



Infrastructures for Peace in Cote d'Ivoire

Naila Salihu

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Abstract

Cote d'Ivoire is in a post-conflict reconstruction and development phase. There has been some remarkable progress towards economic recovery stemming from foreign direct investments and infrastructural development. The country remains fragile and confronted with structural violence. Many of the sources of conflicts are traceable to historical grievances and aftermath of the civil war (2002-2007) and post-election crisis (2010-2011). Several peacebuilding processes and transitional justice mechanisms have been implemented with mixed outcomes. This paper discusses the sources of conflicts and existing peace infrastructures in Cote d'Ivoire. It argues that a formal I4P framework is yet to be adopted for the country, yet, there exist some important structures including formal and traditional mechanisms that work in diverse ways. These mechanisms have their inherent strengths and weaknesses. It is imperative for the state to prioritize peacebuilding as part of ongoing measures to transform governance and economic development.

Introduction

Cote d'Ivoire is in a post-conflict reconstruction phase. There has been some remarkable progress towards economic recovery stemming from foreign direct investments and infrastructural development. Despite the semblance of peace, the country remains fragile and confronted with structural violence. Many of the sources of conflicts are traceable to historical grievances and the aftermath of the civil war (2002-2007) and the post-election crisis (2010-2011).¹ To address these, the country embarked on ambitious transitional justice and peacebuilding processes through the establishment of several formal judicial and non-judicial mechanisms. The outcomes of the effectiveness of these mechanisms have been mixed. To date, Cote d'Ivoire does not have a comprehensive infrastructure for peace.² There have been several dialogues and institutional support from different development partners towards the establishment of a national infrastructure for peace. A structure that was proposed following the end of the post-election crisis in 2011 is yet to be formally adopted.³ The proposed peace infrastructure was supposed to be comprised of a Central Council, an Executive Secretariat, and local representation in districts and sub-districts. The National Assembly was expected to pass a bill to adopt and legalise the peace infrastructure.⁴ The structure was arrived at based on broad consultations with key stakeholders including government officials, traditional and religious leaders, civil society groups, women's groups, and academia. This body was considered representative enough to initiate mediation processes.⁵ Nonetheless, there exist some mechanisms including formal state structures and informal or traditional ones which work in diverse ways to help manage conflicts in the country. This paper discusses the current sources of conflicts and existing peace infrastructures in Cote d'Ivoire. This is based on field research carried out in April 2021 in Abidjan and surrounding communities.

Sources of Conflict

Identity and Land Conflicts

The social fabric of Cote d'Ivoire remains fragile.

Identity conflicts are more likely due to persistent ethno-regional divides and other forms of exclusion. The country consists of over 60 ethnic groups with different linguistic and cultural identities and complex interrelationships. These ethnic groups are categorized into different ethnic clusters. The main ethnic groups (with many subgroups) are the Akan (38.1 %), the Voltaique or Gur (21.2 %), Northern Mandé (19 %), Southern Mandé (9.1 %), and Krou (11.3 %).⁶ The northwestern Mandé (Malinké, and Dioula) groups and the northeastern Voltaic (Senoufo, Lobi, Kulango, and other) groups are combined into one single ethnic category of Dioula "northerners", due to their common Muslim faith.⁷ The southeast is generally populated by Akans and Christians of which the Baule are the most important group in political terms.⁸ Other Akan groups are the Abbron, Agni, and the Lagoon. Another group, the Kru is made up of the Bété, Dida, Guéré, and other sub-groups, of which the Bété are the largest and most influential politically.⁹

There are cleavages between the comparatively poor and predominantly Muslim north and the more prosperous and mostly Christian south, which is deeply rooted in the socio-economic and political history of the country. The principal cause of conflicts in Cote d'Ivoire was generally associated with the controversies surrounding identity and citizenship, especially the concept of *Ivoirité* and the ensuing xenophobic ideology promoted by political actors.¹⁰ The first post-independent President Felix Houphouët-Boigny was able to hold the country together despite its ethno-national diversity through his paternalistic and accommodationist approaches. After his demise, a succession struggle ensued between Alassane Ouattara and Henri Konan Bédié. Bedie eventually became president and with the support of southern elites introduced Ivoirite into the political discourse. This concept privileged indigenous people over migrants. The politicization of identity and citizenship by successive political elites which sought to construct an Ivorian identity that questioned the citizenship rights of most Northerners eventually plunged the country into a protracted civil

¹Konadjé, J. (2018). Cote d'Ivoire: The Price of Positive Peace. Abidjan: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

²Amedzrator, L. & Abdallah, M. (2015). Escaping the Repertoire of Election Crisis: Prospects and Challenges of the Evolving Infrastructure for Peace in Côte d'Ivoire, KAIPTC Policy Brief 2, August;² Interviews in Abidjan April 2021.

³Ibid

⁴Ibid

⁵Ibid

⁶Institute Nationale Statistiques (2014). Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat

⁷EPR atlas Ethnicity in Cote d'Ivoire

⁸The country's "founding father", Félix Houphouët-Boigny, hails from this group which has long dominated Côte d'Ivoire's political and social life.

⁹Bouquet, C. (2011). Côte d'Ivoire: Le dés-espoir de Kourouma. 3rd ed. Paris: Armand Colin

¹⁰Aning, K. & Salihu, N. (2013). Interrogating the 'Northern Problem': Postcolony, Identity and Political [in] stability in Cote d'Ivoire and Togo. In: Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Mhlanga, B. (Eds). Bondage of Boundaries and the 'Toxic Other' in Postcolonial Africa: The 'Northern Problem' and Identity Politics Today. Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa. pp.100-116.

war.

Other identity-related issues such as land tenure conflicts involving autochthones and migrant communities have been very rampant in different parts of Cote d'Ivoire. These are deeply rooted in customary land ownership and the history of the country especially the movements of agricultural colonization in the country.¹¹ The land is a very important issue in the country because of the macroeconomic weight of agriculture. At the microeconomic level, land represents not only access to financial resources, but also access to food and housing, three fundamental elements for human survival. Also, from a social perspective, the land is considered an ancestral heritage. As society is firmly entrenched in traditions, the legitimacy of this identity criterion seems far stronger than that of a simple nationality. The legitimacy of belonging to a native community is built on parentage, as opposed to the recent invention of a national legitimacy built on a virtual national tie.¹²

The identity crises and land conflicts are deeply rooted in history. From the 1920s, the spread of cocoa and coffee plantations in the southeast and the coastal areas attracted migrant laborers not only from other countries in West Africa such as Burkina Faso and Mali but also from the Centre (Baoulé) and the forest areas of the West (Bété), where agricultural and climatic conditions were less favorable. Some of these labourers settled permanently.¹³ Agricultural settlement and subsequent land ownership by migrants became fault lines for future tensions. For instance, in the 1950s, the colonial government had to deal with the discontent of local groups faced with a massive influx of immigrants, particularly in the central-western part of the country.¹⁴

