# The Breakdown of the “Showcase of the French Policy in West Africa”: Crisis of the Ivorian State Institutions in the Lead-Up the Civil War of 2002-2007 through the lens of Dependency Theory[[1]](#footnote-1)

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**Abstract**

The given paper covers the topic of the Ivorian social, economic and political crisis leading to the civil war in the given country evaluated through the dependency theory analysis. Attention is drawn to the special position of Cote d’Ivoire among former French colonies in West Africa as the showcase of benefits deriving from preservation of close ties with France and simultaneous inability to use these benefits to avoid large-scale crisis. The mechanics of demolition of “the Ivorian miracle” are investigated along with the correlation between the crisis and supposed ultimate instability of the dependent economies. Consequences for the nation-state development in Africa are also addressed.

**Key words**

Cote d’Ivoire, political crisis, export-oriented economy, dependency, nation-state development.

**Introduction**

The development of nation-states in post-colonial Africa has been hindered by the number of issues, starting from difficulty in building the functional institutions of a state resembling those of the West and moving on to dealing with the consequences of economic and sometimes military and political dependence on their former colonial overlords. The latter is specifically examined by the proponents of dependency theories, with most notable proponent on the continent being Samir Amin[[2]](#footnote-2). The ideas that the formally independent former colonies are still subjugated by their former colonial overlords or even more powerful industrial developed economies through the unbalanced economic relations gained much popularity in Africa in decades following 1960 and are still commonly applied.

The limits of African statehood were particularly questioned in the wake of the Cold War, as the great number of former colonies turned out to be unable to successfully perform state functions without sufficient aid that was previously available based upon ideological and political allegiances to an external power. With great powers now largely uninterested in lending support to African nations for purely political sake, overall economic turmoil and lack of efficient state structures in multiple cases caused outbreaks of conflict and emergence of alternative centers of power with their own capacities to govern large parts of territory and population. This led to a significant increase I the complexity of dependency mechanisms.

As claimed by Jennifer Hazen[[3]](#footnote-3), the nature of sustaining internal conflicts departed from being driven by external support towards relying on resource-oriented lines of support with greater emphasis of gaining approval of the local population. There is a continuous debate on why these changes took place and why states fail, especially independent African states that are frequently considered weak and inefficient. In the given paper it appears particularly worthy to address the case of Cote d’Ivoire which was considered to be one of the most prosperous African states in the first decades of independence but nevertheless descended into the full-blown civil war fitting Hazen’s descriptions caused by political crisis, ethnic tensions and long-scale economic downturn. The focus is on determining how the seemingly prosperous nation faced these issues and how this is related to the long-running Ivorian dependence on France in the Post-Independence era.

# Collapse of the Ivorian miracle

As the French colonial empire was collapsing by late 1950’s due to unsuccessful wars in Vietnam and Algeria and the political awakening in the colonies, it was decided to offer them independence on terms favorable for Paris, maintaining a strong economic, political and military influence on the established regimes. This approach proved particularly vibrant in French-speaking West Africa. The economic backbone of the close relations with these African nations was the prolongation of resource-based export-oriented economies that emerged during the colonial era. In case of Cote d’Ivoire, the primary export commodity was the cocoa beans along with by-products. The growth in global cocoa prices in 1960’s and 1970’s along with substantial French investments in this sector of the Ivorian economy contributed to long-term economic growth. According to external and internal observers, the growth was achieved due to the low wages of the Ivorian peasants, the low level of state regulation and the influx of labor migrants from neighboring countries, which is illustrated by the absolute decrease in hourly wages (by 12%) with a double growth of GDP in 1960-1980[[4]](#footnote-4).

At the same time economic growth did not stimulate the qualitative development of the Ivorian economic system, characterized by a weak capacity of the domestic market, undeveloped infrastructure, territorial imbalances and external export dependence. Moreover, the influx of non-Ivorian migrants, encouraged by the government of Felix Houphouet-Boigny, weakened the economic position of the local non-Baule population, thus promoting inter-ethnic tensions.

In the 1980’s Cote d’Ivoire had the largest share in the global cocoa market (40%). However, between 1980 and 1993 there was a collapse in the global prices for this agricultural commodity from $3800 to $1100 per ton[[5]](#footnote-5). The Ivorian leadership organized cocoa embargo in 1987-1989 in an attempt to stop the fall in prices by halting the cocoa export to the global markets (its production follows two-year cycles). Given the high share Cote d’Ivoire had in the global market for this product, Houphouet -Boigny and his entourage hoped that they would be able to reverse the current trend. Nevertheless, the dynamic growth amongst Asian cocoa producers (primarily Indonesia and Malaysia) was able to compensate for the lack of supply from the West African country. Therefore in 1989 Cote d’Ivoire was forced to return to the world market, losing half its share and being unable to prevent further decline in prices. Because of this, the government had to halve the purchase price for the Ivorian farmers, which respectively led to the need for a substantial increase in cultivated agricultural land and the production of cocoa beans to maintain the same level of welfare. In 1985-1987 600 thousand tons of cocoa beans were produced annually in the country, but by 1995 this figure rose to 1.2 million tons[[6]](#footnote-6).

