivorian political agenda during the 1990s (2004: 36–40).
Whether one claims that French imperialism was at the heart of the war in Côte d’Ivoire, or one believes that the Ivorian conflict is the result of ethnic tensions between indigenes and migrants, over land ownership and citizenship rights, what comes out essentially in these different explanations is the unsettled nature of the nationhood question in Côte d’Ivoire. That such a debate is taking place shows that at a fundamental level, there is a need to understand where the closure of the symbolic field of nationhood starts: As of when are we “insiders” or “outsiders”? Who owns this land? Who is an indigene? Who is a foreigner?

Two central features come out of these sets of explanation of the war, notably the question of the understanding of the place of foreigners in Ivorian society, and the role of France vis-à-vis the Ivorian polity. These in turn bring up the question of migration, which is the story of the flow of people from mostly West African countries into and outside Côte d’Ivoire, during and after the time of the French colonial presence. Due to the historic character of these features that appear to occupy central stage in today’s debate, I have decided to look at them historically, by exploring their connections to the issue of citizenship vested in a nation.

Three episodes for historical reflection

The three episodes are characterised by a public and open affirmation of the higher interest of originaire Ivorian nationals over that of “foreigners.” The inverted commas are an indication that the notion of foreigner changed concomitantly to the different moments of affirmation of “Ivorianness.” An important feature of these moments was the violence that accompanied them. Such violence, pitched “locals” to “foreigners,” and that this did not a priori come from the State as an institution, but from organised interest groups. While the concept of Ivoirité was only coined in 1994, debate and violence around the issue had existed in Côte d’Ivoire since the mid-1930s.

The 1930s: the first episode focuses on the birth of ADIACI (Association pour la Défense des Intérêts des Autochthones de la Côte d’Ivoire). Historians such as Kipré and Tirefort have presented the birth of ADIACI as the earliest manifestation of territorial consciousness in the colony of Côte d’Ivoire, ‘a moment of birth’. Dwayne Woods reads in the emergence of ADIACI and of its sister organisation UFOCI (Union Fraternelle des Originaires de la Côte d’Ivoire) the emergence of what he referred to as a civil society in Côte d’Ivoire (Woods, 1992: 86; 1994). Tirefort claims that the 179 members that the organisation claimed on the day of its official approval, on 19 July 1937 were all regarded as “évolués”, and were in their majority civil servants and employees of the trading sector (2003: 430). What had motivated the coming together of a few people in such an organisation at the time that it did? Why specifically the choice of the word autochthones? What was the climate in the colony at the time for such reactions to take place at all? Is the birth
of ADIACI a reaction, more than an affirmation? What were the activities of this association? What was its relationship to the colonial authorities?

1958–1963: On 24 October, 1958, violent clashes occurred between local Ivoirian people and people from Dahomey (now Benin Republic), Togo and Nigeria, mostly around the city of Abidjan (Tirefort, 2003). A Ligue des Originaires de la Côte d’Ivoire (LOCI) was at the forefront of these riots (Tirefort, 2003; Roger de Benoist, 2003). These ended in the forced repatriation of a little more than 12,000 Dahomeyans, Togolese, Ghanaians and Nigerians from Côte d’Ivoire (Peil, 1971; Skinner, 1963; Challoner, 1979; Roger de Benoist, 2003; Tirefort, 2003; Arnault, 2004). These riots took place in the midst of claims that ‘foreigners’ monopolised several sectors of the economy and the public administration (Skinner, 1963; Challoner, 1979). The political context of the time was dominated by a debate between ‘territorialists’ and ‘federalists’ within the AOF (Afrique Occidentale Française) (Sirieux, 1957; Schachter-Morgenthau, 1964).

Côte d’Ivoire and its political leadership were the leading force behind territorialism; as the richest country of AOF, Ivorians were loath to become the “milking cow” of the entire federation (Baulin, 1982; Amondji, 1985). This attitude pit the Ivoirian political leaders against their colleagues from other AOF territories, like Senghor from Senegal, or Touré from Guinea; moreover it reinforced the impression that Côte d’Ivoire was being ‘invaded’ by other West Africans (Bahi, 2005). A discussion in the wake of independence (7 August 1960) over the attribution of Ivorian citizenship took place, and ended with PDCI opposing Houphouët-Boigny’s plan to extend Ivorian citizenship to all nationals of member states of the Conseil de l’Entre (Amondji, 1986; Bahi, 2005). How much have these debates and violent confrontations influenced the process of legal codification of an Ivorian nationality? What does PDCI’s opposition to Houphouët’s nationality project say about the notion of autochthony at the time of Independence in 1960?