The post-independence government of Houphouët-Boigny encouraged agricultural settlement for economic development. Indigenous landowners saw this as an attempt to steal their traditional heritage and violate their ancestral rights.¹⁵ This pattern of agricultural settlement has been the cause of frequent conflicts, relating both to land rights and to

the ways in which the different communities share resources.¹⁶ Conflicts between indigenes of the west and Baoulé migrants were very common in the 1970s. However, the northern savannah regions also experienced tenure disputes as a result of agricultural colonization. There were frequent land tenure conflicts in the savannah region, as demand for land increased and new pressures were created by commercialisation of crops (cotton, cereals, cashew nuts) and the rearing of cattle. Particularly, the acceptance of the Peul (Fulani) livestock farmers and their subsequent settlement was the result of a policy introduced by the government in 1974, often against the will of the local population.¹⁷ This policy tended to create a relationship of patronage between these farmers (some of whom had considerable capital) and the agents of the state and local politicians.¹⁸ As far back as the 1980s, there were conflicts between Senufo farmers and Fulani pastoralist herders over uncompensated crop damages.¹⁹

Conflicts over land ownership were a major factor contributing to the political crisis as the western cocoa growing areas saw some of the worst violence during two civil wars in 2002-2003 and the 2011 post-election crisis. The introduction of Ivoirite led to a reversal of policies promoted by late President Houphouët-Boigny that encouraged immigration from neighboring countries to make productive use of rural agricultural lands. Then President, Bedié lacking the resources to coopt identity groups instead resorted to the use of land tenure policies to gain favor with his support base.²⁰ The narrow nationalism promoted by Bedié's government to control access to land, power, and other social and political rights through the concept of Ivoirité exacerbated the existing cleavages. Ivoirité inspired state authorities in crafting the 1998 Land Act that excluded property rights for immigrants. The Act prompted intercommunity conflicts, especially, in the Western parts of the country.²¹ Based on Ivoirité, the Rural Land Law No. 98-750 of December 23, 1998, predicated land ownership on Ivorian citizenship and further increased tensions between indigenous land owners and foreign-born farmers.²² The government of Ouattara initiated some reforms in the land administration laws to address issues of land

¹²Limarche, A. A (2019). Access to land in Ivory Coast: diversity and variability of pluralisms, *Revue des droits de l'homme* - N° 16.

¹³Chauveau, (2000). *Op cit*.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Limarche (2019). *Op. cit*.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Chauveau (2000), *op. cit*

¹⁸Chauveau (2000), *op. cit*.

¹⁹Basset, T.J. (1988). *The Political Ecology of Peasant-Herder Conflicts in Northern Ivory Coast*

ownership. However, these laws have some inherent challenges and ambiguities making them ineffective in addressing the tensions and conflicts on land. For instance, a rural land agency was established in 2016 to implement programmes to speed up the implementation of a 1998 land law designed to reduce conflicts over land by registering customary land rights and issuing legal titles. The vast majority of rural land, however, remained unregistered.²³ The above-mentioned law does not apply to urban lands. In 2013, a new law was enacted to regulate urban lands.²⁴ This law also has inherent challenges especially on the issue of customary rights as the law seeks to vest the registration of lands with the state without mentioning the customary origin of the property.²⁵ Similarly, in July 2019, a new forestry code was adopted that signals a renewed effort to protect and rehabilitate the country's protected forests which have been devastated by cocoa farming. Past government-led forestry reclamation efforts left thousands of evicted farmers' families without access to adequate food, water, or shelter.²⁶ This increased peoples' vulnerability and societal tensions.

In recent years, the country is also experiencing conflict between pastoralist and sedentary communities. These can be attributed to increasing impacts from climate change and other socio-political factors such as integration policies, land tenure, weak state capacities, or even the absence of the state in some areas.²⁷ Climate change, in particular, has resulted in increased desertification, soil erosion and drought has exasperated competition over natural resources. These factors have pushed herders to venture into new areas to seek pasture for their herds. Drifting away from traditional migratory routes and encroaching on farming lands has fueled negative perceptions, juxtaposing sedentary communities versus nomadic ones, often stigmatizing the latter as cultural and/or religious intruders.²⁸ Also,

the effects of protracted regional conflicts in places like Mali and Burkina Faso have further challenged pastoralism by forcing nomadic herders to change migratory routes, therefore increasing the risks of triggering conflicts with sedentary communities. Some pastoralists are being coopted by extremists into those conflicts and becoming the vehicle for illegal trade and arms smuggling.²⁹ In such situations state authority is usually weak, dispute resolution mechanisms have broken down, and weapons are readily available to both farmers and herders to engage in violence to protect their farms and livestock.³⁰ The above factors are often fueled by politics of transhumance in the region generally, which point to the interplay among political and military elites as well as organized criminals who can manipulate social and political tensions between herders and farmers to advance their agendas. They can expand land ownership and take control of large herds for their economic and political gains, consequently threatening the livelihoods of both communities.³¹ Transhumance conflicts have destroyed property, deaths, and displacement of people in Cote d'Ivoire and other West African countries.³²

Socio-Economic Challenges

The population of Côte d'Ivoire is both young and poor. Young people constitute about 77.3 percent of the Ivorian population. About 41.8 percent of Ivoirians are younger than 14 years old and another 35.5 percent are between 15 and 35.³³ Despite a small decline in the poverty rate from 2011 to 2015, a staggering 46 percent of the population still lives below the \$1.50 per day poverty line.³⁴ Poverty and socio-economic marginalization are key drivers of youth radicalization. Côte d'Ivoire is confronted with high rates of unemployment and inactivity among the youth, with more than two-thirds being unemployed. The country has a high youth unemployment rate.

²⁰McCauley, J. (2017). Ethnic and Religious Identity in Côte d'Ivoire's Conflict. In *The Logic of Ethnic and Religious Conflict in Africa* (pp. 116-138). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781316796252.008

²¹Babo, A. (2018). Traditional Mechanisms of Conflict Resolution in Modern Africa: The Bodior Ritual and The Enduring Kroumen Versus Lobi-Dagara Conflict In Southern Côte d'Ivoire, *African Study Monographs*, 39 (2): 83–95.

²²USAID (2013). Côte d'Ivoire Country Land Tenure and Property Rights Profile. Available at

²³Interviews in Abidjan April 2012.

²⁴Republic of Cote d'Ivoire (2013). Regulation no. 2013-481 on the conditions of acquisition of urban land ownership of July 2013.

²⁵Limarche (2019). op. cit.

²⁶Human Rights Watch (2019). Côte d'Ivoire Events of 2019. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/cote-divoire#> (Accessed on May 16, 2021)

²⁷Cabot C. (2017). Case Study: Farmer–Herder Conflicts in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. In: *Climate Change, Security Risks and Conflict Reduction in Africa*. Hexagon Series on Human and Environmental Security and Peace, vol 12. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-29237-8_6

²⁸United Nations (2020). Preventing, Mitigating & Resolving Transhumance-Related Conflicts in UN Peacekeeping Settings A Survey of Practice, United Nations Departments of Peace Operations Policy, Evaluation and Training Division.

