

Even the Stones are Burning: Explaining the Ethnic Dimensions of the Civil War in Côte d'Ivoire*

Isiaka Alani Badmus

Independent Researcher / Consultant Based in Lagos, Nigeria

Telephone: +234-8038034974 +234-8073561903, **E-mail:** <isiakabad@excite.com>
<badmus_in_nigeria@yahoo.co.uk>

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ABSTRACT This article analyses the current civil conflict in the once oasis of peace and haven of political stability within the West African sub-region, Côte d'Ivoire, and specifically looks at the ethnic dimensions of the war. It commences with the discussions of the historical and other backgrounds to the current political cataclysm by scrutinising the ethnic composition of the country within the context of the migratory waves of the pre- and post-independence period. This is followed by the analysis of the impacts of ethnicity on the management of ethnic pluralism especially during the First Republic and the birth of the xenophobic ideology of Ivoirité as antecedent to the current socio-political upheaval. Finally, the article recommends and argues strongly that since ethnicity is at the root of the Ivorian civil conflict, de-ethnicisation of politics will serve as appropriate therapy for a conflict-free Côte d'Ivoire where Ivorian, irrespective of his/her ethnic and religious backgrounds, will be seen and regarded as genuine and bonafide citizen of the country.

I. PROLEGOMENA

With the 19 September, 2002 failed coup d'état and the rebellion that later followed, Côte d'Ivoire, the once haven of political stability and oasis of peace within the West African sub-region, joined the unenviable ranks of war-torn African countries where the Hobbesian state of nature looks like paradise. The current civil war that pit the government of President Laurent Gbagbo against the rebels¹ on the one hand, and the frictions between the party in power, the *Front populaire ivoirien (FPI)* against other political parties² on the other, spells doom for the country with negative repercussions on the neighbouring countries. The socio-political crisis in the country is a product of history that transcends the colonial period. This article aims at informing the proper understanding of the roots of the current political upheavals that have beset the country since 24 December, 1999 when Côte d'Ivoire lost its political virginity consequent on the democratic reversal conditioned by the military takeover³. While a great deal of literature has explored different aspects of the crisis (Akindès 1996, 2000, 2001, 2003a, b, 2004, *passim*; Campbell 2002, and 2003; Chappell 1989; Contamin and Memel-Foté 1997; Coulibaly 2000; Curdiphe 2000; Dozon 2000; Serhan 2002; Vidal 2002; Zongo 2003; Kodjo 1996; Banegas and Losch 2002; Ogunmola and Badmus

2004a, b, *passim* 2005)⁴, the point of departure of this paper is to focus on the ethnic dimensions of the civil conflict. Why focusing on ethnicity? The not too far-fetched answers will be revealed as we tackle the central thesis of this discourse; that the ethno-nationalist civil conflict is symptomatic of the contradictions inherent in the hierarchical classifications of the various ethnic nationalities within the Ivorian society by the narrow-minded, ethnic conscious political elites. This was compounded by President Félix Houphouët-Boigny's 'policy of openness' and 'model of compromise'⁵ which became problematic and tottering at the dawn of the 1990s, and the increased demand for the democratisation of the Ivorian political field conditioned first, by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the ideological Cold War, and second, *La Baule*⁶ Francophone summit in 1990 (Nwokedi 1993: 419-421; Amuwo 1993: 11-13).

Based on the above, we seek to fathom the imperatives of ethnicity in the current Ivorian socio-political quagmire. Second, the article focuses on the xenophobic ideology of *Ivoirité* (Ivorian-ness) which one scholar of refers to as the "specific expression of the re-invention of a collective Ivorian persona, in reaction to the effect of more than three decades of economic openness, which had served to neutralise the expression of any specific identity" (Akindès

2004: 6). Third, what connotation can be found in the escalation of violence in Côte d'Ivoire? Is the fratricidal war indicative of the delegitimisation or better still deconstruction of Houphouëtism? These and other questions represent the express concerns of this article. In order to set about its task, this article is divided into six broad sections beginning with the introduction, which discusses the background issues. This is followed by the section on the ethnic composition and diversity of Côte d'Ivoire. It examines the historical and other backgrounds to the current political cataclysm by scrutinising the ethnic composition of the country within the context of the migration waves of the pre- and post-independence Côte d'Ivoire. The third and fourth, which are the analytical sections of this paper, discuss the impacts of ethnicity on the management of ethnic pluralism within the Ivorian society under the presidency of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, and the origin of *Ivoirité* in the post-Houphouët-Boigny era respectively. The section that follows is on the impacts of the xenophobic ideology on the Ivorian political arena as antecedent to the present socio-political disorder. This is then followed by conclusion, summarises knots up my arguments, and proffers ways towards de-ethnicisation of the Ivorian polity as a therapy for political stability, peace and progress.

II. CÔTE D'IVOIRE: ETHNIC COMPOSITION AND DIVERSITY

Côte d'Ivoire, a Francophone country of 16 million inhabitants that covers a total land area of 322,460 sq. km., shares international borders with Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea, Liberia and the Atlantic ocean in the East, Northeast, Northwest, West, and South respectively. It is a country built by France and harbours over 20,000 French nationals. Côte d'Ivoire became a sovereign state on 7 August, 1960 with Félix Houphouët-Boigny as its first president. The country has about 80 indigenous ethnic diverse groups (David 1986: 16). This ethnic mosaic can be further grouped into four clusters of diverse ethnic groups by classifying small units together on the basis of cultural and historical affinities. Hence, four major cultural regions abound, viz, the Kwas or the Akan group (the East Atlantic region/culture); the Mandé; the Krou (the West Atlantic region/culture); and the Voltaic people

collectively known as Gur⁸ (Akindès 2004: 12; David 1986: 16-18; Ogunmola and Badmus 2004b: 33, 2005: 214). Analysing Côte d'Ivoire's ethnic configurations further, the Akan of the East Atlantic region are believed to be descendants of 18th century migrants from the Ashanti Kingdom in present day Ghana (*Jeune Afrique L'Intelligent*: 4 January, 2003: 41). The Baoulé, the dominant ethnic group among the Akan peoples constitute nearly 15% of the total population followed by the Agni ethnic group who represent 3% of the population. It is fascinating that the much larger Akan are also found in Ghana and Togo. A more accurate and detailed account of other ethnic groups is provided by Arnaud (1983: 27):