A decrease in cocoa export revenues in the 1980’s occurred against the backdrop of the ongoing demographic growth of the country's population. The highest population growth rates (25.61% for the five-year period) occurred in 1980-1985, which, despite a slight decrease in rates (to 19.28% in 1990-1995), almost doubled the population from 8.5 million in 1980 to 16.6 million in 2000[[7]](#footnote-7). Such rapid demographic growth only exacerbated the lack of resources.

A significant decrease in incomes of the population and a general decline in living standards over the 1980’s and 1990’s in the framework of the dominant position professed by the agricultural sector in the national economy (68% of the country's working-age population was concentrated in the agricultural sector) led to a shortage of available land necessary to maintain the previous level of consumption by farmers. In addition, to a large extent, resources for the development of new agricultural land were exhausted, leading to deforestation (of the 13 million hectares of forests that existed in the wake of independence, by 1990 only 2.5 million hectares remained), which previously contributed to the extensive growth of the Ivorian agricultural sector[[8]](#footnote-8). Hence, relatively quick economic growth caused by collaboration with France in pursuing the cash-crop exports economic orientation led to two decades of rapid growth, surpassing all the neighboring states, but this growth proved volatile and dependent on the conditions of the global market, which threatened the stability of the long-term economic development of Cote d’Ivoire.

# Malfunctioning of the economic and social regulation mechanisms

This prompted the government to take measures to liberalize the economy, which was carried out by Alassane Dramane Ouattara, previously an IMF bureaucrat that took the office of prime minister. This position became more significant due to the gradual distancing of the aged and sick Houphouet-Boigny from politics. Measures were taken to privatize state-owned enterprises (during the years when Ouattara was the prime minister, 28 out of 35 state-owned enterprises were privatized and transferred to foreign, mainly French corporate ownership)[[9]](#footnote-9). This entailed a reduction in government spending on the social sphere, primarily on education and health. Therefore, the liberalization policy pursued by Ouattara and his followers led to the deterioration of the situation in the social welfare system. This, in turn, led to a further decline in the standard of living of the population and an increase in social protest.

At the same time, in conditions of land shortage, the country still lacked modern land legislation, and issues of land ownership and rights to use it were resolved through traditional community-based institutions. Moreover, the decision of local elders to transfer land for use or ownership from one person to another could cause disagreement among other members of the community. In 1998, with the support of the World Bank, a new land law was passed introducing the handling of land disputes based on the principles of private rather than communal ownership with state arbitration. However due to political instability in the subsequent period the law was never applied in practice. In this regard, the efficient use of land was seriously hampered by conflicts over property rights and land use[[10]](#footnote-10). As a result, the economic and social welfare of the country's population fell sharply, which could not but affect other areas of public life.

This aggravation of the land issue caused the "unfreezing" of ethnic and confessional clashes within the country, previously smoothed by the rapid economic growth and the authoritarian character of the Felix Houphouet-Boigny regime, which stabilized the general political situation at the national level. At the same time, during the reign of Houphouet-Boigny the ethnic diversity of the Ivory Coast, quite broad even at the outset, increased due to the influx of migrants from the neighboring countries. Rapid economic growth (over 1960-1993 the national GDP grew more than twice), caused by high demand for Ivorian export-oriented agricultural commodities and the influx of French investment (capital and technology) as well as political support from the former metropolis made the country extremely attractive for residents of neighboring states with weaker economies and lower living standards. Therefore there was a dramatic increase in the influx of labor migrants from these countries, primarily Burkina Faso and Mali, who acquired ample economic opportunities under the conditions of the “Ivorian economic miracle”, including the possibility of owning the land where they worked. Côte d’Ivoire in turn used their cheap labor to stimulate more rapid and extensive economic growth. In addition, migrants (70% of whom were Muslims from the states of the Sahara and Sahel regions to the north of the Ivory Coast) made up one of the main support groups for Houphouet-Boigny, on which he could rely in his policies along with the Baule ethnic group, which the first Ivorian president was part of, as well as the indigenous people from the north of the country, namely Doula, Maninka, northern Mande and Senufo, ethnically close to Burkinabe peoples[[11]](#footnote-11). Therefore, migration from neighboring countries to Côte d’Ivoire was widely supported by the country's political regime. As a result, by 1998 their share in the overall population was already higher than a quarter (28%)[[12]](#footnote-12). Therefore in the context of deteriorating land issue there was a sharp increase in ethnic contradictions between migrants and the indigenous population that was dissatisfied with the transfer of large tracts of land traditionally controlled by local peoples to non-Ivorians and now necessary for the latter ones on the brink of the economic crisis[[13]](#footnote-13). The increased importance of land and conflicts between the autochthonous population of the country's southern agricultural regions and migrants from the north and neighboring states that received allotments during the economically favorable period of the Houphouet-Boigny reign led the Baules in power, represented by Henri Konan Bedie, made a choice in favor of supporting the rights of southerners. This caused further exacerbation of ethnic conflicts present in Ivorian society.