²⁹United Nations (2020). op cit.

³⁰UNOWAS (2018). Pastoralism and Security in West Africa and the Sahel Towards Peaceful Coexistence

³¹United Nations (2020). Op. cit.

³²Interviews in Abidjan April 2021.

³³Ibrahima, B. (2012). *Annuaire des Statistiques Demographiques et Sociales* (Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire: Institut National de la Statistique, January 2012). <http://www.ins.ci/n/templates/Pub/annuaire%20demo.pdf>

³⁴Ibid

Unemployment is especially high among youth with higher education.³⁵ There are growing concerns about the link between unemployment and instability.³⁶ While the country is seen to be on the path to economic recovery. The economic growth has mostly been driven by foreign direct investment (FDI) and government investment in infrastructure in a way that has failed to address extreme poverty. This non-inclusive growth has resulted in rising inequality since the end of the post-election conflict in 2011.³⁷ Inequality was already significant before the conflict in 2002.

Socio-economic marginalization has resulted in a lack of access to basic services for a large segment of society, especially in the north. For instance, some Ivoirians are compelled to send their spouses and children to access basic social services such as health care and education in neighbouring countries like Ghana and Burkina Faso.³⁸ Domestically, there are post-conflict grievances arising out of incomplete or ineffective Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) processes. While the DDR processes officially ended in 2012, there is still disaffection among the youth especially arising out of a lack of sustainable reintegration processes.³⁹ This critical mass of disgruntled ex-combatants and youth groups provides a ready market for violence. Cote d'Ivoire is experiencing an influx of refugees from Mali and Burkina Faso due to rising insecurity. The lack of economic opportunities especially among the youthful population leads to frustration and a sense of hopelessness making some of them vulnerable to crimes and other vices. Currently, the rate of crime is very high in urban areas like Abidjan and other port cities.⁴⁰ For instance, the prevalence of delinquent minors often called by the pejorative term 'microbes' who engage in street violence and theft in urban areas like Abobo poses a major challenge to law enforcement and crime prevention.

Closely linked factors such as lack of economic opportunities, social safety nets, ethno-national grievances, and the role of the country in counter-terrorism in the Sahel have increased Cote d'Ivoire's

susceptibility to violent extremism. The country recorded its first case of terrorist attack on March 13, 2016, when assailants armed with Kalashnikovs opened fire on the beach of the sea resort of Grand Bassam, near Abidjan. Again, on March 29, 2021, attacks were carried out on military installations in Kafolo and Kolobougou, both located on the Ivorian border with Burkina Faso, in which three Ivoirian soldiers were killed and several others wounded. Earlier, in 2020, it was reported that jihadists killed fourteen soldiers and gendarmes, near Kafolo.⁴¹ While these attacks are believed to have been carried out by foreign terrorists from Mali and Burkina Faso, the involvement of Ivorian collaborators and the presence of terrorist cells in Ivorian territories is likely.⁴² In August 2016, some Ivorian soldiers were convicted by a military court on charges of conspiracy to aid the terrorist operatives and sentenced to 10 years in prison.⁴³ Besides, the country is host to a significant migrant population from other parts of West Africa. Due to commonly shared socio-cultural traits in border communities especially, foreigners can easily integrate with locals giving rise to concerns that Ivorian youth in the border communities are being exposed to radicalized persons from neighbouring states.⁴⁴

Political Violence

The socio-political history of the country is generally noted for political and election-related violence. From the introduction of multi-party politics in the 1990s to the latest presidential elections of October 2020, almost all election periods have been tainted with violence.⁴⁵ The exception was the presidential election of 2015 which had a relatively low turnout. Various forms of violence are perpetrated by political actors, ordinary people, and even agents of the state as means of achieving political goals. These may be manifested by verbal attacks, intimidation, and physical and armed violence between the supporters or leaders of the various political parties. It is argued that this brutalization of the Ivorian political space originates from the acceptance in the society of the use of violent ethno-national rhetoric and other acts such as hate speech, and physical elimination as

³⁵Kaboré, F.P. (2016). Entrepreneurship, Youth Employment, and Violent Extremism in Côte d'Ivoire. The Southern Voices Network: Research Paper No. 14, Wilson Center, Washington DC.

³⁶Ibid

³⁷Ibid

³⁸Interviews with a head of CSO Abidjan, April 2021.

³⁹Interview with a Researcher in Abidjan February 2020

⁴⁰Interviews in Abidjan April 2021

⁴¹Campbell, J. (2021). Concern Grows About Jihadi Activity in Ivory Coast. Council on Foreign Relations, March 31. Available at <https://www.cfr.org/blog/concern-grows-about-jihadi-activity-ivory-coast> (Accessed on June 26, 2021)

⁴²Interviews with an analyst in Abidjan, February 2020.

⁴³Counter terrorism project

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Bekoe, D. A. (2017). The United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire: How a Certified Election Still Turned Violent', *International Peacekeeping*, 25 (1), 128–53

means of political mobilization.⁴⁶ Low-intensity land conflicts become further politicized by either side of the Ivorian political divide and are often compounded by main political actors resorting to ethno-nationalist rhetoric and broad social mobilization in their quest for power.⁴⁷

Although political crisis on the surface is attributed to the struggle for political supremacy between the north and the south, it is deeply rooted in the issues of identity or citizenship, and historical socio-economic and political grievances.⁴⁸ The politicisation of ethnicity, especially in the post-independence era where politicians in their quest for power resorted to exploiting ethnic and identity sentiments.⁴⁹ The main issue at stake is how to maintain political power through mobilisation of voter allegiance from various socio-cultural groups. Typical of most African states, attaining political power is often seen as the only way to access the country's resources. This pattern has significant value for whoever is in power, their ethnic groups, and the redistribution of the nation's wealth.⁵⁰ The Ivorian political culture has been nurtured by nearly half a century of political dominance by southern elites and superior-subordinate relationships inherent in their control of power and the economy. This relationship has produced an ingrained political culture that stereotypes northerners and Muslims (*Dioulas*) as untrustworthy. Hence, a political credo emerged among southern elites that northerners such as Ouattara must never be entrusted with political power.⁵¹ Interestingly, having taken power in 2011, the actions of the first northerner and Muslim, Ouattara have not been significantly from the type ethnicised politics pursued by his predecessors.⁵²

As recounted by a resident of Yopougon, in Abidjan, during elections, the youth are mostly engaged by political actors to intimidate political opponents. In most instances, such confrontations become violent.⁵³ The

actions of politicians, therefore, remain hindrances to peaceful coexistence. For example, controversies surrounding the re-election of President Ouattara for a third term reignited existing political and socio-cultural tensions. Following the adoption of a new constitution in 2016, which was ambiguous on tenure served under the preceding constitution, there were speculations that President Ouattara could attempt a third term shot at the presidency. Ouattara claimed the new constitution resets term limits and thus allowed him to run again. He initially ended these speculations when he announced in June 2020 that he would not seek reelection. However, in August 2020, the sudden death of the anointed successor Prime Minister Ahmadou Gon Coulibaly changed the narratives. Ouattara reportedly responded positively to calls from his political party, Rally of the Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) to contest as its flag bearer.

