Global Africana Review
Vol. 8, Spring 2024

Interrogating the "Ivorian Miracle": From Independence Success to Civil Wars

Yaya Bakayoko

ABSTRACT

Post-colonial Côte d'Ivoire represents the story of an economically prosperous nation succumbing to the negative effects of economic globalization led by the IMF's structural adjustment reforms. Internal divisions over ethnic tensions fueled by the politicization of citizenship and belonging added to this trajectory. From the "Ivorian miracle," an autonomous agricultural economy led by small cocoa farmers, to the country's involvement with the IMF and the push for economic and political liberalization, the post-colonial history of Cote D'Ivoire has included major episodes of turbulence. The introduction of the concept of Ivoirité—a nativist ideology aimed at classifying between native Ivorians and Ivorians with immigrant ancestry with regard to citizenship status and political participation—would cause ethnic and regional tensions in the country to boil over. Françafrique and other myriad forms of neocolonialist politics that ensure the maintenance of French influence in West Africa also undermined the economic development of the Ivorian state. This article focuses on the involvement of international institutions in the post-colonial journey of the Ivorian state, analyzing the discourse of democracy in the African continent, in a state where the fluidity of citizenship and ethnicity has always created tensions and civil wars.

Keywords: Ivorian civil war, CFA franc, structural adjustment plan, neocolonialism, Ivorian miracle

Introduction

As an ex-economic hub of French colonial West Africa, post-independence Côte d'Ivoire represents the paradigm of a brilliant post-colonial model of economic success and development that has fallen into a civil war fueled by ethnic division and flawed economic measures. Once described as the model of development for newly independent states in Africa, Côte D'Ivoire's post-independence history reveals the difficulty faced by new independent states in maintaining economic success and development in a globalized world (Klass 2008). After a decade marked by growing tensions in most African countries in the 1950s, Côte D'Ivoire, like many others in West Africa, gained independence in 1960. With a new air of freedom and a proclaimed desire to catch up to the rest of the world, these newly independent African states wanted to develop and economically flourish like their ex-colonizers.

With no political experience, most African countries in the immediate post-independence period struggled for economic autonomy. Côte d'Ivoire made an exception to this trend, as the country flourished economically in its immediate post-independence period. The "Ivorian miracle," as it is known, was the country's economic boom from the 1960s to 1980. Led by a strong agricultural sector, the country's economy flourished through the production and exportation of cocoa, coffee, and timber. Production and exportation of internationally high-demand cocoa led the country to be economically prosperous, which in turn led it to be presented as the agricultural and economic development model for new independent states in the region. However, after the world economic crisis in the 1970s that severely hit most African countries, Côte d'Ivoire didn't escape the growing involvement of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its financial management. The IMF got involved in Côte D'Ivoire to restore the country's economy and help fight the early economic crisis. The country agreed to its first structural adjustment plan with the World Bank and IMF in 1980 (Custers 2006), which resulted in the consequence of a critical drop in the price of its main agricultural resources, notably cocoa. These new economic reforms, originally meant for a brief period, instead became a long-term part of the Ivorian economy. The structural adjustment plan came with requirements for numerous reforms. As a result, the Ivorian regime, like most African countries indebted to these world economic institutions, faced major pressure to fully democratize and allow multipartyism in the early 1990s. Before multipartyism, Côte D'Ivoire was led by a single party, the PDCI (Democratic Party of Cote D'Ivoire), the stable regime of the country's first president, Félix Houphouët Boigny. The shift to multipartyism and a "democratic" system would become a factor in destabilizing the fragile tribal, ethnic, and religious cohesion in the country. This article analyzes the downward post-independence journey of the Ivorian state: from its economic miracle, led by the mass production and exportation of cocoa, to its experience with IMF's structural adjustment plans and its relationship with former colonial power, France, to the politics leading to its first coup d'état in 1999.

The sudden death of President Houphouët Boigny in 1993, combined with the structural adjustment plan and the disappearance of stable single party rule, created instability at all levels in the country. Structural adjustment plans decreased subsidies and public spending, heightening tensions among the population due to increasing costs and deteriorating services. After Houphouët Boigny's death, a declining economy and ethnic division fueled by new politics of exclusion led to the country's first coup d'état in 1999. Houphouët Boigny's successor, Henry Konan Bedié, was central to fomenting this regional and economic politics of exclusion; the coup that eventually resulted from increased tensions marked the definitive halt of development and the beginning of a long period of instability in the country.