# The introduction of ethnocentric discourse into the politics of Côte d’Ivoire

These interethnic frictions that began in 1990, the democratic transformations that entailed the revival of a multi-party political system, the execution of presidential and parliamentary elections, the growth of political activism by youth and the death in 1993 of Felix Houphouet-Boignyled to a political crisis engulfing the country. The departure of Houphouet-Boigny weakened, first of all, the unity of the ethno-tribal clans that traditionally were the foundation of his power. For a long time the regime relied on the consolidated support of the Baule ethnic group and the peoples of the north of the country, along with migrants from Mali and Burkina Faso. However, the aggravation of the land issue caused serious disagreement between the Baule, who usually lived in the central and southern regions of the country, specialized in the production of export crops and considered these lands as their own, and northerners who sought to maintain their own control over these lands. The conflict between the two factions at a higher level was expressed in the struggle for power between Henri Konan Bedie, a representative of the Baule nation, and Alassan Ouattara, a representative of the Senufo from the north of the country and, according to the allegations by political opponents, a Burkinabe. Bedie was chosen by the aging first president as his successor while Ouattara served as Prime Minister, an office re-established in 1990, and appeared in 1990-1993 to be the actual ruler of the country under a sick president. The rise of Ouattara, despite the long experience of political cooperation between the Baule clans and the peoples of the north, caused some concern among the Baule representatives who had previously held a higher position in this partnership and who saw in the appointment of a new prime minister a threat to their own dominance. In addition, in 1990 a group of representatives of the north of the country signed the "Charter of the North" - a document requiring the grant of full political rights to Dioula, Senufo, Mande and Maninka ethnicities along with Akan peoples (among which the Baule were traditionally recognized as the largest and most dominant)[[14]](#footnote-14). It also contributed to the growth of mutual distrust between the two parts of the ruling group. Since Bedie and Ouattara were unable to reach a political compromise after the death of Houphouet-Boigny, which led to the resignation and expulsion of the Prime Minister and the occupation of the presidency by Bedie (according to the previously agreed procedure), the ruling clan, consisting mainly of traditional Houphouet-Boigny compatriots from the Baule ehnicity, lost the support of ethnic groups in the north of the country. This led to the withdrawal from the Democratic Party of Cote d’Ivoire of the Assembly of Republicans (AR, Rassemblement des Republicains - RDR), led by Ouattara. In addition, the new political regime established by Bedie was forced to support the most loyal ethnic groups on the land issue, restricting the rights of migrants and northerners supporting AR.

In this situation, the Bedie regime began to pursue a nationalist policy based on the concept of "Ivorianness" ("Ivoirite") - belonging to the indigenous ethnic groups of Côte d’Ivoire. Legislative acts were introduced that infringed on the political rights of the “non-Ivorian” population, which later became the political support base for Ouattara. Over time, this led to the phased introduction by the government of the rules restricting the rights of the migrants compared with the indigenous population. It is ironic that this policy began to be pursued during the premiership of Alassane Ouattara (1990-1993), who subsequently suffered from its application. On December 14, 1991, on his initiative, the introduction of identification cards took place, which allowed to separate the “real” citizens of Côte d’Ivoire from migrants[[15]](#footnote-15). In particular, this category of the country's population lost its right to vote in the national presidential and parliamentary elections (but retained the right to participate in municipal elections). In addition, ethnic restrictions were introduced for those wishing to be elected in the presidential election. Thus, the candidate committed to provide reliable information that both of his parents belong to the indigenous population of Côte d’Ivoire and were born on its territory[[16]](#footnote-16). This restriction was primarily aimed at Ouattara, whose ancestors are partially Burkinabe[[17]](#footnote-17). As a result, this candidate with widespread support from the North’s population was not allowed to enter the Ivorian presidential election in 1995 because of his background, which made it easier to win Bedie. At the same time, Bedie’s legitimacy among a significant proportion of the country's citizens was undermined, which contributed to the escalation of ethnic hatred, which later led to a civil war.