These developments led to sporadic protests and clashes with security forces resulting in the loss of about 8 lives and many more wounded on election day.⁵⁴ The opposition parties have questioned the impartiality of the Ivorian Independent Electoral Commission and Constitutional Council, which validated Ouattara's third term bid. These bodies are constituted by persons appointed by the president and thus considered his allies. The Constitutional Council had rejected 40 of the 44 candidates for the presidential election and validated the candidacy of only four individuals. Namely; Ouattara, Bédié, Pascal Affi N'Guessan, and Bertin Konan Kouadio. Rejected candidates were unable to appeal the Council's decisions, and the government ignored a ruling from the African Court of Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) to allow embattled opposition leaders, Guillaume Soro and former president Laurent Gbagbo to contest.⁵⁵ In April 2020, Soro was sentenced in absentia to 20 years imprisonment by a court in

⁴⁶Vidal, C. (2003). La Brutalisation du Champ Politique Ivoirien, 1990–2003. *African Sociological Review/Revue Africaine de Sociologie*, 7 (2), 45–57; Charbonneau, B. (2012). War and Peace in Côte d'Ivoire: Violence, Agency, and the Local/International Line. *International Peacekeeping*, 19 (4), 508–24.

⁴⁷Jesper Bjanesen, J. & Van Baalen, S. (2020). The making of a dinosaur? Côte d'Ivoire's 2020 elections. 22 October. Available at <http://democracyinfrica.org/the-making-of-a-dinosaur-cote-divoires-2020-elections/> (Accessed on Ma7 28, 2021)

⁴⁸Aning and Salihu (2013). Op. cit.

⁴⁹Sakor, B.Z. & Sakor, V. (2020). Protests, Elections, and Ethnic Tensions in West Africa: What are the Driving Forces? November 24 Available at <https://blogs.prio.org/2020/11/protests-elections-and-ethnic-tensions-in-west-africa-what-are-the-driving-forces/> (Accessed on June 10, 2021).

⁵⁰Daddieh, C. (2001). Elections and Ethnic Violence in Côte d'Ivoire: The Unfinished Business of Succession and Democratic Transition. *African Issues*, 29(1/2), 14-19. doi:10.2307/1167104

⁵¹Interviews with residents in Abobo and Yopougon April 2021.

⁵²Interview with a resident of Yopougon, Abidjan, April 2021.

⁵³Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (2020). Atrocity Alert No. 227: Côte d'Ivoire, Myanmar (Burma) and Democratic Republic of the Congo. November 4. Available at <https://reliefweb.int> (Accessed on June 10, 2021).

⁵⁴Freedom House Report. (2020) Cote D'Ivoire. Available at <https://freedomhouse.org/country/cote-divoire/freedom-world/2021> (Accessed on June 20, 2021)

Abidjan for embezzlement and money laundering.⁵⁶ He has since been in exile. He was given another life sentence for undermining state security in June 2021.⁵⁷

The government banned all public demonstrations throughout the election period, and those that occurred were met with violence. Apart from Soro, Ouattara has fallen out with some of his former allies. Notably, the political alliance formed in 2005 between his Rally of the Republicans (RDR) and former President Henri Konan Bedie's PDCI had fallen apart. Key political leaders, including;

Mabri Toiku (UDPI) and Anaky Kobena (MFA), who were the founding fathers of RHDP in Paris in 2005 have parted ways with President Ouattara in pursuit of their presidential ambitions.⁵⁸ Despite the widespread protests against President Ouattara's reelection bid, the presidential election was held on October 31, 2020, producing a 99.45% victory for him. The election was boycotted by the opposition parties who rejected the outcome and announced a rival transitional council. While regional elections observers from the AU and ECOWAS have not raised questions on the fairness of the election process and the outcomes, other non-governmental international observers such as the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) and the Carter Center have declared that the political and security context was not conducive for a fair and credible presidential election. The government is faced with a legitimacy crisis to run a divided country. The country remains socially and politically polarized. This increases people's insecurity and vulnerability. For example, from August to November 2020, several opposition supporters, pro-government supporters, and militias armed with machetes and guns clashed on the streets in several towns and cities leading to the loss of lives.⁵⁹ An estimated 3,200 Ivorian refugees have fled to neighbouring Liberia, Ghana, and Togo due to rising political tensions.⁶⁰ Political conflicts are very rife in some Ivorian communities partly due to people's skewed understanding of political diversity. Politics in the country is deeply interlinked with peoples' socio-cultural identities. Political contests are reduced to zero-sum games in which people would want to see

their side emerge victorious with little or no chance for political tolerance among members of the community.⁶¹ The Ivorian National Human Rights Council argued that 55 people were killed and 282 injured between October 31 and November 10, 2021.⁶² The Ivorian government further argues that on November 11 20 people were killed on election day and an additional 31 in the days that followed. Any life lost to an election process is an affront to peace and democracy.

Infrastructures for Peace

There exist some notable state and non-state institutions and processes which work in a diverse way to manage social tensions and conflicts. These, therefore, constitute infrastructures for peace in Cote d'Ivoire. This section of the paper discusses a few of them.

Transitional Justice Processes

At the state level, there exist several mechanisms and programmes for social cohesion. Specifically, the Government after the post-electoral crisis in 2011 embarked upon some programmes aimed at strengthening national cohesion and rebuilding state institutions. A notable mechanism was the transitional justice process which began with the establishment of *La Commission dialogue, vérité et réconciliation* (the Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CDVR) in September 2011.⁶⁴ This commission was mandated to identify the root causes of the conflict and possible ways the country could achieve reconciliation. The Commission gathered testimonies from over 72,000 Ivorians. However, the scope of its mandate was not clearly defined, and its budget of \$15 million was inadequate. Victims also questioned the commission's impartiality. There were some misgivings about the commission especially its chairperson, Former Prime Minister, and politician Charles Konan Banny. This raised a credibility challenge for the commission. It was expected that the chairperson's role should have been given to a neutral and consensual personality rather than a politician. Mr. Banny was perceived as an ally of the ruling government but had presidential ambitions

⁵⁶Aboa, A. (2020). Ivory Coast presidential candidate Soro sentenced to 20 years in prison. Reuters News, April 2020.

