

Consequently, internal immigrants from Boule, Malinke, Senoufo (respectively from central and northern parts of the country) and foreigners from Mali and Burkina Faso acquired land at the expense of the native ethnic groups. This caused deep-seated resentment among the locals and cultivated a culture of xenophobia. In response to the growing resentment by native populations, notably the local Bété and the Kroumen ethnic groups in the southwest, Boigny's government adopted a policy of appeasement by offering them government jobs to keep a lid on xenophobia. Disgruntled local groups were also offered posts in the private sector, the army and educational advantages for their children. This patronage created a deeply divided society characterised by an undercurrent of tension. With the economic recession of the early 1980s, Côte d'Ivoire was plunged into a financial crisis that was exacerbated by corruption and mismanagement. The strains in the fragile social fabric based on patronage started to emerge after the first multiparty elections in 1990. Furthermore, the creation of a prime minister post and the appointment of Alassane Dramane Ouattara (a northern Ivorian Muslim) of the newly created *Rassemblement des Republicains* (RDR), led to violent protest in Abidjan in 1991 by Gbagbo's *Front Populaire Ivoirien* (FPI).

Upon the death of Boigny, Henri Konan Bédié, the speaker of parliament, outmanoeuvred Ouattara and assumed the presidency. To consolidate his power and appeal to the nationalists, Bédié adopted the policy of "*Ivoirite*" (Ivorianness). A new electoral code was enacted, creating two types of citizens: those of "pure" Ivorian origin and those of "mixed heritage". As a result, a number of Muslim northerners perceived to be of 'mixed heritage' lost their government positions, thus sowing the seeds of a north-south, Muslim-Christian divide. Importantly, the new electoral code disqualified Ouattara from running for president because his father

was alleged to be from Burkina Faso. In December 1999, Bédié was replaced by General Robert Gueï in a bloodless coup. Surprisingly, Gueï pursued the same destructive policies of divide and rule based on ethnicity, citizenship, nationality and presidential eligibility to isolate his opponents. Against this background, the opposition parties called for a boycott of the 2000 presidential elections and only 37% of the electorate voted. Unphased, Gueï declared himself the winner even though preliminary results favoured Gbagbo. The FPI supporters then staged massive protests, forcing Gueï to flee into exile in Benin and Gbagbo was declared president. On assumption of power, the FPI played reconciliation politics for a short while, but soon revived the concept of "*Ivoirite*". Gbagbo's regime used inflammatory anti-foreigner rhetoric based on the reclamation and liberation of rich farmland for its so called 'native population'. This political strategy set the stage for another round of ethnic violence that spawned attacks against immigrants and vice-versa. The ensuing violence laid the foundation for the attempted coup that almost unseated Gbagbo and brought the involvement of Burkina Faso in Côte d'Ivoire's affairs.

The Linas-Marcoussis Accords: an incomplete peace

In the face of the failure of the Lomé peace talks and other West African initiatives, the French proposed peace talks in France at Linas-Marcoussis (small town outside Paris). The Linas-Marcoussis peace accords, which created a government of reconciliation that included the former rebels (now known as Forces Nouvelles) and other political parties, was a product of compromise and thus contains problematic elements for every party. The accords nevertheless outlined a nine-point programme on disarmament, xenophobia, media incitement and for the organization and supervision of elections scheduled for 2005. However, the accords failed to form a basis on

which a national debate could be encouraged to address the new social contract among Ivorians themselves and between Ivorians and immigrants. Firstly, the accords ignore the regional aspect of the war as part of a broader issue that should be considered in the peace process. Secondly, complications in their implementation have set the stage for a new struggle. The immediate concern was the resignation of *Forces Nouvelles* ministers from the government in September 2003. They acted in protest of Gbagbo's contravention of agreed procedures and his unwillingness to delegate executive powers to the prime minister as stipulated in the accords. Furthermore, the disarmament of former rebels and other unofficial groups failed to begin in October as required by the accords. The accords have been a source of discontent among uncompromising hardliners within Gbagbo's regime, but also among rebel leaders who distrust the president's commitment to the accords. Gbagbo appears to be committed to the peace process but elements within his party do not share this commitment. These are worrying signs and without new regional and international initiatives, the peace process might founder.