Smaller groups in the southern lagoon region, where contact and intermarriage between the Akan and earlier inhabitants have resulted in ways of life that reflect elements of several cultural traditions. These Lagoon cultures comprise about 5% of the populations. They depend on fishing and crop cultivation for subsistence and are not organised polities above the village level. Across the Bandama River, the West Atlantic cultures are represented by Kru peoples, probably the oldest of Côte d'Ivoire's present-day ethnic groups. Traditional Kru societies were organised into villages relying on hunting and gathering for subsistence and descent groups tracing relationships through male forebare. They rarely formed centralised chiefdoms. The largest Kru population in Côte d'Ivoire is the Bété, who made up about 6% of the population in the 1980s. In the North, cultural differences are greater than in the South. Descendants of early Mandé conquerors occupy territory in the northwest, stretching into northern Guinea and Mali. The nation of Mali took its name from one of the largest of these societies, the Malinké. In the 1980s, Mandé peoples—including the Malinké, Bambara, Juula, and smaller related groups—made up about 17% of the population of Côte d'Ivoire. To the east of the Mandé are the Voltaic peoples. The most numerous of these, the Sénoufo, made up about 10% of the population in the 1980s. The Sénoufo migrated to their present location from the northwest in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Both historical periods are still in evidence in two forms of social organisation found in the area—one based on small descent groups and the other on more complex confederations to those of the Mandé⁹.

Geographically and culturally, in the southern half of the country, each of the Akan and Krou cultures constitutes almost a third of the indigenous population, while about one-third of the indigenous population lives in the North also including, of course, the Voltaic people in the northeast and Mandé in the northwest. This plural ethnic configurations sooner or later become the sledgehammer that causes frictions in the Ivorian society that later crept into the political landscape of the country. The reason for this is very simple and straight forward. In Côte d'Ivoire, as with other African countries, national boundaries are the products and impacts of colonialism as much as present-day political reality, bringing nationalism into protracted and long conflict with centuries of evolving ethnic identification. Each of Côte d'Ivoire's large cultural groupings has strong cultural and social ties with people in neighbouring countries. These centrifugal pressures provided a challenge to political leaders in the 1980s, as they did to the Governors of the former French colony (Library of Congress 1998). Ethnic group like the Baoulé of the Akan group easily identify themselves as genuine Ivorians, while others, especially those from the North or even bearing Muslim names are sometimes associated with Burkina Faso, Mali, or Guinea roots. The *raison d'être* is that such names, according to the ethnic conscious elites raise doubt over their (northerners) genuineness as Ivorian citizens. Apparently, this arises from the fact that migrant labourers from those areas also bear, in most cases, the same names with those groups of the North. Indeed, this constitutes the main argument of northerners who feel that they are considered or treated like second class citizens. The northerners believe that their nationalities have become a subject of legal dispute since the demise of Félix Houphouët-Boigny in 1993. The overbearance of Houphouët-Boigny on the political life of Côte d'Ivoire overshadowed this inclination among the advocates of the "son of the soil" dogma. In a nutshell, the seeds of xenophobia were already sown in the Ivorian society before independence as we shall see in detail later.

As already adumbrated, Côte d'Ivoire is a former French colony and the French colonial policy had fundamental impacts on the country's socio-political history. For economic and other

gains, on 5 September, 1932 the territories of the present day Côte d'Ivoire was merged with Southwest Upper Volta (known at that time as Upper Côte d'Ivoire) and facilitated by the good road and railways networks between the North and the South. The situation remained the same until 4 September, 1947 when France abrogated the former decree and re-established the colony of Upper Volta but "the Southwest Upper Volta was shared out among the colonies of Niger, the French Sudan (Mali), and Côte d'Ivoire" (Bâ 1996: 423). This exercise resulted from the fact that there were no well-defined frontiers between and among the colonial territories at that epoch. This setting often caused "frequent and unnecessary conflicts between the Governors of different territories over the exact boundaries between them" (Bathily 2003: 97). As I have argued with one scholar elsewhere (Ogunmola and Badmus, 2004 b), this confusion in the outlines of geographic configurations saw the various ethnic groups of the Upper Volta, the French Sudan (Mali), and those of the northern part of Côte d'Ivoire overlapping between the post colonial states. The above scenario is exemplified by the fact that, "the Kingdom of Kong was founded by Alassane Ouatarra's ancestors [precisely, Sekou Ouatarra]. It stretched over territories that are between Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Burkina Faso, spanning the 17th Century" (Bathily 2003: 97). Evidently, Africa's colonial overlords failed to regard the ethno-historical compositions of their suppressed hosts in the course of their arbitrary partitioning of their polities, thus causing the present bitterness, as acknowledged by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the forerunner of the African Union (AU). As Foltz and Imobighe separately observed (Foltz, 1998: 95-97; Imobighe, 1989: 16-18), this has underlined Africa's frequent frictions that are often exacerbated by the occurrence of natural resources and the earlier noted contestation of the indigeneity status of people that reside around the borders in spite of profound cultural characteristics.¹⁰

III. CÔTE D'IVOIRE: THE MANAGEMENT OF ETHNIC PLURALISM IN THE FIRST REPUBLIC

As we stressed above, Côte d'Ivoire, like many other post-colonial African countries, is a plural society and the management of this ethnic

diversity poses mammoth task for the Ivorian government to achieve political stability and social harmony. The first Ivorian leader, the father of the nation, Félix Houphouët-Boigny is of Baoulé ethnic group of the Akan origins, and he “based his power on the myth of the higher meaning of the state to the specific ethnic group to which he belonged” (Akindès 2004: 12). This legend tends to justify his enigmatic posture and served as the foundation of his propensity to rule other ethnic groups in the country. This myth that ostensibly lacks any official documentation, rests on the dual foundation of “the ethno-centric ideology of the state and the aristocratic ideology of the ethnic group” (Mamel-Foté 1999). This parole and informal ideology that was based on ‘contested’ anthropological arguments sooner or later formed the bedrock of the Ivorian political ideology as encapsulated by Houphouëtism and the copestone of the management of social diversity¹¹. This allegory has configured the country’s social image and determined the course of power in Côte d’Ivoire.