⁵⁷Roger, B. (2021). Côte d'Ivoire: Guillaume Soro sentenced to life imprisonment. *Africa Report*, June 23, 2021. Available at <https://www.theafricareport.com/101081>

⁵⁸Bakare, MA (2020). Threats to credible elections in Cote d'Ivoire: An overview. October, CDD West Africa

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰United Nations High Commission for Refugees (2020). Ivorians flee to neighbouring countries fearing post-electoral violence, 3 November. Available at <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2020/11/5fa118a44/ivorians-flee-neighbouring-countries-fearing-post-electoral-violence.html>. (Accessed on May 23, 2021)

⁶¹Interviews with a community head, Youpougon

⁶²Response letter from Cote d'Ivoire's secretary of state for human rights, 25 November 2020

⁶³Ibid

⁶⁴Fokou, G., & N'Da, Y.S. (2018). Knowledge for Peace: Transitional Justice, Knowledge Production and an Agenda for Research (pp. 27-33, Rep.) (Jones B., Ed.). Swisspeace. Retrieved June 2, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep17666.8>

on the ticket of the opposition in the 2015 elections. Although he did not pursue his presidential ambition, a climate of suspicion about his neutrality was created leading to mistrust between the government and some actors in the reconciliation process.⁶⁵

As a result, this commission had mixed results at the end of its mission in December 2014 because it did not lay the groundwork for real reconciliation.⁶⁶ The National Commission for Reconciliation and Compensation for Victims of Crises in Côte d'Ivoire (CONARIV) (or Commission Nationale pour la Réconciliation et l' Indemnisation des Victimes (CONARIV) was created to carry through the recommendation of CDVR. Many challenges are yet to be addressed. Substantial efforts should be made towards genuine reconciliation among Ivoirians.⁶⁷ In addition to the reconciliation process, there have been domestic judicial and non-judicial processes. Notably, a Commission Nationale d'Enquete (CNE) was established to carry non-judicial investigations, and the Cellule Spéciale d'Enquête (later re-named Cellule Spéciale d'Enquête et d'Investigations, or CSEI), was mandated to conduct judicial proceedings for the crimes committed during the post-election crisis. These were seen as important steps because the country's justice system had been severely weakened by years of instability and conflict that preceded the 2010-2011 electoral crisis. However, there is dissatisfaction on the part of the local population and victims, especially with the transitional justice processes due to the perceived victors' justice approach. For example, only a few of Ouattara's supporters have faced any legal or non-judicial processes for their involvement in the post-election crisis even though a UN Commission of Inquiry, as well as a national investigation, found both sides responsible for atrocities.⁶⁸ For example, the March 2015 conviction of Simone Gbagbo and 82 former Gbagbo supporters further reinforced the perception of victor's justice. These legal proceedings were also criticized for not conforming to international legal standards.⁶⁹ The acquittal of former president Gbagbo and his ally Ble Goude in 2020 after a decade-long

trial at the ICC raises concerns about accountability for the 2010-11 post-election violence.⁷⁰ For victims of the crisis, a persistent sense of impunity remains as the ICC was unable to hold the former president culpable for his acts or omissions that led to the crisis. There remain post-conflict grievances among several Ivoirians. For instance, some persons interviewed in Yopougon and Anonkoikoute, near Abidjan pointed to the destruction of their cultural heritage and places of worship during the crisis. To date, no efforts have been made to reconstruct and compensate victims.⁷¹

Moreover, the recommendations stemming from these non-judicial mechanisms have not been fully implemented. For example, the dissemination of the CDVR report was limited and was not disclosed to the public until 2020. Most of the land reform, consensual political reform, and victim support, among others, are yet to be implemented. Much remains to be done to achieve national reconciliation as the processes have been driven by the political elites.⁷² Most of the victims do not trust state institutions and response mechanisms such as the National Commission for Reconciliation and Victim Compensation (CONARIV). For example, in April 2016, CONARIV presented its progress report. Of the 874,056 files submitted to the verification unit, more than 64 percent have been rejected.⁷³ This rejection has been contested by some victims' associations. According to these victims' associations, CONARIV did not take into account certain categories of persons (amputees, quadriplegics, and vulnerable as a result of war experiences) in their selection criteria.⁷⁴ Questions surrounding the validity of the list of war victims raise credibility challenges for the work conducted by that CDVR. The government established a ministry for national reconciliation in 2020 and appointed one of the opposition candidates in the 2020 presidential election, Kouadio Konan Bertin as minister of National Reconciliation. The objective of this new portfolio is to strengthen national cohesion and reconciliation of the sons and daughters of Côte d'Ivoire.⁷⁵ Will the road map of this ministry is yet to be clarified; it is doubtful it could contribute meaningfully to achieving

⁶⁵N'Da, Y.S. & Fokou, G. (2021). Knowledge asymmetry and transitional justice in Côte d'Ivoire. In Briony Jones and Ulrike Lühle (eds), *Knowledge for Peace Transitional Justice and the Politics of Knowledge in Theory and Practice*, 75-98 Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.

⁶⁶Interviews in Abobo and Yopougon, April 2021.

⁶⁷Konadjé, (2018). Op. cit.

⁶⁸N'Da, Y.S. & Fokou, G. (2021). Op. cit.

⁶⁹Brechenmacher, S. (2016). From The Hague to Abidjan: Whither Transitional Justice in Côte d'Ivoire?

April 21, <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2016/04/21/from-the-hague-to-abidjan-whither-transitional-justice-in-cote-divoire/>

⁷⁰Zounmenou, D. (2021). Gbagbo's return gives Côte d'Ivoire a second chance at reconciliation, *ISS Today*, 17 June. Available at <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/gbagbos-return-gives-cote-divoire-> (Accessed on June 17, 2021).

⁷¹Interview with religious and traditional leaders in Yopougon and Anonkoikoute April 2021

⁷²N'Da & Fokou (2021), op. cit.

⁷³Ibid

⁷⁴Ibid; CONARIV 2018

⁷⁵Duhem, V. (2020). Côte d'Ivoire: Ouattara appoints KKB to new reconciliation ministry. *Africa Report*. December 17. Available at <https://www.theafricareport.com/55602/> (Accessed on June 25, 2021)

recompilation in a deeply divided context.

National Programme for Social Cohesion

Another mechanism is the National Programme for Social Cohesion (PNCS) which was put in place in 2012 to promote social cohesion and national reconciliation through rehabilitation and community dialogue. The PNCS mandate is to undertake specific measures to relieve families of the victims and prepare for medium and long-term opportunities for those families.⁷⁶ The national policy of solidarity and social cohesion (PNCS 2016 – 2020) was adopted in 2016 to realize the objectives. The PNCS had its mandate extended and taken over the work of other committees and is currently the sole institution in charge of the issues of national reconciliation and social cohesion.⁷⁷ For instance, the PNCS was mandated to operationalize the development of the peace infrastructure. However, the I4P is yet to be institutionalized due to several factors including technical and financial constraints.⁷⁸ However, the PNCS undertakes a wide range of programmes within local communities. The PNCs are currently located within the ministry of peace and reconciliation. Although all the PNCs have the particularity of creating optimal conditions for a return to normality, it must be noted that the recent events that have shaken the country have shown that peace in Côte d'Ivoire remains fragile. This is because PNCs were created by the government and there are concerns among some political parties and some civil society groups that the programmes under the PNCS were created to facilitate victory for the current administration in the subsequent elections. The PNCs are working with the support of the UNDP to develop a national strategy for reconciliation and social cohesion. It is envisaged that such a strategy could contribute to creating effective programs and evaluation of existing programmes by both government and international non-government organizations.⁷⁹

