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► **To cite this version:**

Richard Banégas. France's Intervention Policy in Africa Seen from Below: Some Thoughts on the Case of Côte d'Ivoire. *European Review of International Studies*, 2014, 1 (3), pp.60 - 79. 10.3224/eris.v1i3.19124 . hal-03470491

**HAL Id: hal-03470491**

**<https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-03470491>**

Submitted on 8 Dec 2021

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# France's Intervention Policy in Africa Seen from Below: Some Thoughts on the Case of Côte d'Ivoire\*

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**Abstract:** In contradiction with the promise to break with its post-colonial past and some attempts to change its foreign policy, France has reengaged itself massively in African crises. The military interventions launched in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Central African Republic seem to define a new French interventionist policy South of the Sahara. Based upon extensive surveys conducted in Côte d'Ivoire among young pro-Gbagbo militants, this article tries to interpret this new stance from below. It contends that the nationalist and anti-colonial mobilisations that took place in the country were not only instrumental in local power bargaining. They were (and are still) a powerful leverage for generational emancipation and reflect some conflicts of subjectification which will be key in the evolution of Franco-African relations in the future.

**Keywords:** Military intervention, France/Africa, French African policy, Nationalism, Anti-colonialism, Young Patriots, Côte d'Ivoire

## Introduction

Nicolas Sarkozy had promised to break with the past. During his presidential campaign, he declared that France would soon turn the page on the trials and tribulations of 'Françafrique'. Addressing the 2010 France-Afrique Summit in Nice following his election, he promised that there would be no further French military interventions on the continent. Just a few months later, however, Sarkozy – who had come under strong criticism for his ministers' ambiguous ties to the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes – was involved in new wars in Libya and Côte d'Ivoire, both of which resulted in regime change. In the course of his presidential campaign, François Hollande strongly denounced this poorly conceived intervention. With Hollande's election and the left's return to power, it appeared that a new phase of non-interference would soon begin. In January 2013, Hollande nevertheless plunged the French army into a new war to rein in the threat of jihadist movements in Northern Mali. Several months

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\* Translated from the French by Ethan Rundell. All non-English sources are translated by Ethan Rundell.

later, riding high on the success of 'Operation Serval', France sent troops to support UN and African forces in the Central African Republic. In this country, which had long been the exclusive preserve of the French army and where Paris had long made and unmade governments (e.g., Operation 'Barracuda' in 1979), France counted on a rapid intervention allowing it to capitalise on its new image as a 'peace maker' backed by the UN, the African Union and the United States. Lacking any real political plan, however, French forces very soon found themselves up against the complexity of the local situation and indirectly contributed to intensifying the massacres of Muslims by the Antibalaka militias. In a context marked by the first anniversary of the intervention in Mali and growing doubts regarding French action in Kidal and Bangui, criticism soon mounted at home and in Africa regarding the ins and outs of France's new policy of armed interference on the continent.

How should the contradictory movements of France's African intervention policy be understood? Do France's bombing of Gaddafi's 32<sup>nd</sup> brigade in Benghazi and Laurent Gbagbo's residence in Abidjan, followed by operations Serval in Mali and Sangaris in the Central African Republic, indicate that France has returned to its old post-colonial role as 'Africa's policeman'? Are they evidence of a new doctrine of interference in the service of a power strategy forever rooted in the defence of a private African 'preserve' (and made possible by America's 'pivot' towards Asia)? Or are they rather the expression of an incoherent, fluctuating and somewhat 'schizophrenic' policy, one defined on an *ad hoc* basis in the absence of a clear line or genuine strategy and giving rise to ever growing incomprehension on the continent? As we shall see, it is the latter hypothesis that seems to prevail for the time being.

And how is one to interpret local reactions to these interventions, which often fluctuate between acclamation and radical denunciation? How is one to understand the at times disconcerting combination of violent rejections of 'neo-colonial interference' with requests for intervention often bordering on 'calls for empire'?<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, we lack the quantitative, comparative and transversal data required to give a clear response to this question. By contrast, some information may be gleaned from a case study – that of Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) – and qualitative surveys carried out in the working class neighbourhoods of Abidjan,<sup>2</sup> helping us understand the complex relations between a society in conflict and the former colonial Power that militarily intervenes in it. In this respect, the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire constitutes an excellent 'laboratory', not only for studying France's policy of intervening in Africa, but also the conflictual redefinition of the 'collusive transactions' (Dobry) characteristic of the post-colonial relationship.<sup>3</sup>

And indeed, France's involvement in this conflict (which formally broke out in September 2002 with the rebellion of the New Forces and officially came to an end in April 2011 when Laurent Gbagbo was defeated by the bombardments of Operation

1 See G. Salamé (ed.), *Appels d'empire. Ingérences et résistances à l'âge de la mondialisation* (Paris: Fayard, 1996).

2 Since the early 2000s, I have conducted several series of individual and collective surveys – roughly one per year – in Abidjan (in the districts of Adjamé, Koumassi, Yopougon, Abobo, Plateau, Cocody) and elsewhere in the country on various themes relating to the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire and, in particular, the involvement of young people in political action and violence. A good portion of these surveys were carried out among the militant faction of the Young Patriots. Though they were not initially at the centre of my research, the issue of relations between France and Côte d'Ivoire was constantly raised in the interviews.

3 It should be noted that the term "Françafrique" was itself invented by Houphouët-Boigny and was at the time assigned a positive connotation.

Unicorn) gave rise to an unprecedented anti-French mobilisation on the continent, following in the lead of the Young Patriots, a pro-Gbagbo group. By focusing on French interference in the Ivorian crisis and the reactions it aroused, the discussion that follows examines what some have described as a “return to a form of indirect administration typical of Franco-African relations”.<sup>4</sup>

As its point of departure, the article shows how France’s intervention in Côte d’Ivoire is symptomatic of Paris’ changing doctrine and practice of interference on the continent. It suggests that the former colonial Power’s politico-military involvement on Ivorian territory might be described as an incoherent and ineffective (albeit ultimately successful) ‘yo-yo’ policy. The article then turns to consider this policy of interference ‘from below’. Drawing upon interviews conducted among the Young Patriots of Abidjan, it examines the ambivalent meaning of their ultranationalist harangues and the grand narrative of post-colonial emancipation. Beyond their instrumental character, I claim, the anti-colonialist and anti-French mobilisations reflect major generational upheaval and express deep conflicts of subjectification, themselves indicative of a ‘moral war’ between various ‘regimes of truth’. In conclusion, the article examines the future of this theme in a context in which the apparatus with which it was associated in Côte d’Ivoire has disappeared and France becomes involved in new Sub-Saharan wars (Mali, Central African Republic).

## Preamble: The Twists and Turns of a Policy of Power(lessness)

Since the mid-1990s, France’s African intervention policy has been in search of coherence, hesitating between various options that have never truly been clarified. Despite the discourse of rupture and renewal intoned by various governments of both right and left, French policy has remained mired in the uncertainty of unavowed arbitrations and choices between, among other things, ‘non-interference’ and ‘non-indifference’, the temptation to withdraw from the continent and a desire to maintain privileged relations there, the tendency towards multilateralism and the desire to retain a policy of bilateral influence, shifting responsibility to African actors and direct intervention, outsourcing and ‘subsidiarity’, the modernisation of military cooperation and the perpetuation of the old practices of *Françafrique*.

During this period, France has nevertheless embarked on a large scale effort to redefine its security policy on the continent, presenting this as the mark of a new, modernised and Europeanised ‘African policy’. The commitments made with the British at the Saint-Malo Summit were to be its driving force.<sup>5</sup> Following in the footsteps of other great Powers, which were moving to disengage from the continent, Paris implemented a new crisis management policy at the end of the 1990s. Given the still fresh memory of events in Somalia and Rwanda, Paris wondered about the interest and risks of maintaining a strong military presence on the conti-

4 A. Bahi, *L’ivoirité mouvementée. Jeunes, médias et politique en Côte d’Ivoire* (Bamenda Langaa Editions, 2013), p. 281.