The struggle for scarce resources

The Côte d'Ivoire crisis stems from the complex interaction between deep-seated resentments *and* attempts by politicians to manipulate anti-foreigner sentiment for political ends. The notion that immigrants are taking bread from Ivorians has been used by Gbagbo's regime as a smokescreen for corruption, state-sponsored xenophobia and mismanagement of Côte d'Ivoire's dwindling resources. Moreover, Gbagbo and some ultra-nationalist elements within the FPI have increasingly lumped immigrants together with Ivorians born in the Maninke and Senoufe regions of the north. These ethnic divisions have further divided the country between pro-government ethnic groups and pro-rebel ethnic groups. The criminal activities of state-sponsored militias form part of a

larger struggle for the control of rich farmland. Moreover, Gbagbo's regime has also used the media to identify "enemies" and accomplices of the anti-government insurgency and the ongoing ethnic and xenophobia campaign. The state-owned media has played a predominant and catalytic role in the conflict, spreading hate messages and threats of a new war. State-sponsored terror by youth militias have become the order of the day in the south of the country. The main targets of these marauding bands have been the northern ethnic groups branded as collaborators of the rebellion. The capital, Abidjan, has become a haven for pro-government terror groups. In the meanwhile, the government pays lip service to the peace accords, while very little, if anything, is being done to stop the culture of ethnic violence. At the core of the conflict is the struggle for control of the cocoa and coffee belt. These are clear indications that the struggle for scarce resources has been manipulated by the elite to maintain its grip on power and in the process destabilise the region.

A Regional War

Between 1989 and 1999, Burkina Faso's president, Blaise Compaoré, directly financed Gbagbo with the expectation that Gbagbo would adopt a different policy towards Burkinabé immigrants. However, relations between Abidjan and Ouagadougou soon soured when Gbagbo became president. The main reason was that Gbagbo continued with policies of ethnic division and state-sponsored xenophobia. The increasing vulnerability of the Burkinabé immigrant community created a problem for Burkina Faso. This set the stage for a regional war that pitted Compaoré against Gbagbo. Compaoré also used the crisis to gain political mileage over his opponents at home. In December 2002, he launched a repatriation operation termed "Bayiri" (motherland) that gave him new nationalist credentials. The anti-Gbagbo rebels have denied receiving any external Burkinabe

assistance in acquisition of its arsenal. Instead they claim to have seized weapons from government troops in the clashes which ensued in Bouaké and Korhogo. However, evidence of external logistical help from the Burkinabé government seems irrefutable. According to International Crisis Group (ICG) reports, arms from Ouagadougou were transported by trucks across the border into Ivorian territory. The continued support of the rebels by the Burkinabé authorities does not augur well for the peace initiatives. If this support or link is not completely cut, the war might never come to an end. Significantly, continued arms purchases and huge military expenditure by the Gbagbo regime also hinder prospects for peace.

The western regions of the country face similar problems with Liberia. In response to the rebellion, Gbagbo formed an alliance with the anti-Taylor group, Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and the tribal Ivorian militia, the *Forces de Libération du Grand Ouest* (FLGO). In turn, Taylor (the then president of Liberia) created MFIGO as a strategic buffer force to protect him against Gbagbo's FLGO. The presence of troops loyal to Taylor in the west of Côte d'Ivoire became a separate strand in an intricately linked regional conflict. Although the departure of Taylor led to de-escalation of war on the western borders, most of his militia bands have been left to fend for themselves. These groups are desperate and will offer their services at a price to anyone.

Hence, the search for peace in Liberia remains closely linked to the peace process in Côte d'Ivoire. It is quite possible that the demilitarisation process in Liberia might be compromised by the existence of militias along the porous western borders of Côte d'Ivoire. To this end, it is important for any peace effort to look at possible ways of addressing both conflicts in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire simultaneously to avoid continuous flow of weapons and militias around the region.

Politicised ethnicity and xenophobia: a continent-wide problem

The problems being experienced in Côte d'Ivoire are not new to the continent. It is quite clear that these are the same problems that are currently being experienced in the Great Lakes, with DRC at the centre of the crisis. The problems attributed to xenophobia stem from the division of ethnic groups by colonial borders and exacerbated by their cross border migration in search for better opportunities. In the case of DRC the *Banyamulenge* (Rwandese Hutu and Tutsi migrants) arrived in the DRC as cheap labour under Belgian rule. Similarly in Côte d'Ivoire, Burkinabé immigrants arrived as cheap labour in the booming cocoa economy of the 1970s. The problem is that these ethnic differences have been politicised and the conflicts are fuelled by the struggle for scarce resources. In Côte d'Ivoire, the economic problems in the early 80s and dwindling resources plunged the country into a financial crisis. Consequently, the struggle for scarce resources and politicised ethnicity led to the anti-foreigner rhetoric under president Bédié's policy of Ivorianness. Likewise in the DRC, xenophobia fanned by Mobutu's regime and the struggle for control of resources sparked anti-foreigner sentiments in the east.

The issue of nationality also reared its ugly head in the DRC when Kabila (junior) was appointed president of DRC upon the assassination of his father. Questions were raised about his nationality and whether he was a "native" Congolese, partly because he was born in Tanzania and more importantly because his mother is from Tanzania. Kenneth Kaunda faced similar problems in an attempt by Fredrick Chiluba to disqualify him from running for the presidency. Ironically, Chiluba seems to be facing the same charges by his hand-picked successor, Levy Mwanawasa. These issues to a large extent have affected the progress in regional integration with regards to

standardised immigration laws and the free movement of human resources across borders. Some countries on the continent have historically been dependent on migrant labour but have failed to integrate migrants into their economies and societies. For example, Botswana's ill-treatment of Zimbabwean immigrants may be a future source of conflict in SADC. It is important that Botswana and Zimbabwe find ways of harmonising their immigration laws to cater for cross-border migration and economic migrants before the problem becomes politicised as in Côte d'Ivoire. Protectionist immigration laws do not provide the necessary solution to the problems identified above. The lack of clear guidelines on immigration cooperation might in future lead to unnecessary tensions and regional conflicts.