1994–1999: The end of Félix Houphouët-Boigny’s tenure as president of Côte d’Ivoire (1960–1993) was marked by a deep economic and financial crisis. The democratic opening of 1990 came amidst a climate of economic crisis, and an austerity-based reform programmeme administered largely by the Prime Minister Alassane Dramane Ouattara (1990–1993). Under his leadership, the Ivorian State adopted new spending habits, reorganising the networks of political patronage and clientilism in the country. New lines of popular appeal were forged in the face of a legal opposition to the PDCI, the hitherto single party in the country.

In 1994, after he became the President of the Republic of Côte d’Ivoire, Henri Konan Bédié invented the concept of Ivoirité, with the support of Cellule Universitaire pour la Défense et la Promotion des Idées du Président Henri Konan Bédié (CURDIPHE), a group of intellectuals who acted as a think tank around Félix Houphouët-Boigny’s successor. According to its main author, Ivoirité as a concept is supposed to sum up the cultural specificity of the Ivoirian persona: the dressing codes,
the culinary specialties, the music, the languages, etc (Bédié, 1999; Jolivet, 2003). The CURDIPHE thinkers went further and conferred upon Ivoirité the quality of what they referred to as “ivoirien de souche multi-séculaire” (Ivorians whose origins can be traced centuries back) (CURDIPHE, 2000). They declared that true Ivorian-anness inhered in the fact that true Ivorians can all claim to have a village of origin within the borders of Côte d’Ivoire (CURDIPHE, 2000). Naturalised Ivorians, still regarded as Ivorian, could no longer be regarded as ‘true’ Ivorians, according to the ideology of Ivoirité (Tiacoh, 1999; Jolivet, 2003; Arnault, 2004).

The coinciding of the invention and active promotion of this ideology with the elaboration of a new electoral law in 1994, gave a sharper meaning to Ivoirité. The electoral law stipulated that to be a candidate in the presidential election – keeping in mind that the next one was scheduled for 1995 – one had to be an Ivorian born of parents who were themselves Ivorian-born (Konaté, 2002; Marshall-Fratani, 2006). This legal disposition was aimed at Alassane Dramane Ouattara (Coulibaly, 1995; Crook, 1997). He was alleged to have a father who was a migrant from Burkina Faso (Bédié, 1999). This law implied his de facto exclusion from an election in which neither he nor the main opposition parties took part (Crook, 1997; Ouraga, 2000).

From that point on, Ivoirité came to be perceived by many as a deliberate invention on the part of the government to exclude ‘Dioula’ people from the North of Côte d’Ivoire, just like Alassane Ouattara, from the political process, and more generally from the political life of the nation altogether (Vidal, 2002). Dioulas were more and more regarded as ‘Northerners’, and easily mistaken for foreigners, because they share several languages and a religion (mostly Islam) with many of the foreign populations living in Côte d’Ivoire – most foreigners in Côte d’Ivoire are from Burkina Faso and Mali (République de Côte d’Ivoire, 1998).

Africa: A note on citizenship and nationhood

It is important to note that citizenship ought not be exclusively related to nationality or to belonging to a community that associates a layer of an imagined (and assumed) cultural closeness among its members. The debate around citizenship and nationhood in Africa is a very important, though sensitive, issue. In Citizen and Subject (1996), Mamdani sought to explain the current crisis of the State in Africa. He elaborated upon the genesis of the contemporary political institutions through which the State found expression in the continent. His contention among others, was that through the establishment of customary chiefs whose authority was codified in law in the rural areas of the continent (what he calls decentralised despotism), the rural people were reduced to the condition of subjects, whereas citizenship remained characteristic of the settler population, the hallmark of its statutory superiority – a privilege the colonial State could extend to ‘natives’ of its own choosing. This he refers to as the bifurcated state. At the moment of independence, he contends that “the
state apparatus was de-racialised, but not democratised” (Mamdani, 1996: 20). The despotism inherent in the power apparatus of the bifurcated state explains then the current condition of the African State. Citizenship is here understood as the product of particular historical conditions.

Another view on the matter is that of Frederick Cooper, who speaks of the “explosions of citizenship” that animated West Africa during the 1940s. What he is referring to are the different ways in which the workers’ unions based their claims/demands to be given the same social benefits as their metropolitan counterparts (after the Loi Lamine Guèye of 1946 had been passed in the French parliament, an act which granted French citizenship to all people in the French Union). Citizenship in this regard can also mean the guaranteeing of a certain number of material rights to members of a polity by the State (Cooper, 1999.)

Since this study is preoccupied with the link between citizenship and nationality from a historical perspective, it is noted that the character of the African states that came into power after independence played a defining role in either extending or denying citizenship rights to the people. Whichever way it chose to act, such processes took place within the territory of the nation that was inherited from the colonizing power at independence. One of the key principles of the political organisation of the contemporary world is that citizenship is primarily vested in nationality (Brubaker, 1992.)

Concluding remarks: Reconfiguring nationhood?