5 See T. Chafer, G. Cumming, ‘Beyond Fashoda: Anglo-French Security Cooperation in Africa since Saint-Malo’, *International Affairs*, 85 (2010), pp. 1129–1147, and by the same authors, ‘From Rivalry to Partnership? Critical Reflections on Anglo-French Cooperation in Africa’, *Review of International Studies*, 37 (2011), pp. 2439–2463.

ment and had set about developing new security cooperation measures. At the time, the temptation of withdrawal was on everyone's mind. It was even reflected in the practice of conditioning foreign aid as this was set out in Edouard Balladur's famous 'Abidjan doctrine' of September 1993, according to which bilateral French ODA was to be subordinated to good progress in the structural adjustment programmes (SAP) negotiated with multilateral financial institutions. This contrasted with Paris' earlier stance, which had struggled to 'protect' the economies of its former 'backyard' from the neoliberal demands of the 'Washington consensus'. With the 'Abidjan doctrine', it was said, France would no longer distinguish between its traditional friends and others, with all parties equally subject to 'multilateralised' conditionality. At the time, generational changes were also taking place within French diplomacy and cooperation; new personnel were less inclined than their predecessors to see Africa as a necessary condition of French power. Within the administration, there was a subdued but real battle between "ancients", the partisans of maintaining privileged ties with the 'backyard', and "moderns",<sup>6</sup> who militated for engaging with other partners. This was even to be encountered in the corridors of the Elysée, where Jacques Chirac, torn between these choices, established two 'African cells': a rather 'reformist' official one and an unofficial one directed by that permanent fixture of French diplomacy, Jacques Foccart.<sup>7</sup> Although the cohabitation of these two bodies was relatively cordial, it clearly illustrates the ambivalence of a Chiraquien policy that hesitated between thoughts of reform and a desire to maintain 'privileged relations' with the continent.

Yet things radically changed in 1997 with Foccart's death and, above all, the left's victory in legislative elections. When added to the battle already underway between 'ancients' and 'moderns' on the right, the new cohabitation government tipped the scales in favour of the latter. Arriving at Matignon, Lionel Jospin was rather quick to demonstrate his 'right of review' and desire to distance himself from the old politics of networks on left and right alike. A 'new French African policy' was thus unveiled by the new government. With militia warfare raging in Brazzaville, it soon had its baptism by fire: should the French army intervene? At the time, French troops were present in Brazzaville to help evacuate nationals fleeing the war in neighbouring Zaire and President Lissouba called upon them to intervene in the conflict between his supporters and the militias of Sassou-Nguesso. But France continued to turn a deaf ear to his requests and, in a very ostentatious display of neutrality, confined its military action to the extraction of French citizens.<sup>8</sup> From now on, it was said, Paris would no longer systematically assume its traditional role as 'Africa's policeman'. Although taken under constraint, the decision not to intervene in the Congo was the first clear sign to African capitals that there had been a change in policy, especially when one considers what Brazzaville represented in the Gaullist imagery regarding Franco-African relations. A new, hastily elaborated French crisis management doc-

6 See D. Bourmand, 'La politique africaine de Jacques Chirac: les anciens contre les modernes', *Modern and Contemporary France*, special issue, 'France and Black Africa', No. 4 (1996), pp. 431–442; see also the special issue of *Politique africaine*, 'France-Afrique: la fin du pacte colonial?', No. 105 (March), 2007.

7 See R. Banégas, R. Marchal, 'La politique de la France en Afrique sous Jacques Chirac', in C. Lequesne, M. Vaïsse, *La politique étrangère de Jacques Chirac* (Paris: Riveneuve, 2013), pp. 158–184.

8 In truth, this stance of withdrawal was coupled with an unofficial policy – outsourced to covert networks, private networks (including Elf) and allied states (Angola) – of supporting Sassou Nguesso. This allowed Nguesso to gain the upper hand. See P. Yengo, 'Affinités électives et délégation des compétences: la politique congolaise de Jacques Chirac', *Politique africaine*, No. 105 (March), 2007, pp. 105–125.

trine was established in the form of what I have called the “Jospinien neither-nor”<sup>9</sup> (‘neither interference nor indifference’). Even more so than in the Congo and the Central African Republic, where Jospin decided to close military bases in the summer of 1997, the Côte d’Ivoire was to serve as a testing ground for this new policy. Its most striking appearance came with General Gueï’s December 1999 coup d’état. While the Élysée’s African cell wanted to fly to the rescue of the ousted President, Henri Konan Bédié, the Socialist government decided to remain on the sidelines – a powerfully symbolic decision in a country that had until then been considered ‘France’s showcase’ in Africa.<sup>10</sup> This new approach was also reflected in structural reforms to the military cooperation policy, which henceforth took the path of multi-lateralisation, regionalisation and the ‘Africanisation’ of security measures. The RE-CAMP system (Reinforcing African Peace-Keeping Capacities) was thus presented as the new key to regional security, allowing France to withdraw behind the technical curtain of support for local armies. Military bases as well as defence agreements were also called into question, in particular due to endogenous constraints relating to the professionalisation of the army.

Nevertheless, starting in the 2000s and especially after the right’s return to power in 2002, the pendulum began to swing back towards French military reengagement in African conflicts. Following the onset of the New Forces rebellion in Côte d’Ivoire, Paris sent more than 5000 men to intervene in the conflict. Refusing to come to the aid of the Gbagbo regime by virtue of defence agreements, Operation Unicorn supported the UN and froze the front line. The direct involvement of French forces in the Ivorian crisis as well as in Chad and the CAR thus seemed to confirm that a shift had taken place to a new, much more interventionist doctrine, albeit one that had never truly been made explicit. The UK’s military intervention in the Sierra Leone conflict in 2000 appeared further proof that former colonial Powers were indeed returning to their old habit of intervening in the continent’s affairs.

But it was not to last. Following a new crisis in Côte d’Ivoire in November 2004, which saw French forces fighting a loyalist army in the streets of Abidjan while Young Patriots targeted French nationals, the French yo-yo policy swung back for a third time, with Paris adopting a cautious stance of diplomatic and military withdrawal sometimes bordering on political impotence and apathy. Operation Unicorn was reduced to a minimum and the Abidjan military base was mothballed. From that point on, official discourse embraced a position of non-interference. Having led the effort to manage the crisis in Côte d’Ivoire, France passed its responsibilities off to South Africa, with Thabo Mbeki becoming (unsuccessfully) the principal mediator. Fearing a new ‘November 2004’, Paris attempted to pursue this cautious policy of non-engagement in the first four months of crisis following the 2011 elections. But events in the Arab world and stalemate in Côte d’Ivoire’s post-election crisis were to bring about a spectacular return to ‘gunboat politics’.

Faced with the radicalisation of the Ivorian crisis and NATO’s involvement in Libya, the French government found itself in an awkward position, criticised in both France and Côte d’Ivoire for its ‘double standard’ policy. With France spearheading

9 See R. Banégas, R. Marchal, J. Meimon, ‘La fin du pacte colonial?’, *Politique africaine*, No. 105 (March), 2007, pp. 7–26.