The Ivorian Miracle: A Model of Development for New Independent States

The 1950s marked the last fights for independence among African countries. Commonly referred to as the year of Africa, 1960 brought the acquisition of independence for many African countries. Côte D'Ivoire gained its independence from France on August 7, 1960 and began its development journey of catching up to the rest of the world. While the immediate post-colonial era was very difficult for most newly independent African states, all of which aimed to get their economy going, Côte D'Ivoire surprisingly flourished economically. The country entered a period known as the Ivorian miracle, in which its economy was one of the fastest growing in the world. This sudden economic growth was led by a government supported agricultural sector. Cocoa and coffee, the traditional Ivorian crops, became a source of pride for the country as their production and exportation led to the significant growth of wealth.

Between 1960 and 1979, Côte D'Ivoire registered an average growth rate of 7.3 percent compared to neighboring newly independent states like Senegal, with a rate of 2.5 percent, Sierra Leone, with 1.6 percent, and Ghana, with 0.1 percent (Hecht 1983, 25). This Ivorian economic growth was export led and heavily relied on cocoa and coffee, and it was government policies that encouraged agriculture and accessible cheap labor that facilitated such export-led growth. Smallholder farming became an integral part of the Ivorian economy, as thousands of peasants contributed to agricultural production and economic growth. The government used a set of policies to encourage the expansion of cocoa and coffee production; starting in 1965, for example, the government rewarded farmers with cash bonuses for planting new areas devoted to selected high-yield varieties of cocoa. This measure led to a spectacular increase in cocoa production. In Divo, a traditional cocoa-growing region, for example, 10,450 hectares (amounting to 15 percent of the total area under cocoa production) were planted between 1972 and 1980 under this bonus system (Hecht 1983, 32). It is important to note that this agricultural economic system was financed domestically and did not benefit from monetary assistance from any major international monetary institutions. During this period and prior to structural adjustment measures, the Ivorian government enjoyed full autonomy over how it managed financing and export production in the cocoa industry. In terms of development, the country redistributed the cocoa exportation surplus to other economic sectors and provided subsidies and other public welfare supports. Due to the self-reliance achieved by the Ivorian economy during this period, many international economic and development organizations presented the Ivorian economic strategy as the model for newly independent African states.

The Liberalization of the Ivorian Cocoa Industry: An Inadequate Economic System for a Newly Independent State

Structural adjustment plans are a set of economic reforms to which a country must adhere to get a loan from the World Bank or IMF. Such structural adjustment reforms often set conditions, such as massive cuts to public sector employment, reductions in government public spending and subsidies, increased privatization, and a deregulation of the market (Mkandawire and Soludo 1999; Black 2001). These conditions have often been criticized because of their severe impacts on the public sector. The concept of the structural adjustment plan emerged during a particular point in the World Bank's "Debt and Adjustment Period"; these reforms were popularized in the 1980s as more and more countries from the Global South took loans from the World Bank and IMF to mitigate the global recession and national economic crises (Goldman 2005).

Côte D'Ivoire's first experience with structural adjustment plans came in early 1981, with the massive downturn in cocoa prices in the international market. As a result of the global crisis, the period of economic growth known as the Ivorian miracle came to a full stop by the early 1980s. The Ivorian government went to the IMF for aid in redressing its economy and limiting the impact of the crisis, and the structural adjustment plans imposed on the country would then weaken its economic and political autonomy in multiple ways. The reforms began with large scale privatization, and the cocoa sector was notably affected; since it was composed of smallholder farmers, privatization reforms opened up the export market to multinational corporations. This resulted in unequal market power as small farmers were made to compete with these stronger private corporations (Custers 2006). The state-owned *La Caisse de Stabilization*, a government entity that ensured the regularization of cocoa prices for small farmers, was dismantled due to the liberalization of the market. With virtually no government subsidies, no help in protecting them against private multinational companies, and a volatile international market price, small farmers in the cocoa industry that had once led the country to an economic boom were abandoned. Due to the new economic policies, a small group of multinationals now controlled and set the international cocoa price; the income of both the