What is particularly striking is that, the myth of the Akan hegemony lacked any legal or historical basis. Going back into history, the foundation of this legitimating myth is well embedded in pseudoscientific colonial legacy ranking the ethnic groups on the basis of the existence of the state, and the development of writing and of books. Though the Akan occupied the middle between the superior Mandé and the rather inferior Krou, it is believed that this is a myth based on the deliberate distortion of reality by members of the Akan political class during the period of decolonisation. This self alteration of history repositioned the groups so that henceforth, the Akan are at the zenith of the new hierarchy, followed by the Mandé group, while the Krou occupy the nadir. Disputing the historical justification of the Akan hegemony and supremacy over other ethnic groups, Memel-Foté (1999: 25) contends that:

The state-centered focus of the Akan militants does not appear to be well founded. In the first instance, the Akan state experience comes relatively late in the history of West Africa region in general and in the pre-colonial history of Côte d’Ivoire in particular.....Secondly, the state in West Africa has no universality either in the Mandé world or in the Akan world....Thirdly, from the normative point of view, the Akan states, both in their expansionism and their domination

of their subjects, have demonstrated the same types of violence and succeeded in the same types of endeavour as the Mandé and the Gur; they do not appear to present a model more humane in anyway than the Mandé and Gur models. On the contrary, because they were polytheists up till colonisation, they never stopped practicing human sacrifice, rites that were abolished in the Muslim Mandé world centuries ago. They share this practice with age-class societies.

A critical review of Memel-Foté’s argument reveals a vivid picture; that the present day self-acclaimed Akan superiority and propensity to rule other ethnic groups is of recent origin and lacks any historical substantiation. For perfect control of national public life, the ruling party, PDCI-RDA under Houphouët-Boigny instrumentalised authoritarianism, thereby, subjected both men and institutions to manipulation and curtailed democratic values. Furthermore, rival political parties were banned and by the timely strategy of co-opting the leaderships of potentially dissident ethnic groups by incorporating them into the party or governmental bureaucracy¹² and the Ivorian political space was greatly reduced. The ill treatment meted to the Sanwi people is a case in point of Houphouët-Boigny’s authoritarianism. The Sanwi people:

belong to the Agni grouping and related to the Ashanti in the neighbouring Ghana. They had a separate state government and king before the arrival of the European. The French recognised the separate identity of the people when they established a protectorate over them in 1843 by keeping the kingship intact..... Fearful of his status in an evolving Ivory Coast [Côte d’Ivoire], the ruler of Sanwi requested an autonomous status in 1959. France rejected the separatist request, and a group of people set up a government in exile in Ghana. Houphouët-Boigny, who was the Prime Minister, reacted vigorously by arresting the king and other members of the elite. The leader was sentenced to 10 years in prison. Houphouët-Boigny proclaimed that any treaties the French may have signed with the Sanwi state were henceforth invalid (Rubin and Weinstein 1977: 171-172).

Memel-Foté (1999: 26) gives a twin account of the authoritarianism under President Houphouët-Boigny, especially the immediate post-independence era. At independence in 1960, the:

Authoritarian part-legal, part-political measures that the PDCI-RDA autonomous

government had set up changed the nature of the tutelary state, which became a monolithic and despotic 'sovereign' state. While they provided relative economic growth in Côte d'Ivoire, these aspects were disproportionately accentuated. The Anyi people in Sanwi, accused of wanting to 'detach themselves' from Côte d'Ivoire to escape Baoulé hegemony, were subjected to a long martyrdom, the history which has still to be written. Even more barbarous repression was experienced by Bété of the Guébié de Gagnoa sub-region, who were criminalised for being followers of citizen Jean-Christophe Kragbé Gnabé, who had founded a legal, but non-recognised, political party. From 1959 to 1967, three false plots, which were to be followed later by other plots in the army and the police, were the pretext to remove the most valued leaders of the PDCI-RDA, mainly Mandé and Krou in origin, and both young and old. Here again, this despotism and its obvious expansion bore the same defining mark, that Félix Houphouët-Boigny, who never concealed his Baoulé origins and the Akan culture, to which he constantly referred in political speeches.

It is obvious that the self re-writing of history, especially the hierarchical classification of various ethnic groups, has serious implications for the Ivorian society as it deeply entrenched animosity that polarised the country. This new ranking emphasised a sense of *Us/Them* dichotomy by attaching strong sentiments to psychological or biological factors, which have primary significance to the formation of a sense of belonging, in-group identity and solidarity among the members of their group. The erection of a positive image of self as against other groups is often been justified based on argument that construct virtues of the Akan while de-legitimises, or at best exposes the vices of other ethnic groups¹³. However, it is to Houphouët-Boigny's credit that he successfully managed this ethnic pluralism during his long reign that spanned over three decades (1960-1993).