10 See S. Smith, ‘La politique d’engagement de la France à l’épreuve de la Côte d’Ivoire’, *Politique africaine*, No. 89 (March), 2003, pp. 112–126; see also J. Rueff, *Côte d’Ivoire. Le feu au pré carré* (Paris: Autrement, 2004).

the strikes on Gaddafi's army, how was one to understand the wait-and-see attitude it had adopted in Abidjan after the second round of presidential voting? How could France on its own initiative pursue an armed intervention at the same time that it systematically (and opportunistically) relied on the AU or ECOWAS to provide 'African solutions to African problems'? Should support for democratic processes in Africa, even if they are insurrectional or revolutionary, be different on either side of the Sahara? After weeks of procrastination, the Élysée finally answered these questions in early 2011 by heavily engaging the French army alongside pro-Ouattara forces in order to bring down the regime of Laurent Gbagbo. This operation came as a shock in Côte d'Ivoire and elsewhere in Africa. It also raised huge questions that went far beyond the Ivorian framework alone. If civilians had to be protected in keeping with UN resolutions, why had France not intervened earlier to prevent the blind repression of RHDP (Rassemblement des Houphouëtistes pour la Démocratie et la Paix) street demonstrations, the bombing of the Abobo market and the Duékoué massacres? It took more than three months for France and the blue helmets to decide to use their mandate to protect the population and secure elections. Very rapidly, the political question was raised: could bombing sites of Gbagbo's power (the presidential palace and residence) be justified solely in terms of the need to protect civilians or did it rather reflect a partisan shift on the part of Paris in favour of a particular camp and figure who was said to have ties to President Sarkozy? France had difficulty concealing the contradictions between, on the one hand, an official, UN accredited mission and, on the other, the reality of its intervention in support of Ouattarist forces incapable of winning on their own. From that point on, and despite the election of a new government in 2012, Paris has pursued this new interventionist tendency, sending troops first to Mali and then to the Central African Republic. In today's France, right and left seem united in their embrace of a new creed of interventionism in Africa.

## The War Seen from Below: Patriotic and Anti-Colonial Mobilisations

How was this policy of French interference perceived in Côte d'Ivoire? In April 2011, most of Alassane Ouattara's supporters were relieved to see the deadlock broken with the help of international forces and their champion finally come to power. Since then, they have been nearly unanimous in praising France's intervention. The other side, by contrast, saw it as the ultimate proof of 'France's war against the Côte d'Ivoire' and a striking confirmation of Paris' neo-colonialist ambitions in the Ivorian conflict. Indeed, since the start of the crisis, many Ivorians – those with ties to Laurent Gbagbo's regime as well as simple citizens – have tended to interpret and even experience the conflict along agonistic lines as a fight for national liberation and a 'second war of independence'.

Between 2002 and 2011, this rhetoric became the preferred vehicle by which the regime, which lacked internal and external support, sought to win legitimacy. It provided the grist for a veritable state propaganda machine that attributed the origins of the rebellion to Chirac and Sarkozy's France and presented colonial alienation as the

source of all of the country's ills. Although he later distanced himself from Laurent Gbagbo's Ivorian Popular Front (IPF), the then President of the National Assembly, Mamadou Koulibaly, a (free market) economist and herald of the 'young patriots', at this time established himself as the radical standard bearer of this discourse of liberation. In a widely distributed little tract, he wrote:

"This book is a book of combat and that is why it presents the war that France has decided to wage against the Côte d'Ivoire. Wanting to create a modern state is the Ivorians' only crime. ... Freedom has been put on trial for having led to issues not desired by Chirac's France, where it is widely supposed that Africa is still not ready for democracy. African states are only good for state corruption, for recycling official development assistance to finance electoral campaigns in France. We only have a choice between cacao plantation democracy and the colonial one party state. ... No country has friends but all have interests. Côte d'Ivoire also has interests that it wishes to secure and see respected by its partners. After this war, cooperation will no longer be the same as before. ... The destiny of our people is at stake and is now being determined. ... The people of Côte d'Ivoire have the right to defend themselves against any and all aggressors. No one can take away its right to self-determination. ... We want to once again become free men. Patriots of all parties and nations, let us join forces to crusade against those who destabilise our beautiful Côte d'Ivoire. This is not a choice for us. It is a vital necessity."<sup>11</sup>

The leader of the Alliance of Young Patriots, Charles Blé Goudé, who throughout these years of crisis had urged immense crowds to rise up against France, outdid himself in a memoir that, in its second edition, included a preface by Aminata Traoré, a former Malian minister and prominent figure within the African anti-globalisation movement:

"... I rise up against any country that believes it can make another do its bidding. ... This is the reason that my comrades and I are fighting for France to respect our sovereignty. I insist on the fact that I have nothing against the French. I simply disapprove of the neo-colonial methods of their present leaders. I will always refuse this political 'baby-bottling', that is, Paris' policy of keeping African countries in a condition of subservience. ... An entire continent on its knees before France! The time of colonies is over! The present leaders of France must understand that tomorrow is neither yesterday nor today and that the twenty-first century in which we now find ourselves will sound the knell of their retrograde vision rooted in the past. We refuse to bend our knee before France, today or tomorrow. ... What right does that former colonizer have to interfere in our affairs? If we allow them to do so, French leaders will go so far as to decide how we dress and how we behave every day. Jacques Chirac and his people have to finally understand that we have grown up and that we want to take responsibility for ourselves, that we can and must do so."<sup>12</sup>

With President Sarkozy's April 2011 decision to bomb the positions of the loyalist army while their leader, Laurent Gbagbo, took refuge in his bunker in Cocody, this anti-colonialist discourse increased tenfold. From that point on, it became a springboard for new platforms of transnational mobilisation. Hundreds of articles and open letters incessantly denounced the politico-military interference of the former colonial Power.<sup>13</sup> These diatribes soon became the stock in trade of an entire fringe of

11 M. Koulibaly, A. Ahua Jr, G.K. Bush, *La Guerre de la France contre la Côte d'Ivoire* (Abidjan : La Refondation, May 2003), pp. 8–9.

12 C. Blé Goudé, *Crise ivoirienne: ma part de vérité* (Abidjan : Leaders Team Associated/Frat Mat éditions, 2006), new edition, pp. 142–143.

13 Among others, see S. F. Dedy, T. J. Balou Bi (eds.), *Election présidentielle en Côte d'Ivoire, ou le pouvoir néocolonial dans tous ses états* (Paris : L'Harmattan, Présence africaine, 2013); J. Koné Katinan, *Côte d'Ivoire,*

militants, many of them living in exile in Europe or Ghana. These were the words of nationalist intellectuals, one would suppose, all the more radical for living outside the country. But that was not the entire story. For years, this anti-colonialist reading had on a daily basis been thrust to the forefront by the press – whether they were the ‘blue papers’ allied with Laurent Gbagbo’s government, the television and radio stations under his thumb or the large number of artists (singers, musicians, DJs) who were to make a specialty of it with their patriotic ‘zouglou’ and ‘coupé-décalé’ music<sup>14</sup> and patriotic comic books.<sup>15</sup> Championed by an entire universe of activists and street mobilisation structures, the anti-colonialist theme quickly achieved hegemony in the public sphere.

It must be emphasised that this rhetoric of national liberation was not exclusive to the elite. It is obviously difficult to calculate the size of its audience at home or abroad, especially given that its champions were subjected to systematic repression following the change of regime in April 2011. Convergent studies have shown that this argument had won rather wide acceptance before this date, including among those who were not themselves direct supporters of Laurent Gbagbo’s regime.<sup>16</sup> There was of course nothing spontaneous about this: on the contrary, the spread of this anti-colonialist theme throughout Ivorian society had been conveyed by a very powerful political system, that of the ‘patriotic galaxy’ structures, which consisted of hundreds of spaces of mobilisation and ‘popular resistance’. These were hierarchically organised, reaching from the inner circles of presidential power down to the most remote neighbourhoods and regions. The growing number of ‘parliaments’, ‘agoras’, ‘senates’ and other patriotic ‘congresses’ that appeared in the country following the start of the rebellion in September 2002 played a central role in spreading this rhetoric of a ‘second independence struggle’. At the outset, these structures were built as spaces of ‘democratic debate’ after the model of the ‘Sorbonne’, which since the early 1990s had operated in Plateau’s administrative district as a sort of Ivorian answer to Speakers’ Corner of Hyde Park.<sup>17</sup> As spaces of discussion, mobilisation and political socialisation, these ‘street parliaments’<sup>18</sup> gradually established themselves as one of the main driving forces of patriotic speech in urban society. In September 2006, with discussions regarding the political transition underway at the UN, I attended several debates held by the ‘parliament’ of Yopougon-Sideci, one of the country’s largest. Taking the floor in advance of that day’s guest speaker, one of the parliament’s regulars, known for his diplomatic talents as ‘Michel Barnier’, warmed up the crowd in this way:

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*L'audace de la rupture* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2013).