The foregoing discussion provides some explanation for the outbreak of the civil war in Côte d’Ivoire in September 2002, and also provides a background against which to access the viability prospects of the ongoing peace process since the Ouagadougou Agreement which has resulted in Soro’s appointment as Prime Minister and Gbagbo’s visit to the former rebel stronghold of Bouake on July 30, 2007, to symbolically burn some weapons signifying the end of the war.

The important point to note is that the war was the outcome of social contradictions whose foundations had been laid during the colonial period by French policies directed at the exploitation of the territory and reinforced by the policies of the post-colonial political elite, led by the its first president. An enduring feature of the process was the continuity in the character of the economy, and the connections between politics and economics within the country, and its relations with France.

Even before independence, the notions of nationhood and citizenship had been vigorously contested. Unfortunately, the post-independence Ivorian State, did not pay much attention to these questions, but rather took the inherited colonial state as given, where the president resorted to personal rule, characterised by “ethnic balancing” and a “liberal” policy towards migrant-labour from neighbouring countries to one of the world’s largest producers of cocoa and coffee. The prosperity in the
immediate post-independence period provided temporary respite from the conflictive encounters between indigenes and foreigners. The question of migration raises several questions which all relate to the connection between migration and citizenship, given the history of the various states in the West African region.

The analysis of three episodes has shed some light on how the nationhood question has been confronted at different times in the life of Côte d’Ivoire. It is however important to note that an ‘Ivorian nation’ as such does not exist; in fact the talk of ‘nations’ as real existing entities consists in reifying the idea of nation (Brubaker, 1996: 16). Therefore, it becomes important to talk of nationhood or “nationness,” “as institutionalised form, as a practical category, as a contingent event” (Brubaker, 1996: 17). It is necessary to stress the fact that when ADIACI was born in the 1930s, an independent Côte d’Ivoire did not even belong to the realm of possibility. Yet the reference to the autochtones de la Côte d’Ivoire in itself can be regarded as an event, a moment of “crystallisation” (as opposed to something that gradually develops, like in many accounts of nationalism and the ‘birth of nations’). Brubaker notices that “a theoretically sophisticated eventful perspective on “nationness” and nationalism is today urgently needed...we need to think theoretically about relatively sudden fluctuations in the “nationness” of groups and relational settings” (1996:20–21). For him, it is the only way to understand the processes and dynamics of nationalism, that is, to take nationalism away from the classic ‘developmental’ accounts of its birth and ultimate triumph (or failure), and to understand nationalism as an episode on its own, without a particular sense of its own destiny.

The historicising of these three episodes places itself in Brubaker’s logic and moves away from the sets of explanations of the current crisis that I have re-visited in the course of this analysis. Both the ‘case against France’ and the ‘ethnicity and marginalisation’ views take for granted the actual existence of a ‘nation’; they both proceed from a logic that places the solution of the crisis on the basis of its clearly identified causes. Blé Kessé and Koulibaly implicitly advocate a complete reorganisation of the relations between France and Côte d’Ivoire. Dembéle and Akindès address the construction of the Ivorian State and speak to its ability to account for, embrace and promote difference (cultural, economic) among its citizens. Each position regards itself as a totalising worldview in whose fold the ‘truth’ of the Ivorian conflict lies.

Another reason for exploring these three episodes is that they do not fit the ‘image’ of the ‘pays de l’hospitalité’ proclaimed by the second verse of Côte d’Ivoire’s ‘national’ anthem. What is the historic meaning of Ivorian citizenship (when citizenship is understood as the general criterion for admission as a member of a particular political community)? If after 1960, Ivorian nationality received formal legal accreditation, invested with the responsibility of asserting the existence of the independent sovereign state of Ivory Coast (and from 1985 onwards, Côte d’Ivoire), what are the different historical episodes that foretold its manifestation? Is citizenship an oppor-
tunistic political tool used in accordance with the political favours of the time, or do these reflect deeper social, economic undercurrents? An example when such an instance became acute was in 1990 when Ivorian identity documents were widely distributed to many West African nationals at the behest of the PDCI, so as to allow them to participate in the first multiparty elections in the country since 1957.

The March 2007 peace agreement signed in Ouagadougou between President Laurent Gbagbo and MPCI Secretary General Guillaume Soro poses fresh challenges for peace in the country. The agreement sets out various tasks that are ahead for the protagonists in the conflict: namely, the disarmament of the warring parties, the reunification of the Ivorian territory and the organisation of general elections. It is not the task of a peace agreement to provide clues as to the prospects for nationhood; but it remains to be seen if the current rapprochement between Gbagbo and Soro will act as an impetus that will usher in a new historic era whose hallmark would be an inclusive, equitable, broadly acceptable and peaceful resolution of the critical questions related to citizenship and nationhood in Côte d’Ivoire.

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