IV. CÔTE D'IVOIRE, MIGRANTS, AND THE BIRTH OF XENOPHOBIC IDEOLOGY

The problems engendered by Côte d'Ivoire's complex sociological configurations and the tensed relationship that ensued between and among different ethnic nationalities were compounded by the massive presence of immigrants in the country. The presence of these

foreigners is a product of history. During the colonial period, Côte d'Ivoire was developed as, with massive investment in agriculture and basic infrastructures, the economic nerve-centre of France in West Africa. Focus on agriculture that was backed by external funds created cynosure for regional factors of production—labour, capital and other technical know-how—to converge at Côte d'Ivoire. After independence, President Félix Houphouët-Boigny continued the French colonial development policy for the country and this policy yielded handsome dividends. First, both skilled and unskilled labour were attracted to Côte d'Ivoire. Second, this massive migration changed the demographic structure of the country where foreigners constitute about 26.03% of Ivorian population¹⁴ principally from Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria (See Table under the heading notes). Third, for economic reasons, there was internal migration notably the Malinké, known as Djoula who moved from the North to the South and settled down as farm workers in the cocoa, coffee, banana, and pineapple plantations. The state policy of the PDCI-RDA was to encouraged a 'land rush' mentality. This is taken to mean that the land belongs to those who cultivate it. This did not go well for the immigrants as the policy fueled increasing sense of grievance on the part of the indigenous landholders of the cocoa producing areas towards the incoming migrants and in opposition to the ruling PDCI-RDA order. The overall implication of this is that "economic migrations that lead to long-term settlements allow [us] to predict that the natural outcome will be an intermixing of ethnic groups, an intermixing with highly topical political consequences in Côte d'Ivoire today" (Akindès 2004: 10). Still on the economy, Côte d'Ivoire experienced spectacular annual rise in its Gross National Product (GNP) that is comparable to some industrialised countries of the world at that time¹⁵. This, coupled with adverse socio-political and economic situations that affected most of the West African states, especially the drought in the Sahel and economic crises that rocked two sub-regional giants—Ghana and Nigeria in 1970 and 1980 respectively, further reinforced Côte d'Ivoire's status as an economic hub of the West African sub-region. In this regard, it is worth citing Akindès work in extenso:

While in the colonial period, the motives for migration were mainly economic, after the

granting of independence, labour migration increased as a result of the economic euphoria of the 1970s and 1980s. A factor that contributed to this new flow of people towards Côte d'Ivoire was the political instability in neighbouring countries (Burkina Faso, Bénin, Mali, Niger, Togo) and, above all, the agro-climatic uncertainties in the countries of the hinterland (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger). Attracted by the possibility of agricultural work, whether paid or not, the people of the Sahel made their way to Côte d'Ivoire and settled in regions with the greatest agro-economic potential. The 1998 census shows that the Ivorian regions with the highest rates of immigration are Sud-Comoé (25%), Bas-Sassandra (24.7%), Moyen-Cavally (22.4%), Moyen-Comoé (22.1%) and Haut-Sassandra (17.6%). As these figures show, in four of these regions international immigrants constituted more than one-fifth of the population. The common characteristic of these regions is that they are all in the forest zone.

On the political terrain, President Boigny's integrationist policy gave him a personal prestige and Côte d'Ivoire economic prosperity and political stability and the country became a force to be reckoned with within the West African sub-region. Boigny's policy of openness to the outside world enhanced his political quality as migrants became sympathetic to his cause. Not only that the immigrants equated Côte d'Ivoire with Houphouët-Boigny, the personnalification of the state and its apparatus was seen as 'legitimate' since he brought independence to the country. Virtually his fellow countrymen felt indebted. The recognition of this 'moral debt' was expressed by unalloyed supports for the president and his party, the PDCI-RDA (Ogunmola and Badmus 2005: 219; Bakary 1991). Not only this, by promoting French culture and policy in Africa, the father of the Ivorian nation, gained the support of France whose army, indifferent to the ethnic politics in Côte d'Ivoire, gave him the military support to contain dissensions in his domain. The French military presence provided a cover and a secured atmosphere in which arbitrary rule, tyranny and massive corruption and its natural concomitant, the absence of transparency, flourished (Turkson 2000: 2003). The economic euphoria of the Boigny's years, backed up with the massive presence of migrant workers unwittingly blindfolded the society that Côte d'Ivoire was already a xenophobic society. So

this assertion leads us to some fundamental questions; (1) What actually went wrong in Côte d'Ivoire?, (2) When and why did ethnicity come to the fore in the Ivorian society? or, when did the Ivorian society start experiencing the fears of others/foreigners and the destruction of its cosmopolitanism? As a matter of fact, the forerunners of the xenophobic trend began towards the tail end of colonialism in Côte d'Ivoire when the *Association pour la défense des Intérêts des Autochtones de Côte d'Ivoire* (ADIACI) condemned the French colonial policy of recruitment into the colonial civil service. This became a hot issue when ethnicity assumed an alarming dimensions with the 1958 riots during which *Dahomeans* (i.e nationals of present day Benin Republic) were selectively attacked. However, the ascension of Félix Houphouët-Boigny doused the tension after a purge in the civil service (Dozon, 2000). However, the prolonged downturn of the economic fortunes of Côte d'Ivoire that also coincided with the demise of Houphouët-Boigny as a guarantor of social harmony signaled the end of the paternalistic and clientelist system. In *addendum*, I contend that the politics of succession of Houphouët-Boigny brought forth ethnicity as a rallying point for the Ivorian political class. It was in this tortuous way to fill the vacant presidential seat that the advocates of *Ivoirité* conceived the concept as a barrier to overcome in the socio-political ladder. *Ivoirité* was oiled by the new policy of residential permit that was institutionalised by the former Prime Minister Alassane Dramane Ouattara (popularly known as ADO) by his supporters—the Alassanists¹⁶. As hinted at earlier on, discerning an Ivorian from his fellow Africans in the neighbouring countries, especially the Dioula from Mali and Burkina Faso, is a huge task. Therefore, the northern population became frustrated as they were regularly harassed. Another set of problems emerged with as regarding the status of foreigners whose descendants were given Ivorian citizenship. The doctrine of *Ivoirité* makes a sharp distinction between those that are considered bonafide Ivorian owing to their origins and birth and "others", i.e., foreigners

The 'Ivoirité': A Destructive Ideology of Political Exclusion

The state sponsored ethno-nationalist ideology of 'Ivoirité' was conceived and became

popular under President Henri Konan Bédié who succeeded Félix Houphouët-Boigny after initial power tussle and personality clash with ADO. The ideology of '*Ivoirité*', in which the concept of citizenship is central, is taken to imply 'ideal Ivorian' or 'undiluted blood'. Jean- Pierre Dozon (2000) puts it thus:

The ideology of Ivoirité had a bicephalous internal component. For northerners, it called into question their origin, or rather something that would make it floating or doubtful and suitable to make the second class citizens: which the Islamic oBédiénce of the majority often seemed to confirm by identifying them tendentiously of being stateless persons.