- 14 See A. Schumann, ‘Songs of a New Era: Popular Music and Political Expression in the Ivorian Crisis’, *African Affairs*, 112 (448), 2013, pp. 440–459; as well as the work of A. Kamaté, *La Côte d’Ivoire en crise. Musique populaire et pouvoir de 2000 à 2006*, Master’s thesis, University of Paris 1 (Department of Political Science), 2006.
- 15 See the comic book *Côte d’Ivoire. Indépendance économique, l’ultime combat*, published in August 2006 by a cartoonist nicknamed ‘The Imperial’ and distributed in the streets of Abidjan.
- 16 See R. Banégas, ‘Côte d’Ivoire: les jeunes ‘se lèvent en hommes’. Anticolonialisme et ultranationalisme chez les Jeunes patriotes d’Abidjan’, *Les Etudes du CERI*, No. 137 (July 2007), pp. 52; G. Koné, *Sociogénèse et dynamique du mouvement ‘Jeune patriote’*, Sociology dissertation, University of Bouaké, 2010 (forthcoming under the title *La révolte des porteurs de chaises*, Abidjan, 2014).
- 17 See A. Bahi, ‘La ‘Sorbonne’ d’Abidjan: rêve de démocratie ou naissance d’un espace public?’, *Revue africaine de sociologie*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2003), pp. 47–63.
- 18 See R. Banégas, F. Brisset-Foucault, A. Cutolo (eds.), ‘Parlements de la rue. Espaces publics de la parole et citoyenneté en Afrique’, special issue of *Politique africaine*, No. 127 (October 2012).

“... Everything comes to an end. We decided to fight the battle of Kirina<sup>19</sup> because France itself won its independence. Even France was invaded and afterwards did away with... the invaders. Hitler and the Nazis marched on France. They lunched at the Bastille. We weren't there... but we know your history. So they marched on France. And General de Gaulle called for resistance from London... he called for resistance. In the same way, President Laurent Gbagbo calls upon us... to resist. And today you describe us as patriots in the pay of President Laurent Gbagbo. We are not... in the pay of President Laurent Gbagbo. We are resistance fighters. That's what we are! We are resistance fighters in the pay of our Republic... which is now being tormented by the colonists of yesteryear. (*applause*). We are resistance fighters... Here, no one has a weapon here. We are going to disarm France with speech... With speech... we are going to disarm France. We're going to put an end to all that... and we're going to cooperate now with France as equals. The time of lucrative contracts – contracts costing just one, symbolic franc – with the Bouygues family is over. Now, we'll take bids. Thabo Mbeki comes with his briefcase, Vladimir Poutine, Jacques Chirac, Tony Blair, George Bush, everyone! With all our petroleum, how much do you offer? South Africa, 44%, ok, you can wait a little; France 20%: get at the back of the line; Russia 50%, the United States 52%, that works, sold! (*applause*). That's how we're now going to negotiate and sell to the highest bidder. We're now going to sell to the highest bidder because it's not normal that we should be poor in a rich country... President Gbagbo decided to put an end to all that. We let the presidential palace that you see in Plateau there, we let it. We let it to France. The presidential palace, the hall of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister's residence, the ministerial compound, the Vridi shipping terminal... it was all rented out. And we paid money to France. And President Gbagbo Laurent came and he said: 'Ok, your rental agreement is with Houphouët Boigny... Your rental agreement is with Houphouët Boigny.' ... Even the roads were rented out. Who knows, maybe even the French language I am speaking is rented (*laughter and applause*). In any case, true independence, we haven't had that, we were lied to. We weren't independent. We were free with our feet in chains, closely supervised by the master. Before, could we speak before the master? We trembled. Now we greet one another: hello, how are you? Many things have changed and true democracy has now begun to emerge.”<sup>20</sup>

Listening to this harangue, it becomes clear that the violence of the ultra-nationalist discourse embraced by the Young Patriots reflects long-standing and very profound alienation within Ivorian society. Like many of its neighbours in francophone Africa, the Côte d'Ivoire never truly cut the umbilical cord with the 'motherland'. This oft-denounced 'osmotic' relationship was more pronounced in Côte d'Ivoire than elsewhere due to President Houphouët Boigny's choice – at once political, economic and strategic – to remain in the fold of the former colonial Power. Following independence, the 'old man' defended the Community option and the maintenance of close ties with Paris against the advocates of pan-Africanism. In contrast to his neighbour Nkrumah, he built up his country's wealth by strengthening these relations in all domains: military, economic, political and cultural. For Côte d'Ivoire, independence was little more than a flag: all prerogatives of sovereignty were exercised by the French, the country's security was assured, not by a national army, but rather by the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bima (bataillon d'infanterie de marine), the better part of the economy was in the hands of French interests and the highest reaches of the state administration were staffed by French 'énarques'.

19 A famous battle in the course of which Sundiata Keita, the founder of the Mandinka Empire, defeated the tyrant Soumahoro Kanté.

20 Remarks gathered at the Yopougon-Sidéci Parliament, Wednesday 20 September 2006. For the full text of the speech, see R. Banégas, 'La France et l'ONU devant le "parlement" de Yopougon. Paroles de Jeunes patriotes et régimes de vérité à Abidjan', *Politique africaine*, No. 104 (December 2006), pp. 141–158.

The force with which nationalist sentiment was expressed throughout these years of crisis is obviously related to this history of alienated sovereignty and reflects long-standing demands for a second independence.<sup>21</sup> So much is well known. Less well known is the relationship between this contemporary mobilisation and the earliest stirrings of the anti-colonialist narrative in the first hours of independence. With their attention focused on the rent economy and the political alliance with Paris, Houphouët and his people knowingly neglected any historical reference that might have united, as elsewhere, a backwater nationalism. In the 1950s and 60s, nationalist movements were the object of ferocious repression, as was the Guébié secessionist mobilisation, which expressed a clearly anti-colonialist discourse in native accents. This movement, which some of Laurent Gbagbo's troops still claim to follow – Gbagbo himself is a native of Gagnoa (the region of the Guébié) and a historian of nationalism – was violently crushed with French support. With the crisis of the 2000s, Kragbé Gnagbé enjoyed something of a renaissance thanks to a new nationalist historiography that presented him as a hero of the anti-French resistance.<sup>22</sup> Taken alone, the strong resurgence in public discussion of painful episodes such as that of the Guébié indicates that the virulence of the pro-Gbagbo patriotic mobilisations doubtless also had something to do with this long eclipsed nationalist memory. The role played by extraversion and *françafricain* 'consanguinity' in the formation of the Ivorian state and economy has led many Ivorians to believe that they still suffer from a 'deficit of self-representation'.<sup>23</sup> In classic fashion, this conflict, which expressed itself in terms of national liberation and a second independence, partly made up for it.

## National Liberation, Anti-Colonialism and Generational Emancipation

As soon as the war began in 2002, the Young Patriots of Abidjan provided shock troops for Laurent Gbagbo's government. Mobilised by the government, which handsomely remunerated their leaders, the Young Patriots played a pivotal role in the very ambivalent and conflictual relationship with France. Proof of this is to be found in the violent demonstrations that took place following the Marcoussis accords in January 2003 as well as those of November 2004, in the course of which French forces fired on the crowd in the streets of Abidjan and a large number of French nationals left the country. In January 2006, patriotic militias once again took centre stage to challenge the UN and violently resisted the pro-Outtara uprising and blue helmet patrols during the post-election crisis of 2010-2011. Recruited in large numbers and armed and trained by loyalist forces, these militias represented a formidable system of social and political control in the service of the regime.<sup>24</sup> The

21 See H.-M. Yéré, *Citizenship, Nationality and History in Côte d'Ivoire, 1929–1999*, PhD Thesis, Université de Bâle, 2010.