Ivorian government and small farmers was drastically decreased as a result. It is estimated that when Côte D'Ivoire engaged with its second structural adjustment plan between 1999 and 2000, the revenue of small farmers in the cocoa industry was cut in half compared to previous years (Custers 2006). Pressure from the IMF and other international financial organizations to liberalize the cocoa market in the 1980s rendered the economy of multiple African nations fragile, notably that of Côte D'Ivoire and Ghana, which had been the African continent's main producers of cocoa. Liberalization and privatization of the cocoa industry hence exacerbated the Ivorian economic crisis rather than attenuating it, and inevitably delivered a bankrupt and needy Ivorian government into the hands of the IMF (Amanor 2020). The state moved from regularizing the cocoa industry, which had enabled the reinvestment of economic surplus from cocoa exports and facilitated the provision of subsidies, to pushing the liberalization of the industry. As a result, the conditions imposed by the IMF weakened the Ivorian economy's autonomy and exposed small cocoa farmers to the greed of stronger and more powerful private multinational cocoa export companies. The replacement of state agencies with private agents and companies with greater market power widened the gap between the farmgate price and the exported cocoa price. These reforms thus weakened the government's power over its own cocoa exportation, as multinationals became the controllers of the country's cocoa export industry (Wilcox and Abbott 2004). Like with many developing nations, the IMF's structural adjustment plans considerably altered the path to an autonomous economy for the Ivorian state, as it was now under the control of the international financial institution and its policies.

Neocolonialism and the Push for Multipartism

The volatility of the international market price of cocoa and the liberalization of the industry were factors that led to the decline of the Ivorian miracle. However, international pressure from former colonial power France and the IMF to adhere to political liberalization, namely multipartism, would become serious additional factors in making the Ivorian state economically and politically vulnerable. After independence, many African states enjoyed single party rule, as leaders of earlier independence movements became leaders of the new free states and stayed in power for multiple decades. As discussed earlier, Ivorian independence movement leader Houphouët Boigny was installed as president of the Republic in 1960. As a plantation owner and part of the small farmer community that had once revolutionized the country's cocoa production, Houphouët Boigny stably ruled the country, leading a single party, PDCI, for three decades. With twenty years of economic prosperity in the country's immediate post-independence period, Houphouet Boigny's rule, although not democratic, was characterized by stability and prosperity. As part of its structural adjustment plan, the IMF required some political reforms, and in the late 1980s, the institution pressured all African states it had become involved with through loans to move toward political liberation and full democratization. By the early 1990s, a movement for multipartyism vibrated across all sub-Saharan African states—the pressures from international powers were increasing and new political minds were emerging. Still recovering from the worldwide recession and its recent economic crisis, the Ivorian government accepted multipartyism under this pressure. Multipartyism in Côte D'Ivoire would render its stability fragile, as political parties gained partisan support through divisive ethnic and religious propaganda. This forced introduction to multipartyism, designed to democratize the country, was in practice superficial, and a facade used by Houphouët Boigny and his government to alleviate the pressure from the IMF and other international powers.

Houphouët Boigny died in 1994 while still in power. This tragic event was seen as an opportunity for multiple political party leaders to fight for the presidency through calls for early and immediate elections. In a country so ethnically diverse as Côte D'Ivoire (with more than sixty different ethnic groups), the newly formed political parties rallied support through appeals to ethnicity and regionalism rather than political reforms, and thus over time played a role in destabilizing the political climate of the country (Klass 2008). The liberalization of the Ivorian political sphere and the cocoa industry through structural adjustment hence undermined the political and economic autonomy of the country, and over time served to undermine its stability.

The CFA Franc and France: Neocolonial Involvement in West Africa

Although it gained independence in 1960, Côte D'Ivoire's post-colonial politics and economy were largely influenced by both the reforms of the IMF and the involvement of former colonial power, France. I contend that the neocolonialism of French economic involvement and the intervention of Western financial institutions in newly independent West African states prevented the full and gradual economic and political development of these states. The politics of *Françafrique*, an institutional system privileging French companies and firms as primary exporters and investors in sub-Saharan francophone African economies, has guaranteed the maintenance of strong French political and economic ties in Africa. Simultaneously, the politics of *Françafrique* prevent the full liberation of former French colonies, limiting their development and accession to full economic autonomy and expansion into other markets worldwide.

The CFA Franc (*Communauté Financière Africaine*) is the currency of two economic zones, the *Communauté de L'Afrique Central* (CEEAC) and the *Union Economique et Monétaires Ouest-Africaine* (UEMOA); the two economic zones are composed of fourteen countries, including Côte D'Ivoire, all of which are former French colonies except Guinea-Bissau. The CFA Franc is printed by the Bank of France and the external convertibility of the currency is guaranteed and determined by the French treasury (Taylor 2019). This means that the CFA Franc currency is French property as it is owned by the French national treasury, thus enabling Paris to decide its value. The French control over the economic fortunes of francophone West African countries has been enmeshed with and part of the Bretton Woods process, which aimed to promote export and open the African economy to the global market. In 1994, in accordance with the IMF, Paris devalued the CFA Franc from 0.002 per French Franc to 0.001 per French Franc. This devaluation was done without the agreement or consultation of Côte D'Ivoire or any members of the CFA economic zone (Taylor 2019).