The other side of the ideology of *Ivoirité* is its selective nature within the southern population where the Akan was adjudged the best to rule according to a nebulous classification that was deeply rooted in the colonial policy. Against the above background, it is apparent that *Ivoirité* was conceived and deeply designed purposely as a strategy of political exclusion with the self serving interests of protecting the Akan hegemony and the domination of political power by the Baoulé to the exclusion of others. The ideology was later increased in popularity and was officially recognised with its approval by the July 2000 referendum under General Robert Guéi who came to power consequent on 24 December, 1999 coup d'état that kicked PDCI-RDA and its candidate President Henri Konan Bédié out of power. Public reactions were very hostile from the North for, it was seen as an attempt to scheme them out of Ivorian politics. The politics of *Ivoirité* is fascinating and/or at best incredible. This is because in other societies where ethno-nationalism sprang up, state took serious measures to curb its effects but in the Ivorian case it was the state itself that initiated this destructive policy/ doctrine purposely to retribalise the Ivorian political space and discourse. This ideology is traceable to a group of 'political' scholars/jobbers based at *Cellule Universitaire de Recherche et de Diffusion des Idées et Actions Politiques* of President Henri Konan Bédié (CURDIPHE). CURDIPHE published a manifesto entitled: '*Ivoirité* or the Spirit of President Henri Konan Bédié's New Social Contract'. Consequently, it is not a surprise why one Ivorian ethno-sociologist, Georges Niangoran Bouah refers to *Ivoirité* as a set of socio-historical, geographical and linguistic data that allow Ivorians to say authori-

tatively that an individual is a citizen of Côte d'Ivoire or an Ivorian (Niangoran-Bouah 1996: 45-52). The person who asserts his/her *Ivoirité* is expected to have the state called Côte d'Ivoire as his/her country, be born of Ivorian parent native to one of the numerous ethnic groups native to Côte d'Ivoire. Let it be clearly understood that the proponents of the Ivoiritarian project are convinced beyond reasonable doubt that President Félix Houphouët-Boigny's policy of openness to the outside world has created unwanted difficulties where it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish precisely the "original component". In a nutshell, the supporters of ethno-nationalism make a clear cut dichotomy between the southern population that are regarded as "genuine" Ivorian (*Les Autochtones*) and the people from the North that are largely regarded as "foreigners" (*Les Allogènes*).

V. FORWARD MARCH, STOP, ABOUT FACETURN: "IVOIRITÉ", POLITICS AND THE IGNITION OF CIVIL WAR IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

As already implied, the rhetoric of *Ivoirité* started with Henri Konan Bédié purposely to exclude his principal political opponent ADO from contesting the October and December 1995 presidential and parliamentary elections. But, it is disheartening that the Ivorian political class learnt virtually nothing from the political violence that marred the 1995 elections. Instead of Henri Konan Bédié to have addressed the citizenship issue and more importantly to liberalise the political arena so as to allow the oppositions to participate, he failed to do so. Contrarily, Bédié reinforced ethno-nationalism, this time with tribal colouration that effectively narrowed the already reduced political sphere. According to Losch (2000: 208, cited in Campbell 2003):

The president's lack of political legitimacy that is linked to the absence of electoral competition in the 1995 elections—because of the first exclusion of Ouattara and the boycott by the opposition—the questioning of the economic bases of political power through liberalisation and the disengagement of the state, and the end of the Cold War, resulted in an ideological drift ('fuite idéologique') of the regime towards ethno-nationalism. The focusing of the political debate on the theme of Ivoirité,

by favouring a *repli identitaire* (a retreat into identity), has drastically reduced the possibilities for adjustment to the new challenges.

What is particularly striking in the quotation above is the extent to which the Bédié-led government was so indifferent to the burning issue of *Ivoirité* in Côte d'Ivoire. Under President Henri Konan Bédié, political class, especially the PDCI-RDA exploited ethnic divisions to oust rivals, used the states apparatuses at their disposal to repress opponents and incited hatred and fear among the population. President Bédié's campaign of ethnic 'cleansing' led to the removal of most, if not all, people from the North from major positions in all sectors of Côte d'Ivoire. Examples abound: Abdou Traore, a first class sociologist and formerly employed at UNESCO was relieved of his post within the organisation. Ali Coulibaly was also fired as the principal television broadcaster, not forgetting General Abdoulaye Coulibaly who was also fired as ComMandér of the Ivorian Air Force. These people were subsequently replaced by people from the Baoulé ethnic group to which the president belongs (The Washington Times, Oct., 10, 1996: A17). This led to the disengagement of sizeable party members who found solace in other political parties, such as RDR, etc. ADO, the leader of one of the most important opposition parties (RDR) was disqualified from the contest by the electoral commission on the grounds that he is a foreigner. ADO was accused of being a foreigner that had taken up the post of Governor of Francophone Central Bank, *Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* (BECEAO) headquartered in Dakar, Senegal, as a Burkinabe. To worsen the situation, in addition to the xenophobic crusade was the land issue. Some foreigners became landowners according to the Status of the 1935 colonial law. To the detriment of some foreigners they had not strictly adhere to the law regarding the ownership of the land as they had settled, in most cases, for a traditional system of land ownership which the post-colonial state did not sanction (On the Issue of Land, read: Volker Stam 2000). In actual fact, Article 26 No. 98-750 of the land ownership law made it abundantly clear that those that had inherited the land could be dispossessed of it three years after the demise of the person who had purchased the land (Schwartz 2000: 63). The land issue became a thorny matter when those Ivoirians from

the Southwest that had gone for greener pastures to the capital city returned virtually empty-handed owing to the biting effects of the Ivorian economic slump. The returnees, psychologically armed with the doctrine of *Ivoirité* targeted the immigrant farmers. Incidentally they were mainly Burkinabe. This exacerbated the victimisation of the Burkinabe who were perceived to be sympathetic to the cause of ADO (The Guardian: 26 January, 2003: 7).