Cross-border migration and in some cases, lack of state authority along borders, form part of the broader problems experienced in inter-state and civil conflict that eventually turn into regional wars. The challenge, therefore, lies with the African Union (AU) to formulate clear guidelines on how the issues of nationality and state-sponsored xenophobia should be dealt with at national, sub-regional and continental level. Such an initiative should also look at possible ways of addressing and managing differences between countries at a sub-regional and regional level. At the moment, the AU seems to be addressing symptoms of a problem (for example peace-making) as opposed to addressing the root causes.

Côte d'Ivoire: possible scenarios

Assuming the government of Gbagbo is unseated through elections or a collective effort of internal dissidents and external collaborators, what impact would this have on Côte d'Ivoire and the region as a whole? How will Ivorians deal with reconciling internal fractious relations and a deeply politicised ethnicity? What would happen to the youth militias in the south? How will

they learn to move away from a culture of violence and easy money? What will stop them from offering their services to other political parties or insurgent movements in the region? There are no definitive answers to these questions. However, it is useful to posit scenarios that might occur in the post-Gbagbo era.

Firstly, given the ethnic and nationality tensions and state-sponsored terror, it is likely that a military takeover might lead to more violence and further destabilisation of the region. This stems from the fact that both the rebels and government have created a highly militarised society. Disarmament and demilitarisation will present a serious challenge for whoever assumes power. Furthermore, the militias have become formidable political actors who can neither be legislated nor wished away. If these bands of armed youth are not dealt with they might pose a major security threat for years to come.

Secondly, an all out war in which power will be contested by various ethnic and political interested parties pitted against one another might yield the same results. Given the divisions between the moderates and the extremists in Gbagbo's ruling cabal, it is also quite possible that some elements within Gbagbo's regime that have benefited from the war and have much more to lose, might want to hang onto power at all cost. The struggle for power and control of the rich cocoa belt might destabilise the regions. The solution to the crisis lies in a peace process that takes into account the regional issues and addresses the root causes of the conflict. However, given the current environment of mistrust between the rebels and the government it is highly unlikely that the elections will ever take place.

Policy Considerations

- *The regional dimension of the Ivorian conflict should be addressed as part of a broader peace agenda. The ongoing peace process in Liberia and*

Sierra Leone, alliances within the region, the porous western border and the criminal activities along the borders will continue to affect the peace process in Côte d'Ivoire. It is therefore important for ECOWAS to play a leading role in the solution to the Ivorian crisis.

- *Disarming, demobilisation and reintegration of rebels into the national army should be the immediate priority of the Government of National Reconciliation (GNR). To this end, the international community and the African Union's newly-founded Peace and Security Council (PSC) should exert pressure on the government and rebel forces to implement article VII (on disarmament) of the Linas-Marcoussis accords in collaboration with ECOWAS and the French Licorne forces. Disarmament should be broadened to include all non-official armed forces, pro-government militias and armed civilians.*
- *The rebels and political parties should be allowed resume their duties in the Government of National Reconciliation. To facilitate this process, Gbagbo should also reinstate all ministers of the GNR and permit them to assume full control of their portfolios. This would deter divisive elements from undermining the peace process.*
- *The AU together with sub-regional organisations should convene a continental conference to assess the root causes of regional conflicts. Importantly, the meeting should try to thrash out guidelines and protocols to deal with the issues of ethnicity, porous borders, immigration, nationality and citizenship.*

Postscript

In July 2004, under heavy pressure from the international community and

regional leaders, the former rebels announced an end to their boycott of the Unity regime. This move was a crucial step in resolving the political crisis and healing the rift between the rebels and the government. The Accra meeting in July brought together important political figures. South Africa's President Mbeki and Kofi Annan (UN Secretary-General) played a major role in the signing of "The Accra 3 Agreement". Under the Accra agreement, laws aimed at reconciling the country have been passed since the beginning of parliament's special session in mid-August.

However, parliament still has to ratify laws on the disarmament of rebels and militias, reunification of the country, land ownership and the make-up of the electoral commission. The ECOWAS peacekeeping envoy must maintain this momentum and ensure that there is no incursion of armed force that would unsettle the democratic process. This might pave way for the presidential elections due in October 2005, followed by those for national assembly in November and local government in December.

Suggested Reading:

- ICG Africa Report No. 72 Côte d'Ivoire: "The war is not yet over", 28 November 2003, Freetown/Brussels
- ICG Africa Report No. 82 Côte d'Ivoire: No peace in sight, 12 July 2004, Dakar/Brussels

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