Through this economic attachment, France undermines the full financial development of these countries. The total absence of autonomous national economic policies in Côte D'Ivoire and members of the CFA zones is a direct consequence of France's role in manufacturing and controlling the value of the CFA Franc. A country's currency and economy are pillars of its development; with an operating mechanism that ensures Paris has leverage over members of the CFA Franc zones, the CFA Franc is an instrument limiting the development of West African countries, while maintaining France's political and economic influence in the continent.

The Concept of Ivoirité: A Politics of Exclusion Causing a Civil War

Numerous examples show how civil wars have destroyed the development of some sub-Saharan African states, with Liberia and Sierra Leone being the most prominent examples in West Africa. Apart from the innocent lives they take, armed conflicts can economically cripple nations for decades; revival from conflicts is often a very slow process, and it is sometimes impossible to recover. The political instability leading to the first Ivorian coup d'état in 1999 and the civil war of 2002 had numerous ingredients: a failed economy, a fragile political scene caused by international actors imposing reforms, and a politics of exclusion based on ethnic differences. The glorious economic period known as the Ivorian miracle had enabled Houphouët Boigny, the country's first president, to unify the nation through the provision of public jobs and subsidies to all citizens, regardless of ethnic or religious differences. During this prosperous era, Côte D'Ivoire welcomed a lot of immigrants, especially those from neighboring Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso, which provided cheap labor for the cocoa and coffee industry. As mentioned earlier, the global crisis in the mid 1970s hit the Ivorian economy hard because of the country's heavy reliance on cocoa and coffee exportation. With the mid 1980s marking the first economic crisis since independence for the Ivorian economy, tensions rose in the country, and those neighbors and immigrants welcomed earlier were now seen as burdens.

The death of President Houphouët Boigny opened up long existing ethnic and regional tensions. Upon his death, a clear regional division was created between those of the North and the South. The North—which is primarily made up of a mix of the Malinke ethnic groups, Muslims, and immigrants from the neighboring countries of Mali and Burkina Faso—was highly marginalized by Henry Konan Bedié, Houphouët Boigny's successor. As Bedié led the transitional period after Houphouët Boigny's death and prepared for the next election, he introduced policies to exclude numerous candidates from the country's northern regions. Bedié introduced the concept of *Ivoirité*: a politicization of citizenship status, aimed at classifying between indigenous Ivoirians and Ivorians with immigrant ancestry. This concept, which was codified into the electoral law, meant that presidential candidates had to have two native Ivorian parents (Bah 2010). This political move was intended to stop Alassane Ouattara, a popular northern political leader who may have had partial ancestry from neighboring Burkina Faso, from participating in the election. Unsurprisingly, this law not only furthered the stigmatization of northerners as immigrants, but it also accused them of being the source of the country's declining economy (Klass 2008).

Stemming from this growing tension between the North and the South—created by the politics of exclusion led by Bedié—the army, led by General Robert Guéi, ousted President Bedié in a coup d'état in 1999. Under international pressure led by France and French multinational export companies that controlled most of the country's cocoa exportation, General Guéi held the country's first election with the law of Ivoirité still in place. The election blatantly favored General Guéi and was criticized by the international community as it was seen as a way for the military to retain power. Facing severe international threats of economic embargo, General Guéi eventually decided to leave the presidential office to election runner-up Lauren Gbagbo. With Lauren Gbagbo as the president and the concept of Ivoirité still in place under the law, the North continued to feel marginalized. With massive support from locals, a rebel group formed by traditional hunters called Dozos in the North gained control of the northern part of the country. By 2002, Côte D'Ivoire had become a divided country, with the South governed by the government of Laurent Gbagbo and the North by the rebels. What had started with a policy of exclusion targeting the rise of northerner political leaders turned into an armed conflict that divided the country in two, definitively stopping the country's hope of reviving its past economic glory. Although the economic crisis had led to tensions between different ethnic groups that boiled over, Bedié's concept of Ivoirité and his politics of exclusion aimed at immigrants, accusing northerners of being responsible for the destruction of the Ivorian miracle, were the ultimate factors that led to the country's first civil war.