The inaction of the Bédié government to find ways of resolving the thorny issue of *Ivoirité* momentarily rocked Côte d'Ivoire to its very foundation. Coupled with this was the deepening socio-economic crisis warranted by the economic mismanagement and corruption. This eventually led to a coup d'état by young army officers, who were not paid their allowances and salary since their return from peacekeeping mission in Central Africa Republic on the Christmas eve of 1999. These military officers eventually invited and installed General Robert Gueï whose ascendancy to power as the military head of state (head of *Comité National du Salut Public*, i.e The National Committee for Public Salvation as the highest ruling body of the state) had two fundamental implications in the political history of Côte d'Ivoire. First, the coup d'état dented Côte d'Ivoire's status as Francophone West Africa's beacon of stability. Second, it signaled the end of the Akan hegemony of the Ivorian political sphere since the new strong man, General Gueï hailed from the Yacouba ethnic group that belongs to the Krou that migrated from Liberia.

Expectedly, the coming of General Gueï to power relaxed the tensed political atmosphere as Ivoirians firmly believed that the regime would turn a new leaf and relegate *Ivoirité* to the past even to the dustbin of history. Expectedly, the General promised to return Côte d'Ivoire to civil rule and was critical of the ideology of *Ivoirité*. Francis Akindès (2004: 21) gives a lucid account of General Gueï's opposition to *Ivoirité* thus, according to Gueï:

"Ivoirité was a threat to national unity, and corruption was undermining Ivorian society. Justifying the coup d'état by the 'younger generation' as the response to these two social scourges, he attempted to mobilise collective memory around the work of Houphouët-Boigny, who had guaranteed prosperity and security to one and all irrespective of their differences. Foreigners and nationals alike reassured as to

their respective historical places in the construction of the 'grandeur of Côte d'Ivoire and national unity'. National Television broadcast the visits and speeches of President Houphouët-Boigny, stressing national dialogue and peace again and again. Confidence in the social corpus was also restored by the pilgrimage of the new leader to the tomb of the 'father of the nation'; the restoration of Ouattara's right on his return from exile and the quashing of the legal proceedings against him; the promise to 'make a clean sweep' and to restore rights to the civilian population before the end of 2000; and by never-ending declarations of loyalty to the Houphouëtist legacy

In spite of the above mentioned good qualities of General Gueï and moves of the junta as adherents of Houphouëtism, ethno-nationalism brought forth as Gueï presented to the Ivorian nation his true image and ambition of transforming himself into a civilian president via the electoral processes in which he would not just be the referee, but also the key player, the star and the judge. With this chameleonic personality and pursuant to this sinister goal, political process was manipulated and Gueï chose the path of authoritarianism. According to Akindès (2004: 21):

In the course of his 10 months as head of state, General Gueï moves from exalting the paradigm of openness (recognition of foreigners' contribution to the development of Côte d'Ivoire and guarantees of security to increasingly anxious foreign residents to a form of stigmatisation based on the 'hold of foreigners over vital sectors of the national economy'. Intent on staying in power, and with a good understanding of the strength of nationalist discourse for political mobilisation in the absence of an economic alternative, he took up Ivoirité again. While this reversion to the foreigner as scapegoat, linking the image of Alassane Ouattara with the foreigner as trouble-maker, meant that General Gueï was the continuation of Bédié, there was a further element in his political strategy: this was his challenging historical Akan predominance in state power. The new political line was based on the need for the regional rotation of power: simply put, power had to shift from the control of the Akan group to the Krou group, to which the general belonged. [Emphasis mine].

This political machination and manipulation

reached its zenith with revision of the constitution that was approved by the July 2000 referendum. The new constitution under General Gueï set the stage for the country's Second Republic but contained restrictive clauses for eligibility for the exalted office of the President. Article 35 of the said constitution required both parents of any Ivorian wishing to contest the presidential election to have been born in Côte d'Ivoire. According to the constitution:

The President of the Republic must be of Ivorian origin, born of a father and mother who are also Ivorian by birth. He must never have renounced Ivorian nationality. He must never have used another nationality. He must have resided in Ivory Coast for 5 continuous years preceding the date of the elections and have a total of 10 years of effective residence.

Apparently, the amendment of and the restrictive clauses in the constitution were designed to exclude ADO, the leader of the RDR from contesting. The judiciary became a willing tool in the hands of the military junta. On 6 October, 2000 a new twist was introduced into the Presidential elections as the Supreme Court, in a controversial decision disqualified the former President Bédié on health ground and ruled that the former Prime Minister's candidature was invalid on the basis of his 'uncertain' Ivorian origin. It is noteworthy to cap the disqualification saga by stating that the Supreme Court was then presided over by General Gueï legal adviser. The president was left in the political arena with only one contender, Laurent Gbagbo of FPI who was considered a political underdog. However, the military failed to respond adequately to the socio-economic aspiration of Ivorians who kept on going up the ladder of pauperisation. This coupled with the disillusion brought about by military rule became the electoral Waterloo for Gueï. His defeat and attempt to manipulate the election results was greeted with strong opposition by Gbagbo's supporters who overran the security operatives who were seemingly equally disenchanted by Gueï's rule and his series of discovery of alleged coup d'état that really sapped the morale of the Armed Forces. Thus, Gbagbo assumed the mantle of leadership in a confused and insurrectionary manner. Copying his immediate predecessors, president Gbagbo consolidated the policy and politics of *Ivoirité*. This time around, Ouattara who was identified with northerners' struggle to position themselves as bonafide Ivorians was

excluded to take part in the 2000 Parliamentary elections. Owing to the earlier historical account, northerners were considered second class citizens by the doctrine of *Ivoirité*. At this juncture, it is essential to note that ethnicity used as an instrument of political exclusion catapulted Côte d'Ivoire in the road to social disintegration and war as a result of the dismal management of ethnic diversity. The attendant results of *Ivoirité* were that while others are seen as legitimate citizens who have the right to rule, others are considered only good to be followers. It was this frustration and perceived accumulated anger in an atmosphere of continued poverty that underline the civil war.