Under these conditions, primarily due to the split between the supporters of Henri Bedie and Alassane Ouattara, chances grew for the opposition politician Laurent Kudu Gbagbo, representing the Bete people from the wider Krou ethnic group living in the south-west of the country. Traditionally, immigrants from these areas of the country supported the opposition to the Houphouet-Boigny regime. Representatives of the Krou ethnic groups never held high positions in the Ivorian state hierarchy of the post-colonial period, which, in addition to Houphouet-Boigny’s tribesmen, the Baule, was dominated by immigrants from the north, the Dioula, Mande and Maninka, as well as the French, who had extensive experience in administrative activities[[18]](#footnote-18). In addition, the Krou people took a more disadvantaged position in the economic life of the country, since the control of land in the south-west of the country, more suitable for export agricultural activities, was given to representatives of the Baule, who transferred them to migrants from the north. Therefore, the income from the use of these agricultural lands was redistributed not so much in favor of the autochthonous population (Bete / Krou), but in favor of the Baule who held higher positions in the state apparatus and companies engaged in the purchase of agricultural products, and the Dioulas who received land for cultivation. This caused discontent among the local population, directed against the ruling regime and alien ethnic groups, and heated up the political situation. Thus, in particular, Kragbe Nyagbe and the African Nationalist Party created by him, which, contrary to the Ivorian constitution, were denied registration, were supported by the Guebi (a subgroup of Bete) and attempted to form an independent state of Ebrunia. The inability to resolve the conflict within the framework of the law led to an armed uprising in October 1970. Its suppression by government forces was accompanied by significant casualties and became the largest repressive act undertaken by the Democratic Party of Ivory Coast (PDCI) while in power[[19]](#footnote-19).

Laurent Gbagbo, who began active participation in the country's socio-political life in the late 1970’s and in 1982 formed his own opposition political movement - the Ivorian Popular Front (Front Populair Ivorien, FPI, initially illegal) and found himself in exile in France, was also a representative of the Bete ethnicity. After the start of democratization in the 1990’s Gbagbo participated in the presidential and parliamentary elections as an opposition candidate as he enjoyed the support of the majority of the population in the south-west of the country and gained a total of 18%. However, Gbagbo and his supporters were unsatisfied with the election results, accusing Houphouet-Boigny of using the votes of the northerners to achieve victory[[20]](#footnote-20). In the future, despite the distrust of the ethnic groups from the north of the country, the FPI did not support Bedie’s nationalist policy, condemning the concept of “Ivorianness”. And with the split between the Akan people and representatives of the north within the ruling group and the beginning of the confrontation between Bedie and Ouattara, representatives of the Kru ethnic groups had the opportunity to improve their traditionally low status within the Ivorian society. In addition, the Attie and Dida peoples, located outside the south-west of the country, in the Abidjan region, as well as the Kru, who held an extremely low status in the colonial and Houphouetist administrative hierarchy, also consolidated around Gbagbo and his political allies, which strengthened the position of the FPI in the struggle for power. Subsequently, the ethnic support base of Laurent Gbagbo in the Ivorian political spectrum was called BAD (Bete, Attie, Dida) in accordance with the main ethnic groups electorally most loyal to the leader of the FPI (although the ethnic base of support for this party was not limited to them)[[21]](#footnote-21).

Thus, by the end of the twentieth century in Côte d’Ivoire, three opposing political groups have identified themselves with massive ethnic support, while the economic foundation of the stability (the cocoa exports) got undermined by the decline in prices on the global markets. In these conditions the traditional elite’s ability to govern significantly dropped, setting the field for the coup d’état in 1999 and the civil war which broke out in 2002. Hence internal disagreements caused by the dependency-related economic downturns immensely contributed to the deterioration of the overall humanitarian situation in Cote d’Ivoire, despite the initial benefits of the chosen post-independence development model.

# Conclusion

The case of Ivorian post-independence rapid economic development based on cash-crop exports as well as large-scale French investments and political support seems not to fit the argument of dependency theorists that such ties inevitably lead to the flow of prosperity form the periphery to the nucleus of the global economy. However it emerges that the chosen development model, while successful at the initial stage, namely the first decades after independence, allowing the country to economically surpass all of its neighbors, failed to maintain sustainability. It proved highly vulnerable due to the fluctuations on the global cocoa market, causing chain reaction that led to social upheaval and the rise of nationalism, halted institutional development and undermined the governability of the society inn crisis. Therefore this particular case of nation-state development in post-independence West Africa provides support for the argument that unbalanced economic relations with external powers are detrimental for the sustainability of nations that emerged in the former colonies.

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