However, there have been challenges to the effectiveness of the PNCS. For instance, it is yet to start the main compensation phase of its work.⁸⁰ In addition, the lack of visibility of the PNCS activities points to a series

of ambiguities in the social cohesion process.⁸¹ More so, the rhetoric of social cohesion at the local level has not been supported by actions of promoting peace at the national level by political elites.⁸² The programming of the process of social cohesion has not incorporated the resolution of the real issues that impede reconciliation such as dialogue with the opposition, the responsibility of political leaders from all camps combined in successive crises, and restoring the confidence of all parties in the electoral game, among other issues.⁸³

Office of the Mediator of the Republic

Ombudsman institutions play diverse roles in enhancing governance processes. These include enhancing the transparency and accountability of government activities, management, and budget, but also engaging stakeholders in pursuing their mandate more effectively. As these institutions interact with citizens, oversee that their rights are being respected, and provide policy recommendations, they can contribute to and inform a country's open government strategies and initiatives. Ombudsmen also monitor and contribute to the implementation of reforms and hold the government accountable. Côte d'Ivoire has an institution known as the office of the Mediator of the Republic. This is a constitutional body that has administrative authority with a public service mission. The office of the Mediator of the Republic was created by Law No. 2000-513 of August 1, 2000. This institution replaced the Presidential Organ of Mediation (OPREM) created by Decree No. 95-816 of September 29, 1995.⁸⁴ The Mediator of the Republic is appointed by the Head of State in consultation with the Speaker of the National Assembly to a 6-year non-renewable mandate. The Mediator of the Republic is an independent authority and is vested with functional immunity and should be non-partisan. He/she is independent of the government, and shall not be prosecuted, investigated, arrested, detained, or tried in respect of opinions expressed or acts committed in the performance of his/her official duties.⁸⁵ The Mediator works through a body of regional mediators and council advisors that meet every three months to discuss pertinent issues and projects.⁸⁶

⁷⁶Fokou, G., & N'Da, Y. S. A. (2018). Social Cohesion in Post-Conflict Côte d'Ivoire: the Fragile Corner Stone of the Peacebuilding Process. In B. Jones (Ed.), *Knowledge for Peace: Transitional Justice, Knowledge Production and an Agenda for Research* (pp. 27–33). *Swisspeace*. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep17666.8>

⁷⁷Interview with an official of the PNCS Abidjan, April 2021.

⁷⁸Interview with an official of PNCS Abidjan April 2021.

⁷⁹Ibid

⁸⁰Interview with an official of the PNCS Abidjan, April 2021.

⁸¹Piccolino, G. (2017). Rhétorique de la Cohésion Sociale et Paradoxes de la "Paix par le Bas" en Côte d'Ivoire. *Politique Africaine*, 148 (4), 49–68

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Piccolino (2017). *Op. cit.*

⁸⁴<https://www.aomf-ombudsmans-francophonie.org/cote-divoire-mediateur-de-la-republique-de-la-cote-divoire/> (Accessed on June 18, 2021)

⁸⁵Interview with a senior official at the Office of the Mediator of the Republic, Abidjan April 2021

⁸⁶Ibid

The mission of the Mediator of the Republic is to seek an amicable settlement of disputes between citizens and institutions of the state, local authorities, public establishments, or any other body with a public service mission (social organizations, public enterprises, etc.). The office also helps in the mediation of intra-inter community disputes. This arguably helps to reinforce social cohesion.⁸⁷ People are expected to petition the mediator in writing when they have grievances. The Mediator does not interfere with the conduct of legal proceedings and does not question court decisions. Aggrieved persons can resort to the courts if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of the mediation.⁸⁸

Some of the notable challenges with this office relate to public confidence, awareness, and accessibility to the office of the mediator. Ordinary Ivoirians seem apprehensive about the effectiveness of the Office of the Mediator because it does not have a role in mitigating political disputes in the country. As recounted by a resident of Abidjan, “what did the mediator do during the violence that came with the third term agenda of President Ouattara”?⁸⁹ People are doubtful about the independence of the Mediator and his ability to deal impartially with issues involving the political class. Moreover, this institution has no mandate to settle disputes involving the military. The military and other security forces have been a source of insecurity in the country.⁹⁰ Until recently, mutinies have been very rampant in the Ivorian armed forces. Particularly factions within the armed forces have mounted more than 50 uprisings during Ouattara’s presidency.⁹¹ There are reports of corrupt practices perpetrated among the top brass of the Ivorian security and armed forces. These issues are left unaddressed due to the relationship of patronage among security personnel and political actors. The tendency for a military incursion in the political process in Cote d’Ivoire cannot be neglected. There are concerns about a possible insurrection by ex-rebel commanders who were hitherto under the control of Guillaume Soro⁹² and by officers of the armed forces from the ethnic groups whose political elites have been marginalized.⁹³ While the capacity of such groups to undermine the stability of

the country appears minimal, mutinies remain a real threat to cohesion within the security and defence institutions.⁹⁴

The SSR process needs to take a holistic view toward developing an appropriate mechanism for dealing with excesses and human rights violations from the military and security forces. The office of the Mediator is not known by a lot of ordinary people.⁹⁵ There have been some attempts by the office to increase awareness about the office among the citizenry. Sensitization campaigns are being carried out in every part of the country. In the last two years, people’s awareness of the office has increased due to these sensitization programmes.⁹⁶ The office also carries out outreach projects in several parts of the country.

Local Security Committees

As part of the PNCS, local security committees (*Cellule de securite*) have been created for the purpose of early warning and information gathering. These committees exist within communities and are made up of representatives from traditional authorities, youth groups, and other community-based organisation. Their primary responsibility includes picking up early warning signals and reporting to appropriate authorities for further action.⁹⁷ These local security committees are very active in Abidjan and surrounding communities. These platforms are recognized by state institutions and serve as platforms for government and civil society collaboration in conflict prevention.⁹⁸

Key actors within the *cellule de securite* such as traditional or community leaders are often considered the first point of call for managing communal or interpersonal disputes within their communities. These persons often refer matters that bother criminality to the police and gendarmerie. These committees have contributed to maintaining societal cohesion as they provide early warning information to the appropriate state institutions. However, there are some challenges to their effectiveness. For instance, most of the members are engaged on a volunteer

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Interview with a resident of Abidjan April 2021.

⁹⁰Salihu, N. (2017). Human Transformation of the Armed Forces for Democratic Stability in La Côte d’Ivoire. KAIPTC Policy Brief 5 November.

⁹¹Martin, P.A. (2018). Security sector reform and civil-military relations in postwar Côte d’Ivoire, *African Affairs*, 117(468):522–533.

⁹²A former leader of the rebel Force Nouvelles, and , a former speaker of the National Assembly.

⁹³Bakare, (2020). Op. cit.

⁹⁴Interview with a senior security official in Abidjan, April 2021.

⁹⁵Interviews in Yopougon and Abobo, April 2021.