22 See J. Gadji Dagbo, *L'Affaire Kragbé Gnagbé. Un autre regard 32 ans après* (Abidjan, Nouvelles éditions ivoiriennes, 2002).

23 After the expression of Ousmane Dembélé (personal communication).

24 See R. Banégas, 'A Warrior Generation? Political Violence and Subjectivation of Young Militiamen in Côte d'Ivoire', in N. Duclos (ed.), *War Veterans in Postwar Situations: Chechnya, Serbia, Turkey, Peru, and Côte*

spread of ‘parliaments’, ‘agoras’ and ‘senates’ throughout all neighbourhoods of the economic capital also reflected a desire to control the urban territory. This movement rapidly gained ground in the large towns of the South as well as in rural areas where the leaders of the patriotic galaxy, with the government’s encouragement and financial support, helped build analogous organisations. In the first years of the conflict, the patriotic movement thus experienced a meteoric rise and impressive growth in the zone controlled by the government. In retrospect, it can even be argued that the Young Patriots saved the regime from collapse and above all allowed it to resist the various demands of the international community. Indeed, this mobilisation played a crucial role in the regime’s efforts to resist pressure from France, the UN Security Council and the African Union to reach a power-sharing agreement.

In fact, one might make do with an instrumentalist reading of this anti-colonialist movement, which to a very large extent obeyed the regime’s orders. On this view, the patriotic mobilisation was ultimately just a device to mask the real social, economic and political interests of the Young ‘ventriotes’<sup>25</sup>, who employed nationalist logor-rhea to advance their interests. There is obviously much evidence to support this interpretation. The luxurious lifestyle of the leaders of the ‘patriotic galaxy’ – Charles Blé Goudé, Konaté Navigué, Eugène Djué and others – suggests that ultranationalist politics had in the space of a few years become a powerful vector of economic accumulation and social upward mobility. It has also been noted that, among lower ranking members of the movement, involvement in the patriotic galaxy could prove profitable. Many young activists succeeded in selling their engagement in exchange for a favour – in particular, their ‘admission’ to a civil service competition and professional integration into the administration. Indeed, at all levels of the movement, patriotic mobilisation was inseparable from activist strategies for capturing rents on the classic model of the ‘politics of the belly’.<sup>26</sup>

My surveys nevertheless prove that the patriotic mobilisation cannot be reduced to its ‘alimentary’ dimension alone and that its commodification does not amount to a political economy of material remuneration. The luxurious lifestyle of the movement’s leaders has blinded observers to the relative poverty of their troops. Yet the latter nevertheless mobilised on behalf of the nationalist cause, sometimes even paying to attend the debates that took place daily in Abidjan’s Plateau district at the ‘Sorbonne’ or in the neighbourhood agoras. As with any mobilisation, anti-colonialist or otherwise, the Young Patriots were also motivated by social imaginaries and networks of sociability. These had been profoundly affected by the generalisation of violence. My argument<sup>27</sup> is that underlying sociological dynamics – in particular, the individual and collective struggle for youth emancipation championed by a new generation of activists – fuelled support for the anti-colonialist rhetoric of the ‘second war of independence’.

At the individual level, biographical interviews with activists in the service of the patriotic cause indicate that these young people saw the anti-colonialist cause as a source of self-empowerment. The discourse of national liberation served another

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*d’Ivoire* (London: Palgrave, 2012), pp. 241–266.

25 A pun referring to the Young Patriots’ greed and predatory activities. The expression, “la politique du ventre” (the politics of the belly), is commonly used in reference to prebendal politics in Africa. See J.-F. Bayart, *The State in Africa : The Politics of the Belly* (London: Longman, 1993).

26 *Ibid.* On the various ways in which patriotic mobilisation was sold, see the dissertation of G. Koné.

27 Which I have presented elsewhere: see R. Banégas, ‘Côte d’Ivoire: Patriotism, Ethnonationalism and Other Modes of Self-Writing’, *African Affairs*, Vol. 105, No. 421 (2006), pp. 535–552.

form of emancipatory struggle, at once generational, familial, communitarian, economic and, ultimately, political. In this sense, the discourse regarding France and its colonial heritage was not merely cover for the mercenary attitude of 'ventriones' or simply a reflection of state propaganda. In what had come to resemble a true generational revolution, it was also the preferred rhetoric for expressing self-affirmation and the demand for rights. As a young speaker at the Yopougon parliament named A.S. put it:

"My name is A.S. I'm from Northern Côte d'Ivoire; I'm Senufo and Christian. ... And my position in the crisis is all the more... complex given that it's my parents who in practice are... involved in what's happening. So I can't take the same stance as those who are here. Because at home people are dying, there isn't any medicine, there isn't any drinking water, ... I think about my parents but at the same time I know that the fight will lead me... towards freedom. ... We're in the process... we're in this fight because..., in fact, we're a new generation, we're a new generation and we think that... those who taught democracy, those who taught us freedom, we're only asking them for a single thing: our right to exist as a nation and our, our right to freely choose those who rule us. That's the... the problem we have. But those who colonised us, I mean France, were perhaps a little surprised because maybe it didn't notice that the baby had grown up; I mean, we went too fast, so maybe the master hadn't expected that the student would learn so quickly and now wants to be like the master. ... France has to accept... us with our way of thinking, people have to respect our choices. ... People must be allowed to express themselves .... So people have to allow us to express ourselves. We want to collaborate with them; France after all is the leading partner in the development of... Côte d'Ivoire. The last time I was surprised to see the ambassador come to say that Côte d'Ivoire represented 0.008% of [French] cooperation in the world. We say "fine, if we are nothing to you, let us be then." That's it, if you think that we're nothing in your eyes then give us back our freedom. And then when we realise we can't live without you, we'll come to see you again. It's as simple as that. But we're forced to collaborate. We can perhaps understand that our great grandparents perhaps signed agreements because I have an Italian friend who told me one day after we had left a demonstration, he said "but, Soro, do you know why you are fighting"; I told him, "we're fighting for our freedom." He said "but what freedom are you talking about?"; I said "our freedom, that means we want to be able to make our own choices." He said "but perhaps people sold your Côte d'Ivoire before you were born"; I said "but the debate isn't about that". ... Because real freedom can't be given away. Freedom is something you fight over. Because my Italian friend told me, other countries won their independence by fighting for it; "you, your independence was... given to you. But what was your independence given in exchange for?" I couldn't answer this question because obviously I knew he was right."

Extending these remarks in a discussion of how his involvement with the movement affected relations with his family, he added:

"All that so as not to depend on someone. So that no one can dictate our behaviour. That's it. ... But I have to say that it was hard at the beginning because when we came at the beginning of the parliament, parents treated us as children who didn't want to do anything, who just came to kill time... to defend those who are already doing well. But over time we ultimately convinced them that without this fight we would be nothing and that the investment they had made would be wasted because we wouldn't be able to look after them. People should have a good wage, everyone should have a job... but we know that only the fight can give all that, it's the fight that we are pursuing now."<sup>28</sup>

28 Interview, Abidjan (Yopougon), September 2006.

Another ‘professional’ patriotic orator, ‘Professor Echo’, reiterated these sentiments in recounting the day his parents – Methodist protestants “who had never thought that I would take a position in politics, much less become a public figure” – saw him mount the podium at the “All Powerful Congress of Abobo”. This affected his relations with his father: “I continue to depend on him today... when it comes to managing the situation. When I’m a bit in a confused situation, I consult him. So he has become a consultant for me (*laughter*).”<sup>29</sup>