The first Ivorian civil war started in 2002 and would last about half a decade, costing thousands of human lives and destroying the nation's development. Under tremendous international pressure, the government of Laurent Gbagbo would organize a presidential election in 2010, in which all major political leaders of the country, including Alassane Ouattara, would be given a chance to participate. At the end of the 2010 presidential election, Alassane Ouattara, the political leader once banned because of suspicion that he had foreign ancestry, emerged victorious. Alassane Ouattara's victory would be highly contested, with his opponent, President Gbagbo, refusing to accept the results and leave the presidency. The post-election period in 2010 again brought Côte D'Ivoire to a time of violence, with another civil war fueled by politicians playing with the fragile ethnic, regional, and religious tensions between the north and the south of the country.

Conclusion

Moving from an economic miracle to economic collapse and political disaster, Côte D'Ivoire has undergone a tormented history, yet one common to post-colonial African states. From its independence to the present moment, the country has been subject to multiple external influences that have not always been beneficial for its stability. Before its association with the IMF, the country enjoyed some political and economic autonomy that created a period of economic boom shortly after its independence. I have shown here that although internal politics played a role, the path of the Ivorian state has been largely determined by external influences. Economically, the IMF structural adjustment plans stripped the country of its autonomy. The liberalization of the cocoa industry in favor of private multinationals destroyed small farmers' cocoa production and exportation. The massive cutting of government expenditures and subsidies imposed as part of the structural adjustment reform caused youth employment to die out, leading to the rise of nativism and an acute dislike of immigrants.

Still part of the external influences dictating the Ivorian post-colonial path, France has been continuously involved in the country's politics and economy, undermining its autonomy and preventing its full development. The CFA Franc has been a tool of neocolonialism, well used by Paris to maintain greater political and economic influence in the Ivorian state and other former French colonies in Africa. Internally, certain politics have threatened the nation's stability. Henry Konan Bedié's concept of *Ivoirité* has been influential in dividing the country—added to a struggling economy, these circumstances have favored the outbreak of a civil war. The revival of the Ivorian economy with current president Alassane Ouattara highly depends on the strength of the country's reconciliation process. The South and the North, the Christians and the Muslims, and all the different ethnic groups must become one for Côte D'Ivoire to fully regain its prosperity and achieve lasting economic autonomy.

References

Amanor, Kojo. 2020. "Transnational Corporations, Financialization and Community Development in West African Cocoa." *Community Development Journal* 56 (1): 59–78. https://academic.oup.com/cdj/article-abstract/56/1/59/5934783?redirectedFrom=fulltext&login=false.

Bah, Abu Bakarr. 2010. "Democracy and Civil War: Citizenship and Peacemaking in Côte d'Ivoire." *African Affairs* 109 (437): 597–615. https://www-jstor-org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/stable/40928365.

Black, Stephanie. 2001. *Life & Debt*. New York Film Release. A Tuff Gong Pictures Production. Video, 1:20. https://uncch.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=c2d7374f-7943-4715-832e-ad7a00ee8740.

Custers, Peters. 2006. "Globalisation and War in Ivory Coast." *Economic and Political Weekly* 41 (19): 1844–46. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4418197?casa_token=jf6y_HZN6pIAAAAA%3ABfIHuWRN6Ak8ustg8F_kpbOgIHp_OlgT2QYFCsOPnI7BlDyIAl4g2qko4QC5pDaDrOsoEkC7gc07FinhjUZp4Joe1LVa4k7B8b8bSYpv6wMTLcZCMz4.

Goldman, Michael. 2005. *Imperial Nature: The World Bank and Struggles for Social Justice in the Age of Globalization.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1nq3np.

Hecht, Robert M. 1983. "The Ivory Coast Economic 'Miracle': What Benefits for Peasant Farmers?" *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 21 (1): 25–53. https://www-jstor-org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/stable/160615.

Klass, Brian. 2008. "From Miracle to Nightmare: An Institutional Analysis of Development Failures in Côte d'Ivoire." *Africa Today* 55 (1): 109–26. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/250682.

Mkandawire, Thandika, and Charles Soludo. 1999. *Our Continent, Our Future: African Perspectives on Structural Adjustment*. Africa World Press. Trenton, NJ: International Development Research Center. https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/a61212cf-edc1-4066-8967-1f50e04b29a5/content.

Taylor, Ian. 2019. "France à fric: The CFA Zone in Africa and Neocolonialism." *Third World Quarterly* 40 (6): 1064–88. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01436597.2019.1585183.

Wilcox, Michael, and Philip Abbott. 2004. "Market Power and Structural Adjustment: The Case of West African Cocoa Market Liberalization." Paper presented at the American Agricultural Economics Association Annual Meeting, Denver, Colorado, August 1–4, 2004. https://ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/20084/?v=pdf.