⁹⁶Interview with a senior official at the office of mediator of the republic, April 2021.

⁹⁷Interviews with members of security cells in Yopougon and Abobo, April 2021.

⁹⁸Interviews an official of PNCS Abidjan, April 2021

basis. A major concern of respondents is the impact of the peacekeeping economy on Ivorian society. While peacekeeping economies are critical in stimulating the local economy and providing livelihoods during and in the immediate aftermath of war, they have negative unintended impacts.⁹⁹ Income inequalities and poverty have led to the erosion of voluntarism among the population. So, most people do not desire to provide voluntary services. Secondly, the few who desire to volunteer require basic tools like mobile phones, call credits, or internet data to communicate and relay information to the appropriate institutions. In most instances, these tools are not provided under PNCS due to budgetary constraints.¹⁰⁰ Members of the local security committees persons require basic training on early warning reporting.

Traditional Mechanisms

Different African societies have their inherent mechanisms for conflict management. In most communities, there are some indigenous rituals, palaver institutions, and discourses that are used to prevent and resolve local communal conflicts. However, some modernists argue that these traditional systems often reinforce patriarchy and silence the voices of women and youth and instead emphasize the key role of elders.¹⁰¹ In African communities, the hybridity of traditional and formal mechanisms work together in making peace and seeking an effective solution to societal crises.¹⁰²

Like in most African countries, different communities in Cote d'Ivoire have their unique traditional mechanisms for preventing and managing conflicts. It is argued that different communities prefer the use of traditional mechanisms over the modern judiciary system, especially in the management of land and other interpersonal conflicts.¹⁰³ In Ivorian rural areas, for instance, the modern judiciary system and customary rules have long overlapped but with a predominance of the latter in daily social relations.¹⁰⁴ The management of land conflict falls primarily under traditional regulations of village affairs. In

most instances, people resort to law enforcement (gendarmerie) and state officials (sous-prefect and prefect) after traditional arbitration fails.¹⁰⁵ According to traditional leaders in Anonkoikoute, the police always refer communal conflicts including marital and land disputes to traditional authorities to resolve using the established customary laws.¹⁰⁶ However, there is a tendency for people to prefer traditional platforms for dealing with issues like gender-based violence, especially rape and spousal abuse. Ideally, such criminal issues should be referred to the police and court systems.¹⁰⁷ This may be attributed to the complex nature of the legal regime in dealing with such cases and also the lack of trust in state institutions among the people. In some instances, culprits are given lesser fines as opposed to the types of punishment prescribed by the laws.

Also, there exist some customs that serve as conflict prevention measures. For instance, in Anonkoikoute there is the *Baga* ritual, where people who fight their neighbours or other members of the community are fined by the traditional leaders.¹⁰⁸ Similarly in Kroumen in western Cote d'Ivoire based on traditional rules, a murderer is banished from the village for a period of seven years, and his or her possessions are destroyed and/or burned down. It is believed that expulsion in the Kroumen custom offers moral satisfaction, which strives to soothe the resentment of the victim's family.¹⁰⁹ In addition, the rule aims to calm the anger of the aggrieved family and their ancestors who have been tainted by the blood of their relatives and prevent revenge from the ancestral world. In Kroumen communities, traditional peacemaking encompasses violence, sacrifices, and negotiations with the family of the deceased at the end of the period of banishment for the eventual return of the perpetrator. At that moment, the perpetrator's family offers animals for immolation during the *Bodior* ritual to seal the peace.¹¹⁰

Another mechanism that works closely with the chiefs and local security cells is the Peace Houses (Case de la Paix). These peace houses are deeply linked

⁹⁹Aning, K. & Fiifi Edu-Afful (2013). Unintended Impacts and the Gendered Consequences of Peacekeeping Economies in Liberia, *International Peacekeeping*, 20(1): 17-32.

¹⁰⁰Interviews an official of PNCS Abidjan, April 2021

¹⁰¹Ibid

¹⁰²Aning, K. Brown, M. A., Boege, V. & Hunt, C. (eds.) (2018) *Exploring Peace Formation: Security and Justice in Post-Colonial States*. London: Routledge

¹⁰³Focused group discussions with traditional leaders in Anonkoikoute, April 2021

¹⁰⁴Babo (2018). op.cit.

¹⁰⁵Focused group discussions with traditional leaders in Anonkoikoute, April 2021

¹⁰⁶Focused group discussion with traditional leaders in Anonkoikoute, April 2021

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Bobo (2018). Op. cit.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

to the traditional conflict resolution mechanism like Palava huts. Following the post-election crisis in 2011, WANEP and other development partners) have supported these houses in several communities and suburbs in Abidjan such as Yopougon and Abobo. These houses are headed by community heads whose primary responsibility is to settle disputes among members of the community.¹¹¹ A plethora of issues is often addressed here including, spousal conflicts, interpersonal conflicts, and land disputes.

However, despite the prevalence of traditional mechanisms to solve conflicts, tensions remain in several Ivoirian communities. Some analysts have therefore argued that the legitimacy of traditional authorities and the power of customary mechanisms are challenged by youth who no longer trust their traditional leaders. Others are of the view that traditional mechanisms only deal with the effects of conflicts rather than addressing their root causes. For example, there have been disagreements between youth and traditional elders as the youth in some cases have questioned the credibility of their traditional leaders. Some youth even argued that some of the rituals did not contribute to resolving their difficulties concerning land access. These mechanisms

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The Role of Religious Groups

The role of religion in peacebuilding in Africa has to be located within the wider framework of the role of religion in the public space in Africa more generally. Indeed, religion and public policy “intertwine because both claim to give authoritative answers to important questions about how people should live.”¹¹⁴ Despite increasing processes of secularization, religious voices are not absent from public debates in most African societies. This can be partly attributed to the history of religion and religious transformation in Africa. Religion has always been perceived, by a majority of Africans, as having the power to radically change social life and history.¹¹⁵ A lot of people in Africa turn to religion for resources to prevent conflicts or to restore peace.

Cote d’Ivoire is a religiously diverse country. According to the 2014 census, the country has a population of 23.7 million (including both Ivorian and non-Ivorian nationals). Specifically, 42.9 % of the population are Muslims and 33.9 % are Christians. About 3.6 % are adherents of traditional African beliefs while followers of other religions constitute about 0.5 %.¹¹⁶ The constitution of the country stipulates a secular state that respects all beliefs and treats all individuals equally under the law. Religion provides sources of identity and socialization for several people through the different modes of expression and its interactions with other aspects (political life, economic activities, and social relations). The increasing role of religion mainly Christianity and Islam in the Ivorian body politic points to a challenge of greater importance as the country remains fragile because of political, socio-economic, and identity crises from which it is still struggling to fully recover.¹¹⁷ Historically, Côte d’Ivoire was seen as a stronghold of Christianity, traditional African religions, and other prophetic cults.¹¹⁸ Islam was perceived as a religion of foreigners and the Dioula and other groups originating from the north were seen as people without pure Ivoirian origin.¹¹⁹ Catholicism in particular was the dominant Christian faith of political leadership in the country until the early 2000s. President Houphouët-Boigny made his Catholic faith a matter of state priority by

¹¹¹Interview with chef du quartier de Yoa Sehi, Yopougon, April 2021

¹¹²Bobo (2018). Op. cit

¹¹³Ibid

¹¹⁴Lado Tonlieu Ludovic, S. J. (2012). Religion and Peacebuilding in Sub-Saharan Africa In: T. McNamee & Muyangwa, M. (Eds) *The State of Peacebuilding in Africa: Lessons Learned for Policymakers and Practitioners*. Palgrave Macmillan, 47-64.