In light of these intimate and microsociological battles, the ultranationalist mobilisation of patriotic youth against France and its local henchmen can therefore also be interpreted as the symbolic vector of a struggle for empowerment and subjectification among young people. By the violence of their discourse and – for many of them – their involvement in militias, they were attempting to win a place for themselves in the public sphere as a fully-fledged political category. Indeed, the crisis of the 2000s witnessed ever greater assertiveness on the part of young activists who ‘stood up as men’ to shake off the yoke of generational relations and claim their place in society. This process of empowerment and emancipation is of course neither new nor uniquely related to the conflict but the war did accelerate it, propelling some activist segments of the urban and rural youth population to the forefront of the political arena. Aspiring to power without, in Yacouba Konaté’s phrase, “being wallflowers”,<sup>30</sup> many of these young patriots were influenced by their experience of the political culture of violence within student unions, where disagreements were already being resolved by ‘machettage’ and armed confrontation. Recruited for their part among the ‘strongmen’ of the ghettos and idle youth of the suburbs, the vast majority of rank and file troops also used this violence as a tool of social vengeance. The looting that accompanied the November 2004 mobilisations and the subsequent victory of Alasane Ouattara’s troops in 2011<sup>31</sup> clearly illustrate this phenomenon. Ultranationalist rhetoric was thus combined with that of looting within a single matrix centred on the appropriation of property and the assertion of rights. This matrix was itself subsumed under what Achille Mbembé has called an “unprecedented culture of liberty as a form of domination” and accumulation. “This domination”, he adds, “consists in taking, appropriating and profiting in keeping with a vision that likens the life of the individual to a game of chance in which the temporal horizon is dominated by the present. The liberty to trespass upon others and their belongings does not only partake of a particular power struggle. It also partakes of a lifestyle and aesthetic.”<sup>32</sup>

## “That’s the Truth!” Conflicts of Subjectification and Regimes of Truth

Yet it would be mistaken to interpret the anti-colonial patriotic mobilisations solely in terms of juvenile emancipation, even when crossed with the libertarian aesthetic

29 Interview, Abidjan (Yopougon), September 2006.

30 See Y. Konaté, “Les enfants de la balle. De la Fesci aux mouvements de patriotes”, *Politique africaine*, No. 89 (March 2003), pp. 49–70.

31 See G. Koné, ‘Logiques sociales et politiques des pillages et barrages dans la crise post-électorale en Côte d’Ivoire’, *Politique africaine*, No. 121 (June 2011), pp. 145–160.

32 A. Mbembé, ‘A propos des écritures africaines de soi’, *Politique africaine*, No. 77 (June 2000), p. 42.

of violent domination to which Mbembé refers. As I have shown elsewhere,<sup>33</sup> this 'patriotic subjectification' should be understood from the perspective of an ambivalent process of subjection in the twofold, Foucauldian sense of the term:<sup>34</sup> affirmation of a moral and political subject *in* and *by* subordination to a very burdensome and constraining social and institutional framework. Indeed, the dynamic of generational self-assertion championed by the Young Patriots movement remained very equivocal and subject to powerful systems of internal and external patronage. In this respect, it can be argued that the anti-colonialist mobilisation against France was also a moral war that reflected very profound conflicts of subjectification pitting various 'regimes of truth' against one another.

It is no coincidence that the harangues of patriotic speakers and the songs of zouglou and coupé-décalé were constantly punctuated with the slogan: 'That's the truth!' Indeed, among the young activists in the agoras and parliaments of the 'patriotic galaxy', the process of subjectification took place by way of a hermeneutic effort to 'reveal' the truth expressed by public speaking.<sup>35</sup> In addition to the central task of wartime mobilisation, the street parliaments were also given the duty of 'governing of souls'.<sup>36</sup> In the peculiar situation of 'neither war nor peace' that long prevailed, it was necessary to help people 'withstand the fears' of war and 'stand tall' in adversity. As one of the Sorbonne and Yop' Sideci speakers put it, this presumed that those who ran the agoras were capable of "explaining" to ordinary people "what has really happened in the country since 2002".<sup>37</sup> All of the speakers I interviewed claimed that they had shouldered a major responsibility in the crisis: in explaining the situation, they enacted a 'maieutics' serving to 'raise awareness' and construct citizen resistance. In particular, this involved countering the 'lies' and counter-truths peddled by international media outlets, such as Radio France Internationale and France 24, so that Ivorians might become the subjects of their own history. The Young Patriots' heavy investment in knowledge, understanding and the quest for 'truth' must be understood in the context of this duty to 'regenerate the nation' and 'stand up as men' against colonial plots to dispossess the self.

The very structure of the patriotic agoras testifies to the importance conferred upon the question of veridiction. A certain 'division of intellectual labour' was to be observed among the speakers in 'street parliaments', with various domains of knowledge parcelled between 'specialists': the 'political analyst' who deciphered the news of the day and revealed the strategies employed by 'foreign Powers' to subjugate the Ivorian nation; the self-proclaimed 'historian' who used anamnesis to draw connections between the history of colonial domination and the 2002 rebellion; the 'expert economist' who drew upon technical arguments to show how the West – and, in particular, large French firms – plundered national and continental resources; the 'mystical professor' who mixed spiritual sources of various provenance (including Pentecostalism) in an effort to convince his flock at the 'Sorbonne' that 'to be happy,

33 See R. Banégas, 'La politique du "gbonhi"'. Mobilisations patriotiques, violence milicienne et carrières militantes en Côte d'Ivoire', *Genèses*, No. 81 (December 2010), pp. 25–44.

34 See M. Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité. La Volonté de savoir*. Volume I (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 81.

35 See Armando Cutolo, 'Le retour de Gbagbo. Jeunes patriotes, herméneutique de l'Histoire et subjectivation religieuse', in F. Viti (ed.), *La Côte d'Ivoire, d'une crise à l'autre* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013).

36 See R. Banégas, A. Cutolo, 'Gouverner par la parole. Parlements de la rue, pratiques oratoires et subjectivation politique en Côte d'Ivoire', *Politique africaine*, No. 127 (October 2012), pp. 21–48. The section that follows borrows from this article. I would like to thank my co-author.

37 Interview, Abidjan, 30 June 2007.

the poor must win the battle of spiritual decolonisation' and so on.<sup>38</sup> In this cognitive system, every domain of social and political life, every event past or present, was made to fit into a hermeneutic scheme based on the principle that emancipation was to be had by unveiling the 'truth'. What was at stake in this arrangement was the possibility of transmuting Ivorians – and, more broadly, Africans – into the active subjects of a new regime of historicity.<sup>39</sup>

From the perspective of the present discussion, what matters here is that this hermeneutic effort of subjectification first and foremost took place by way of an effort to break with colonial history and its heritage. In contrast to the academic world, where this issue was long passed over in silence, historiographical critique was omnipresent within the patriotic agoras. With the celebration of the fiftieth-anniversary of independence in 2010, it assumed particular salience:

"The truth is always comparable, ok. The truth is by nature comparable. Because there's the lie and then there's the truth. ... For example, when Sarkozy now says that he wants to celebrate the fiftieth-anniversary of African countries and there is an official mission and people say that... ... We won't be ready to accept this lie. Because, yes, we say that colonization brought us many things, Western knowledge and scientific development, schools, etc. Those are real thoughts. But we aren't going to accept a fiftieth-anniversary in which France is presented like the Angel Gabriel who brought us salvation through Mary who had the child in her belly and the negative side of things is concealed by the wonders of French diplomacy. We won't accept that. ... We're going to express our fiftieth-anniversary. We are going to speak about the positive effects of colonization and the harmful effects of colonization. ... Since Nicolas Sarkozy's speech in Senegal at Sheikh Anta Diop University, I've understood that we've been taught nothing about the truth. ... The French told us that, as if by magic, the transhumance of people in Côte d'Ivoire took place in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-centuries. As if there was a territory there, a square, no one lived there and the trumpets are blown and there, ponponpon, the peoples enter. It's a pure lie. It's true that movements have taken place in the world. But to set the history of Côte d'Ivoire in that framework... It's true that we haven't written our history and that other people have given us our history. This history must be rewritten. That's the truth. And that's what the fiftieth-anniversary will be."<sup>40</sup>

"No one is going to come and tell us anything other than what people will simply accept. That won't work anymore. We're going to tell people the truth. And the truth, it's not brutality. ... Galileo, because he told the truth, they said he blasphemed and they killed him. But it turns out to be true today. ... Because the truth depends on the period. As soon as the common run of people can't recognize what you say as the truth, it's taken for a lie, until the common run of people understands and discovers for itself that what you said was true. That's when the truth takes hold. That's the truth. The truth comes from an individual who is challenged and even excluded from society before the common run of people accept science."<sup>41</sup>

This search for the truth was not mere intellectual speculation on the part of young dropouts who saw it as an opportunity to make a name for themselves. For those who made a vocation of it, it was also an effort applied to one's self, a "hermeneutics of the subject" submitted to a discipline that in some respects made the Young Patriots the

38 In the words of Simplicé Decho, known as 'Mystic', a 'tenured professor' of the Sorbonne, interview, Abidjan, 12 February 2010.