VI. SUMMING UP: DE-ETHNICISATION OF POLITICS AS THERAPY FOR POLITICAL STABILITY IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

As alluded to above, ethnicity is the fundamental cause of the Ivorian civil conflict, and reinforced by the deepening socio-economic crisis, most importantly the hyper-globalisation of the 1990s which came to challenge and eventually made Houphouëtism or Houphouëtist compromise structurally dysfunctional. Undoubtedly, the civil conflict has polarised the country along ethnic cleavages and completely destabilised the country, especially the northern part where the rebels hold maximum control with Bouake as their headquarters. Apart, the upsurge in the flows of refugees is becoming alarming and a signal to the leaders of the West African sub-region of the coming complex humanitarian crisis as witnessed in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Even though the war has not engulfed the capital city of Abidjan and the southern part of the country in terms of physical destructions, the biting effects of the protracted war are highly noticeable as the economy is now bent on its kneel, thereby crippling the financial muscle of Laurent Gbagbo's government to effectively perform its constitutional duties of providing adequate security for all and sundry within the society and more importantly the provision of social facilities, thereby depressing the standard of living in the face of correspondingly high cost.

Not unproblematic also is that insecurity is now pervading the entire nation as hooligans, thugs are now the reigning actors in the country, not forgetting the attacks on foreigners while

Côte d'Ivoire is now notorious for assault on women in terms of sexual violence being perpetrated against them by government forces and state sanctioned vigilantes and extreme torture of the detainees. Based on these negative features of the nation, the Human Rights Watch concluded that the future of Côte d'Ivoire is in the balance. This is because, according to the Human Rights Watch report:

The political and social climate remains volatile and characterised by intolerance, xenophobia, and suspicion. The shocking brutality that permeated the election period was the fruit a dangerous policy of manipulating ethnicity for political gain. Whether the fault-lines of ethnicity and religious mistrust exposed during the elections cut deeper into the fabric of Ivorian society, or begin to heal depends largely on the restoration of the rule of law. These abuses described in this report must be addressed by both the government and international community, not with denial and impunity and symbolic gestures, but instead with concrete action (Internet site: www.hrw.org, date accessed 14 March, 2005)

From the afore-written, what can be done to save Côte d'Ivoire from this political *cul de sac*. My basic position is that since ethnicity is at the root of the Ivorian political crisis, de-ethnicisation of politics will serve as appropriate therapy for a conflict free Côte d'Ivoire; Ivorian nation that will be based on a solid foundation of rule of law, where every Ivorian irrespective of their geographical location, ethnic background and status will be equal in the eyes of the law so as to relegate the xenophobic ideology into the dustbin of history. Then the question is: How do we go about it?. Going about it or better still achieving peace in Côte d'Ivoire is a very simple but also mammoth task. This depends on the path the political class wants to follow. My position, as we forcefully argued in the article I co-authored and published in CODESRIA's *Africa Development* (vol. xxx, nos. 1 and 2, 2005) is that there is little the international community can offer. A substantial part of the task to achieve peace is in the hands of the Ivorian themselves. It is imperative for Ivorians to reflect on the effect(s) of *Ivoirité* on the country. If their answer is in the affirmative, then peace will be elusive in Côte d'Ivoire, but if the answer is negative, then the political class need to come together to iron out their differences in a peaceful manner. I strongly

believe that genuine reconciliation will put Côte d'Ivoire back on the right path. In this regard, ADO should be allowed to take part in the political process and contribute his own quota to the *grandeur* of the country and by extension the self inflicted virus, so to say, of *Ivoirité* should recognise the people of the North as genuine Ivorian by this the foundation of the Ivorian civil conflict will be perfectly handled. By this, the good people of Côte d'Ivoire, including the political class especially the key actors; Gbagbo, Bédié, Ouattara, etc should have forgiving spirit and that the interest of the country should be uppermost in their minds and relegate their parochial interests to the secondary. By this, the international efforts of finding lasting solution to the civil conflict will become meaningful.