¹¹⁵Smith, J.H, (2011). Religious Dimensions of Conflict and Peace in Neoliberal Africa: An Introduction. In: Smith and Hackett, *Displacing the State*, Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies,1–23.

¹¹⁶INS, Recensement Général de la Population et de l’Habitat 2014. The census report indicate 19.1 %19, of the population do not associate with any religion while 20 % did not respond to the census.

¹¹⁷Institute for Security Studies, (2015)

¹¹⁸Miran-Guyo, M. (2006). *The Political Economy of Civil Islam in Côte d’Ivoire*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung-Lit Verlag, pp.82-113.

¹¹⁹Ibid

building the biggest Basilica in Africa in his hometown of Yamoussoukro.¹²⁰ From the 1960s up to the 1980s, Muslim groups were essentially absent from the political arena.¹²¹ The transition of the country to multiparty democracy in 1990 opened the gate to militant Islam in the country which came with the creation of new associations that began to embrace political activism amid the raging debates on Ivoirité that erupted in 1995.¹²² The presidency of Laurent Gbagbo, 2002-2011 and the ensuing identity conflicts saw the intrusion of Pentecostalism and Evangelical Christians into the political space.¹²³ This went as far as involving spiritual advisors in political management and even state security. The gospel became an instrument used to legitimize political and military struggle which divided the country into two distinct zones, Christian-South, and Muslim-north.¹²⁴ This is deeply rooted in the socio-political factors discussed earlier. It is argued that successive southern politicians like Bedie and Gbagbo carried out systematic stigmatization of what they saw as aggression from an enemy within, northerners or Muslims.¹²⁵ These grievances coupled with others provided motivation for northern-led rebels of *Forces Nouvelles* to take up arms and plunge the country into a resort to civil war. The post-election crisis in 2010-2011 also took ethnic and religious dimensions with southern Christians against northern Muslims.¹²⁶

Religion remains an essential avenue to social mobilization and peacebuilding as most religions seek to proffer peaceful coexistence. However, there remain both intra and inter-faith tensions in the country. For instance, in July 2018, authorities charged a Muslim preacher with xenophobia, discrimination, inciting hatred, and being sympathetic toward terrorism.¹²⁷ An Evangelical Christian pastor, Israel N’Goran was arrested for publishing online videos of authorities deemed tribalistic and xenophobic. Again in 2019, unidentified individuals vandalized a Catholic

church in Grand-Yapo, north of Abidjan. The assailants destroyed a statue of the Virgin Mary and scattered the fragments at the entrance to the church. Authorities investigated the incident but made no arrests. Similarly, in August of the same year, unknown individuals removed the head from a statue of the Virgin Mary in a Catholic church in Abobo- Doume, north of Abidjan.¹²⁸

Due to these social and religious tensions, religious leaders are increasingly being involved in resolving societal tensions in Ivorian communities through interfaith dialogue.¹²⁹ However, some religious and political leaders as well as civil society representatives have criticized what they called attempts by government officials to use their religious affiliations to advance their political causes.

Particularly, its rise to power in 2011 of Ouattara brought about a shift in the formerly uneasy relationship between Muslims and the state. Some prominent imams in Abidjan, at the helm of national Islamic organizations, such as the High Council of Imams (COSIM), have become intimately close to political leadership and are regularly called upon for their advice on national issues.¹³⁰ In return, some of them have amassed a variety of generous benefits both economically and politically. For example, many cadres from Islamic associations have risen in the political structure.¹³¹ This development has also increased social tensions within the Muslim community as some religious leaders mostly based in Abidjan’s affluent neighbourhoods of Cocody, have embarked on a scramble for socio-economic benefits from their proximity to political power rather than promoting the larger interests of the Muslim community.¹³²

¹²⁰Macauley (2017), op. cit.

¹²¹Savadogo, Boukary Mathias. 2005. ‘L’intervention des associations musulmanes dans le champ politique en Côte d’Ivoire depuis 1990’. Cited in Madore, F. (2016) The New Vitality of Salafism in Côte d’Ivoire: Toward a Radicalization of Ivorian Islam?, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 46(4):417:452.

¹²²Ibid

¹²³ISS (2015). West Africa Report: Is Cote d’Ivoire Facing Religious radicalism issue 13, July

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Nordås, R. (2014). Religious demography and conflict: Lessons from Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana. *International Area Studies Review*, 17(2), 146–166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2233865914529118>

¹²⁶Interview with an Islamic religious leader in Yopougon April 2021

¹²⁷US Department of States (2018). Cote d’Ivoire: International Religious Freedom Report. Available at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05> (Accessed on June 23, 2021)

¹²⁸US Department of States (2019). Report on International Religious Freedom: Côte d’Ivoire

¹²⁹Interview with an Imam in Yopougon, April 2021.

¹³⁰Miran-Guyon, M. (2017). Muslim society and the Ouattara regime in Côte d’Ivoire. *Partial elective affinities. Afrique contemporaine*, 3(3-4), 249-254. <https://doi.org/10.3917/afco.263.0249>

¹³¹Ibid

¹³²Ibid.

Conclusion

Cote d'Ivoire is on a rocky path to post-conflict reconciliation. The country is witnessing rapid economic recovery aided by massive inflows of foreign direct investments and infrastructural development. There are real concerns that massive economic expansion has not translated to mutual benefits for the majority of Ivorians in terms of reduction of baseline poverty rates and creation of jobs for the rapidly growing youth population. Structural violence remains a major threat to peace and stability. The country remains fragile as the social fabric is deeply factionalized. Historical grievances including socio-economic and political factors continue to influence people's perceptions and actions in diverse ways. Peacebuilding in such a context is a complex and multifaceted endeavor, consisting of many different structures and interventions working together to keep society from sliding into conflict. A proposed I4P framework for the country remains on paper due to varied reasons including the inability of the government to allocate the needed material and institutional resources to push the process forward. Nevertheless, there are some important structures including formal and traditional mechanisms that work in diverse ways. These mechanisms as discussed earlier have their inherent strengths and weaknesses. Measures aimed at achieving reconciliation and social cohesion have not been effective due to a lack of trust and legitimacy. The state must prioritize peacebuilding as part of ongoing measures to transform governance and economic development. Efforts must be made to build institutional legitimacy through a credible and transparent political system that is trusted by all. In addition, community reintegration and social integration also require building local capacities and providing institutional support to local actors.



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