Identity Polarization and Conflict: State building in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana

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ABSTRACT: The conflict in Cote d'Ivoire split the country in half corresponding to the religious line between the mainly Muslim north and the mainly Christian south. This paper discusses the religious dimensions of the conflict to see how identitiy politics affected the build-up to and the continuation of the conflict. Cote d'Ivoire's neighbor Ghana is situated on the same fault line between a Muslim northern part and a Christian south. Apart from the cultural divide, there are also other striking parallels between the two neighbors. Why have the conflict trajectories in the two countries been so different? Religious polarization has gained higher political salience in Cote d'Ivoire than in Ghana. This paper discusses the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, and finds that although the conflict does not feature many of the characterizations of a religious war, religion has become an important label that has increased identity polarization. The case of Ghana on the other hand shows how the existence of religious fault line does not predetermine bloodshed.

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Introduction

On Huntington's map of the civilizations of the world a fault-line cut across Africa from west to east (Huntington, 1996). Based on his clash of civilizations thesis he foresees conflicts where the Muslim civilization to the north and African civilization to the south meet. And indeed, there have been quite a few wars in this fault line, such as the long and bloody war in Southern Sudan and now Darfur, Ethiopia with seven different conflicts since the end of the cold war, coups in Central African Republic (2001–2002), Sierra Leone (1991–2000), Liberia (1989–2003), Nigeria (2004) and the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire (2002–2004) (UCDP, 2006). Huntington also points to Chad, Kenya and Tanzania where he has found that struggles have taken place between Muslim and Christian groups (Huntington, 1996: 256). He states that "across the bulge of Africa, a variety of conflicts have gone on between the Arab and Muslim peoples of the north and animist-Christian black people of the south" (ibid.) and boldly adds that "wherever one looks along the perimeter of Islam, Muslims have problems living peaceably with their neighbors" (ibid.). However, several of the countries along the fault line between Huntington's civilizational divide are relatively peaceful, such as Ghana, Benin, Togo, and Cameroon.

Several large-N studies find limited support for Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' thesis (see e.g. Russett, Oneal & Cox, 2000; Henderson & Tucker, 2001; Fox, 2001; Chiozza, 2002; Roeder, 2003; Tusicisny, 2004), but Roeder reported that for the period 1990–1999 the results strongly support the clash of civilizations thesis as "contacts between civilizations within states were more likely than were contacts that do not cross linguistic or religious lines to escalate to more intense conflicts" (p. 509). Such large-N tests mostly rely on easily accessible indicators of demographic polarization in countries in terms of religious groups, or by indicators of the religious belonging of protagonists in recent wars. However, more than just predicting where conflicts will take place, Huntington (1996) makes a series of claims about the nature of religious fault line wars – many aspects of which are hard to put to systematic empirical tests.

Although the thesis has been disregarded on several accounts in various studies, Huntington's claims about the characteristics of religious wars can serve as a gateway to discussing the religious dimensions of conflicts. In this paper I take into account not only the polarization in terms of relative population sizes of the different

religions in the case under study or which religion predominates each of the sides. Rather, I take a look at a wider set of claims put forward by Huntington (1996) about the characteristics of fault line wars, particularly how religious identity polarization develops and shapes conflicts.

The media often portray the war in Cote d'Ivoire as a conflict between Muslims and Christians, but most commentators do not label the conflict as a religious war. Indeed, what constitutes a religious war, and what separates religious wars from other wars is in itself a topic of discussion in the literature, although most scholars do often use implicit rather that explicit demarcations. Although Huntington's (1996) thesis is (perhaps rightfully) scorned by many researchers, he does provide a set of claims about religious fault line wars which could be used as a framework for investigating the religious dimensions of conflicts. My main interest in this paper is to outline how religion has been handled in the state building processes in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. There are marked differences between how identity has played a role and been handled in the state building processes of Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, factors which might help explain the different conflict trajectories in the two countries. As a gateway to these issues I outline the main characteristics of religious fault line wars as portrayed in Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis before I to study to what degree the situations in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana are in line with the description of the build-up of such conflicts, and in what ways religion has played a role in Cote d'Ivoire's recent bloodshed. The conflict cannot be accurately depicted as a 'religious war', but we can find some of the features of religious fault line wars, particularly in terms of how religious identities have become more polarized in the conflict process.

Religious fault line wars

Several scholars have claimed that religious identity differences can increase the risk of conflicts, and intensify existing conflicts. Religion is argued to foster a stronger loyalty and private commitment than other "ideologies of order" (Juergensmeyer, 1993). Horowitz (1985) argues that religious differences are more important than language differences as a social cleavage that can develop into a conflict. Seul (1999) also argues that religion frequently appears as the primary cultural marker distinguishing groups in conflict, whereas Reynal-Querol (2002) adds that religious polarization in terms of having two groups of approximately equal size is a decisive

factor. In this sense the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire confirms the assumption that religious differences leads to conflict, and also that polarization leads to conflict, as the Muslims in Cote d'Ivoire constitute about 35–40% of the population and the rest are mainly Christians/ animists. Huntington's thesis about the clash of civilizations argues that conflicts are rooted in religious differences in and of themselves, as religion psychologically provides the most reassuring and supportive justification to fight against threatening "godless" forces (Huntington, 1996: 267). This places him in a primordial understanding of the causes of war in which "differences in religious traditions should be viewed as one of the most important independent variables to explain violent interactions in and between nations" (Hasenklever & Rittberger, 2000).