39 See A. Cutolo, 'Regimi di verità. Nazionalismo, anticolonialismo e afrocentrismo nella galassia patriottique in Costa d'Avorio', *Luomo*, 2011, I-II, pp. 235–259.

40 S.B., orator of Yopougon's Sideci parliament, 13 February 2010.

41 'Michel Barnier', interview, Abidjan, 12 February 2010.

“parrhesians”<sup>42</sup> of the Ivorian crisis. By observing the patriotic agoras and listening to the speeches made there, one could assess the degree to which the interpretive and truth-telling duty claimed by speakers played an important role. These young people had seized a power that historically devolves upon elders or the institutions of the ‘theologian-state’.<sup>43</sup> Bolstered by their control of the street, they cobbled together their own, very empirical and often confused historical ‘knowledge’. This was nourished by a close reading of the press and, above all, a constant effort to set matters in geographical and historical perspective. They ‘decrypted’ reality through comparison and analogy with other situations and other times and in this way constructed their own regime of historicity. This process was central to their denunciations of the colonialist designs of France, whose ‘plots’ had to be decrypted. Indeed, ‘Jack Bauer’, S.B. and ‘Barnier’, three of the Yopougon ‘parliament speakers mentioned above, even formalised this technique in what they referred to as ‘diapos’:

“By reading so much, one makes diapos. These diapos allow us to see all of the scheming. For us, the diapo, it’s... for example, you see a sentence that says this: Dadis Camara was shot by his aide-de-camp. And after the assassination attempt against Dadis Camara, you see Wade who goes out and comes with a helicopter to look for Dadis to bring him back. You take this image, you automatically compare it with the actions, you reflect the image and its action in our crisis. How did Abdoulaye Wade behave in Côte d’Ivoire during the crisis. What was his position? Automatically, that allows us to see that it is not a chance action but rather premeditated. That’s what we call the diapo, the comparativity of the actions that take place in other countries in regards to the Ivorian crisis. It’s the comparative reading of other actions that took place here with actions that happened elsewhere. That’s what we call the diapo. They’re projections, you know... We use the past. For us, the past is the diapo. That what our diapo is. What happened before and clings to what is happening now, that’s what the diapo is for us.”<sup>44</sup>

This hermeneutics of comparison and historical analogy help us to understand the ambivalent process of subjectification among patriotic speakers and the complexity of their relationship with France. Although characterised by a virulent rejection of external interference, the ‘African writings of the self’ (Mbembé) promoted by these speakers were the work of clearly globalised subjects<sup>45</sup> who were very much aware of what was happening in the world and eager to take their place in it.<sup>46</sup> Behind the old theories of colonial conspiracy was a fundamentally counter-hegemonic desire to give another meaning to the world that surrounded them, to set it in another regime of truth and historicity. This activity of ‘deciphering’ is crucial to understanding what became of the agoras and street parliaments over time. The Young Patriots who crowded into these spaces claimed a power of exposure and revelation that in some respects paralleled prophetic and exegetical activities.<sup>47</sup> By virtue of the privileged place they occupied in the patriotic galaxy structures, they presented themselves as the authorised interpreters of power and its shadows:

42 M. Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité. Le gouvernement de soi et les autres II. Cours au collège de France*, 1984 (Paris : Gallimard Seuil, 2009).

43 To borrow the expression of Achille Mbembé, *Afriques indociles* (Paris: Karthala, 1988).

44 “Michel Barnier”, interview, Abidjan, 8 February 2010.

45 See J.-F. Bayart, *Global Subjects: A Political Critique of Globalization* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

46 On this subject, see J. Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2006).

47 See J.&J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution Vol I: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

“You know, in Côte d’Ivoire and in this parliament, as the Bible says, I’m the shepherd, my flock knows my voice. When our President of the Republic speaks, we know what he’s talking about. If he addresses us, we know it; if he speaks to someone else, we know it. Because he has trained us. He said one thing: “What I say isn’t what you are to understand.” ... [President Gbagbo] made a speech here in Côte d’Ivoire and we spent eleven days deciphering the head of state’s speech because we had difficulties ourselves. And we had to meet in session to understand that he wasn’t addressing Ivorians. ... So we spent eleven days. We had to photocopy this speech and everyone went home, laid down and deciphered until we met one Sunday at the parliament in an annex room, all in a tangle, because we were going to talk to the people and the people were very worried because the head of state’s speech had not been understood by the people. ... This was after [the peace agreements of] Accra III. I said that we were wearing ourselves out for nothing. The chief of state’s speech was not for us. Look at what he said. He said: ‘Dear friends of Côte d’Ivoire, my fellow countrymen...’ So it was the international community he was addressing, not us. And when we met in plenary session and made our presentation, the various remarks of the various speakers who were there were met with cheers and they all went happily home. We finally succeeded in deciphering the President’s message ... As initiates, we had already understood.”<sup>48</sup>

This issue of *revelation* by ‘initiates’ was a central dimension of the framework of patriotic governmentality. In the agoras, the grand narrative of nationalist emancipation was often expressed in the language of religious deliverance. This ‘deliverance’ closely blended the rhetoric of ‘born again’ faith with the revolutionary ideology of the IPF and Fédération estudiantine et scolaire de Côte d’Ivoire (FESCI) activists who ran the agoras.<sup>49</sup> Pentecostal pastors, in particular, played a prominent role in the agoras, occupying certain slots reserved for ‘mystical affairs’. The vocabulary of revival churches was also to be encountered in the harangues of patriotic speakers. A large portion of the speeches made before street parliaments were thus devoted to interpreting what the speakers referred to as the ‘religious aspect of the crisis’. This interest in mystical interpretation may appear far removed from the matter at hand. And yet it is central. For it was only by unveiling the ‘true meaning’ of the Ivorian crisis as it was revealed by the struggle against the rebellion and colonial France that the nation would recognise the sign of its divine election.<sup>50</sup> This religious hermeneutic of the conflict was expressed by means of a specific lexicon that quickly became hegemonic in the street parliaments. There, northern rebels were depicted not only as ‘terrorists’ in the service of France and imperialist interests but also in the guise of demons, sorcerers sent by evil outside forces to ‘eat’ the sovereign body and loot national resources. The resistance of the Young Patriots was thus presented as a ‘war against sorcery’, a divine test intended to liberate the Ivorian people – even the entire ‘African black race’, as one pastor who frequented the agoras told me – from its evil spells and lead it towards genuine deliverance on Earth and beyond. In this narrative of a mystical battle for deliverance, French military intervention occupied a central place.

This soteriological and, in many respects, eschatological reading of the Ivorian crisis was popularised by pastors in the agoras, reiterated *ad nauseam* by speakers

48 ‘Jack Bauer’, interview, Abidjan, 8 February 2010.