NOTES

1. The three principal rebel movements in Côte d'Ivoire are: *Mouvement Patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire* (The Patriotic Movement of Côte d'Ivoire), *Mouvement Populaire Ivoirien du Grand Ouest* (The Ivorian Popular Movement of the Great West), and *Mouvement pour la Justice et la Paix* (The Movement for Justice and Peace).
2. The FPI, the Ivorian Popular Front of President Laurent Gbagbo came to power in October 2000. Apart from FPI, other major contenders in the Ivorian political field are *Le Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI-RDA)—Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire, *Rassemblement des Républicains*—Rally of the Republicans, and *Le Parti Ivoirien des Travailleurs* (PIT)—The Ivorian Workers Party.
3. The military coup d'état of 24 December, 1999 signaled the abrupt end of 39 years of political stability that had been in place since 1960.
4. On the impacts of ethnicity in other societies, literature is legion: see Gurr Ted, Harff B. (1994); Horowitz D (1985); Novak M. (1971); Young Crawford (1983); Wimmer Andreas (1997); Kymlicka W, Wayne Norman (eds.) (2000).
5. The policy of openness implies President Félix Houphouët-Boigny's over reliance on, and adherence to trade liberalisation and market economy.
6. *La Baule* conference of 1990 stipulated the new agenda of France towards Africa viz, first, French financial and economic assistance to Francophone African states is conditioned to multi-party democracy in which citizens would be freely choose through the ballot box their representatives and second, France would no longer use its military bases in Africa to prop-up and rescue dictatorial regimes. Kunle Amuwo (1993) puts the issue more graphically. According to this Nigerian bilingual *politologue*, *At the 1990 Summit in La Baule, France, a seeming serious agenda was announced by Mitterrand against the backdrop of a New World Order favourable to pluralism, rule of law and democratisation of the political space, the French president, not wanting to run against the tide of history, as exemplified in East-Europe and specific militancy and agitations in much of Africa, outlined the La Baule doctrine: henceforth, aid would be cut to countries that refused to democratised and "democracy will be your best friend in the future"*.
7. It is in line with Amuwo's position that Marie-Lucy Dumas (1990/1991) noted that France was merely extending the political conditionality of aid proposed to Eastern Europe to Africa, while also assuring the black continent that aid to the East will not be at its expense and debt reduction will not stop. (Cited in Amuwo, 1993).
8. 'Houphouëtism' is a term coined to describe President Félix Houphouët Boigny's political philosophy, legacy, and leadership style that is characterised by the culture of dialogue and peace. During Boigny's presidency and even after his death in 1993, the stakeholders of Ivorian politics claims to be followers of this political ideology that determined the course of politics in Côte d'Ivoire. On Félix Houphouët-Boigny's political legacy see: Bakary (1992); Widner (1994); Diarra (1997); and Kone (2003).
9. The ethnic composition is such that: the **Mandés** encompasses such groups as Malinké, Dan, and Kweni; the **Kwa** or the **Akan** group comprises of the Agni, Baoulé, Abron, Alladian, Avikam, and the Lagoon ethnic groups; the **Gur** houses the Senoufos, Koulango, and Lobi; while **Krou** harbours the Wê, Bété, Dida Bakwé, and Néyo. Please note that Djoula, Juula and Dioula are used interchangeably in this article. The same goes for Krou and Kru; and finally Agni and Anyi.
10. For further analysis see: *Jeune Afrique L'Intelligent*, No. 2189-2190, 22 December to 4 January, 2003, p. 41
11. On this, see Zongo Mahamadou (2003).
12. It also entailed selective management of ethnicity by Houphouët-Boigny where the Akan, most importantly the Baoulé ethnic group, were highly favoured by the highly established patrimonial system
13. This was the situation in Côte d'Ivoire. For example, from the mid-1970s, the Sénoufo in the North were over represented in the Army, and peoples from the South dominated the Police Force and National Gendarmerie (*Gendamerie Nationale*), while the Baoulé constituted the majority in the National Security Police (*Surété Nationale*).
14. For explicit analysis of how anthropological arguments that are based on racial prejudice are being used to portray the virtues of the Akan against their perceived 'rivals', I am relying on Memel-Foté's (1999) long but interesting argument. The Dioula and the Bete are, writes Memel-Foté: *discriminated against by using dubious psychological arguments: they are "not genuine", in the words of the ideologists—that is, their reactions are unpredictable, they are not really to be trusted, and unsuited to successfully dominating the Akan. Secondly, in ethnic relations, significant immorality traits are associated with this psychology. According to one person, the Dioula "are lawless unbelievers" and the Bété are "violent women-chasers"; another says the Dioula are as malevolent as slaves; a third person states the "class education" which is*

Foreign Population in Côte d'Ivoire and their Country of Origin in 1988 and 1998.

Population (Foreigners) Country of Origin	1988		1998	
	Total	%	Total	%
Burkina Faso	1,564,650.	51.5	2,238,548.	56.0
Ghana	167,783	5.5	133,221.	3.3
Guinea	225,845	7.4	230,387	5.7
Mali	712,500	23.4	792,258	19.8
Liberia	4711	0.2	78,177	2.0
Benin	86,375	2.8	107,499	2.7
Togo	42,664	1.4	72,892	1.8
Niger	84,826	2.8	102,220	2.6
Nigeria	52,875	1.7	71,355	1.8
Mauritania	16,650	0.5	18,152	0.5
Senegal	39,727	1.3	43,213	1.1
Other West Africa	2,364	0.1	3,923	0.1
North Africa	1,142	0.1	1,928	-
Central Africa	3,727	0.1	10,770	0.3
Other Africa	886	-	4,793	0.1
Non-Africa	32,312	1.1	32,699	0.8
Not declared	-	-	58,015	1.4
Total	3,039,037	100	4,000,047	

Source: Jeune Afrique L' Intelligent, no. 2098, 27 March - 2 April, 2001 P. 46

characteristic of "the civilised Akan" is not apparent among the other two ethnic groups and their like. In the third instance, in the political relationship the claims of the Dioula and Bété constitute a danger to the state and nation: the Bété because of their cultural incompatibility with the presidential function; the Dioula for a strategic reason, given the fact that, in the last resort, they would work towards propagating and "establishing" Islam. These negative anthropological factors define in reverse the positive qualities considered desirable in the ideal political class of the Ivorian nation, the assumption being that these are to be found in the Akan alone, particularly among the most militant Baoulé and Anyi, who were the spokespersons. To begin with, there are psychological qualities: the need a man of one's word, endowed with conviction, sincerity, and uprightness. Then there are moral qualities: the nobility and generosity of the free man, his spirit of peace and sexual moderation, all qualities which bear witness to a proper upbringing in the eyes of the Akan aristocracy. Finally, there are the philosophical and religious justifications of ethnic superiority. On the one hand, there is the vocation to protect and promote what is considered antagonistic to Islam, namely the Christian religion. On the other, the assumption that in this non-secular approach the protection of Christianity was the exclusive vocation of the Akan, not that of the Krou or Gur or even Mandé. No comparative survey has ever, even slightly, validated this falsely contrasted representation

14. According to the 1998 census, the population was of 15, 366,672 inhabitants of which 4,000,047 (26.03%) were immigrants. Based on this census figures, the number of foreigners in Côte d'Ivoire and their country origin are summarised in the table below:
15. During the immediate post-independence period to the mid-1980s, Côte d'Ivoire experienced annual growth rate of more than 7%. This made the country

to be compared, at that time, with countries like Japan, South Korea and Brazil. On the Ivorian Economic miracle, see Faure, 1982.

16. Alassane Dramane Ouattara (ADO), a technocrat and former Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), was the first Prime Minister of Côte d'Ivoire under President Félix Houphouët-Boigny

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