49 See A. Mary, ‘Prophètes pasteurs. La politique de la délivrance en Côte d’Ivoire’, *Politique africaine*, No. 87 (October 2002), pp. 69–94; R. Banégas, ‘Côte d’Ivoire: Patriotism, Ethnonationalism and Other Modes of Self-Writing’, *op. cit.*

50 A. Cutolo, ‘Regimi di verità. Nazionalismo, anticolonialismo e afrocentrismo nella *galaxie patriotique* in Costa d’Avorio’, *L’Uomo*, 2011, 1-2, pp. 235–259.

and very broadly disseminated among the public (through publications as well as the audio and video recordings on offer at patriotic market stalls). This gave rise to a totalising and all-encompassing discursive regime, a producer of 'truths' of formidable performative power in this great many-sided battle against the Other, whether it be the foreign assailant, the imperialist exploiter, the colonialist predator or one's own next-door neighbour. These truths were constructed around guided interpretations linking apparently distant events into a structure of meaning. If the nation's destiny was to be realised, the signs of God had to be recognised in this structure. Beyond their banal, anti-French harangues, this was the highly exegetical and performative mission to which the patriotic speakers of the Sorbonne, Yop'-Sideci and the All Powerful Congress of Abobo had devoted themselves. Their defeat, with the fall of Laurent Gbagbo in April 2011, did not destroy this alternative regime of truth. Quite the contrary: the fact that Alassane Ouattara came to power on the back of rebel forces and the French army powerfully confirmed the interpretive framework of a 'post-colonial conspiracy'.

### Conclusion. The Difficult Renegotiation of Franco-African Relations: Between 'Calls for Empire' and the 'Colonial Whip'

Following the victory of the Ouattara camp in 2011, the Abidjan 'Sorbonne' was razed by bulldozers and all of the neighbourhood agoras were dismantled. The speakers who carried the flame of the struggle against France and its local allies have disappeared from the scene or migrated into other activities (particularly within new churches). Indeed, three years after the fall of Laurent Gbagbo's regime, the nationalist and anti-colonialist theme seems to have completely disappeared from the landscape. In its place, the notions of 'emergence' and Franco-Ivorian 'reunion' now seem to be the order of the day. As soon as the guns fell silent, Prime Minister François Fillon hastened to Abidjan (July 2011) with a large delegation of businessmen in order to resume cooperation and trade between the two countries. In January 2012, Nicolas Sarkozy invited President Ouattara to Paris for a lavish state visit. The very pomp with which this took place testifies to the desire of the two leaders – who are, moreover, personal friends – to turn the page on the years of crisis and resume close ties. And in July 2014, François Hollande was received on the banks of the Ébrié Lagoon for an official visit. In fact, armed intervention is not the only form of assistance that France has provided Alassane Ouattara. It also supplies him with major financial support, including an agreement to supply more than 2.5 billion Euros in C2D funds (Debt-Reduction-Development Contract) – the largest such grant ever bestowed by a French cooperation programme – to help with the country's reconstruction. Nearly all state sectors – infrastructure, youth, education, agriculture, transportation – benefit from French support (as well as that supplied by other sponsors, including the EU). The French army is also heavily involved in the reform of the Republican Forces of Côte d'Ivoire. In little time, bilateral tension and armed interference have thus turned into an official honeymoon.

How is this abrupt reversal to be understood? Although there are no available figures to this effect, it should be stressed that the anti-French mobilisation discussed in

this article was not unanimously supported by the population. Many ordinary Ivorians did not necessarily recognise themselves in the grand patriotic narrative. Championed by an activist minority and an effective system of mobilisation, this narrative was in large part exploited for its own ends by a regime lacking in internal support and under external pressure. It may be presumed that the supporters of Alassane Ouattara, who received a majority of the votes cast in the December 2010 election, had an entirely different perception of France's policy of interfering in the Ivorian crisis. Indeed, many welcomed the bombs dropped from French helicopters which, in April 2011, permitted Laurent Gbagbo's arrest. But these contrasting perceptions should not be reduced to a simplistic opposition between two partisan camps. My surveys among supporters of the two sides indicate that, trained in the same student union networks as their IPF counterparts, many young pro-Ouattara activists shared similar convictions in regards to post-colonial alienation. As we saw above, the calls for a 'second war of independence' loudly and clearly proclaimed in patriotic agoras were the preferred rhetoric for expressing a dynamic of generational emancipation. The halting but real process by which anti-colonialist rhetoric is employed in the service of the political subjectification of young people is not limited to a particular party or even a particular partisan camp; it cuts across an entire generation of young Ivorians (and, more broadly, Africans) whose prospects for the future remain bleak. The 'calls for empire'<sup>51</sup> that arose in the last phase of the conflict were in fact deeply ambivalent. They went hand in hand with a desire to put Franco-Ivorian (and, more generally, African) relations on a new, more egalitarian and less paternalist footing.

Today, as in the time of Houphouët, Paris and Abidjan are once again key strategic partners and no forum remains for anti-colonialist discourse. Brushed under the carpet of a 'national reconciliation' that is at once factitious and unilateral, this theme has been crushed under the weight of a new hegemonic discourse centred on developmentalist logorrhea regarding 'the emergence of Côte d'Ivoire in a global world'. This discourse is establishing itself as the new regime of truth. The nationalist and anti-French hermeneutic of the Young Patriots is now confined to IPF activist circles and exiled Gbagbo supporters who seek to promote a different reading of the events of 2010–11: that of a colonial conspiracy hatched on the banks of the Seine. Will the profits to be had from economic and political reconstruction inevitably spell the gradual disappearance of this recurrent motif? Has the relative success of Operation Serval in Mali definitively turned the page on Franco-African 'incomprehension'? Nothing could be less certain. As we have seen above, the strength of the anti-colonialist theme stems from long-standing and very profound alienation within West African societies in general and Côte d'Ivoire in particular. It is part of a particular historicity in which extraversion holds a central place.<sup>52</sup> This explains the fundamental ambivalence of the relationship of attraction-repulsion that is to be observed in the fits and starts of France's interventionist policy in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The wars waged in Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Mali and the Central African Republic as well as the earlier operations in the DRC, Chad and Darfur have undeniably led to the increasing militarisation of France's relations with African societies. Today more than ever, these many-sided relations, seem to have been reduced to their military and warlike aspect. One must not be misled by the positive outcomes of the Mali

51 To once again cite G. Salamé, *Appels d'empire*, *op. cit.*

52 See J.-F. Bayart, 'L'Afrique dans le monde, une histoire d'extraversion', *Critique internationale*, No. 5 (1999), pp. 97–120.

intervention. French policy on the continent is generally perceived – negatively – through a twofold prism: military intervention and the European repression of migration. Western military intervention and police cooperation increasingly appear as the military arm of a new civilising mission in many respects reminiscent of colonial ‘pacification’ and the ‘whip’. In a context in which the themes of the colonial legacy, anti-imperialism and alienated sovereignty are returning to the forefront of social struggles and citizen movements, one may conjecture that this security-based optic will eventually stoke new resistance to ‘Western imperialism’. We have seen the extent to which this theme was at work in the Ivorian case. In a few years, it is not impossible that disappointed followers of Ouattara will regroup around the nationalist cause formerly championed by the patriotic fringe. This is of course still not the case in Mali, where French involvement has generally been met with approval. Yet in this fiercely nationalist country, where the national epic is based on the story of Sundiata and anti-globalisationist tendencies<sup>53</sup> are not unknown, this perception might also be reversed and give way to an anti-French counter-mobilisation challenging the neo-colonial reconquest of an ever more coveted Sahara.<sup>54</sup> Despite the precautions taken to avoid any confusion with a war against Islam, it is now not impossible that the conflict in Northern Mali (and the more complex war in the Central African Republic) might contribute to the development of a counter-discourse of resistance to the French presence joining radical Islam with the themes of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism.

53 See J. Siméant, *Contester au Mali. Formes de la mobilisation et de la critique à Bamako* (Paris: Karthala, 2014).

54 In May 2014, the MNLA reconquered Kidal despite the presence of a large force of French and UN troops. This gave rise to strong emotions in Bamako, where France was loudly booed.