The front line in the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire coincides with the fault line between what Huntington sees as the Islamic and the African civilization. However, to be able to study the degree to which this conflict shows the signs and dynamics of a religious fault line war Huntington's work might serve as a framework of the discussion, as he outlines how the actors, issues, and dynamics of religious war differ from other wars. To study the role that religious identities have played out in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, I outline a list of central indicators and dimensions of fault line conflicts from Huntington's work. Huntington's (1996) main claim is that the association of people into broad cultural communities translates, somehow, into conflict, through what seems as close to inevitable animosities stemming from the defining of out-group from in-group. Religion is the central defining characteristic of Huntington's civilizations – the largest cultural communities (Huntington, 1996: 47). Also, cultural factors – particularly religion – are more important motivations than other factors; so whereas economists base their reasoning on the rational "economic man" Huntington as a 'culturalist' interprets the world in terms of the "religious man". Huntington argues that cultural commonalities and differences shape the interests, antagonisms, and associations of states but also groups if people within states. Although nation states will remain the most important actors in world affairs but "their interests, associations and conflicts are increasingly shaped by cultural and civilization factors" (Huntington, 1996: 36).

Several key characteristics to separate fault line conflicts from other conflicts can be read from Huntington's theory, although there is no single explicit definition of what are the necessary or sufficient prerequisites. The most parsimonious indicator of

fault line wars is found by studying the actors in the conflict, and their identities in particular. Fault line wars differ from other conflicts by almost always being between peoples of different civilizations in terms of religion (Huntington, 1996: 253). Whether the split between the factions has to be perfectly synchronic with religious belonging is not clearly stated, but this is indirectly applied from the logic of his argument. So-called cleft countries, with civilizational divisions within the country, can lead to massive violence and threaten the country's existence. This is most likely when cultural differences coincide with differences in geographical location, but if the identities and the geographical distribution do not coincide they may be made to do so through forced migration or genocide (Huntington, 1996). How deep religion has to stick in the protagonists (i.e. do the people involved in fighting have to be practicing religious people for instance), is not clear-cut from Huntington's work. However, the impression from both Huntington's general message of the nature of civilizations and the majority of the examples used do not indicate that strong religiosity per se is a necessary prerequisite for a conflict to be a civilizational clash. However, the intensity of religious commitment has historically determined the level of violent conflict between Islam and Christianity (Huntington, 1996).

Religious identities are sharpened during escalation of fault line conflicts, and civilizational consciousness rises in relation to other identities. Moderates tend to lose out to fundamentalists and radicals (Huntington, 1996: 266) and this leads to an increased identity polarization. Self-definition will increasingly be in religious terms, and central artifacts and symbols of the other side become targets, such as religious buildings, museums and libraries. As religious or civilizational identities become more focused and hardened, the conflict starts to take on a life of its own. A 'hate dynamic' similar to the security dilemma in international relations emerges in which political leaders expand and deepen appeals to ethnic and religious loyalties. Group cohesion and commitment enhances and a clearer polarization emerges. The conflict is redefined more exclusively in terms of 'us' (forces of virtue) versus 'them' (forces of evil). As a fault line conflict intensifies, each side demonizes its opponents, often portraying them as sub-humans that could legitimately be killed (Ibid: 271). Fault line wars are therefore "violent and ugly", both sides engaging in massacres, terrorism, rape and torture.

Another by related set of characteristics of fault line wars pertain to the issues of the conflicts. Huntington (1996) states that fault line conflicts are sometimes

"struggles for control over people", but most frequently "the issue is control over territory" (pp. 252f). The goal of at least one of the parties is to conquer territory and free it of other people by expelling them, killing them, or by "ethnic cleansing". The territory is for one part at least a highly charged symbol of their history and identity, sacred land to which they have an inviolable right. The fault line conflicts therefore also tend to be harder to solve than other conflicts. They are often vicious, bloody and protracted since fundamental issues of identity are at stake (Huntington, 1996: 252f). Neither party will accept something short of victory, and therefore peace deal are often broken, and the conflict may go on for a long time as "off-again-on-again wars" (ibid. 253).

Several examples from the case literature and the media show that by using religious rhetoric in conflicts, groups have gathered extremely motivated followers willing to die as martyrs in suicide attacks or to go into battle relying on religious rituals and 'bullet proof' ointments for protection (see e.g. Cline, 2003). Grew (1997: 20) states that "religious beliefs have always been those that people were most willing to sacrifice, fight, and die – and live – for". Religion might therefore "cement the willingness to bear the costs of conflict" (Lacina, 2006: 283). Fault line wars are marked by frequent truces, cease-fires, and armistices, but not comprehensive peace treaties that resolve the central political issues (Huntington, 1996). They can temporarily come to a halt due to exhaustion of the primary participants or because of involvement by other participants that have the interest and means to bring the fighters together. If religious conflicts are characterized as implying especially strong apathies between belligerents, and are inherently zero-sum in nature "it might be impossible for the parties to ratchet down violence in favor of cohabitation" (Lacina, 2006: 284). The parties are thereby trapped in a circle of violence and un-ending conflict.

Juergensmeyer (1993) describes religious conflict protagonists as perceiving to be part of a cosmic war of good versus evil, and this metaphysical element that incorporates battles into such a cosmic struggle is unique to religious violence. The underlying argument is that a religious commitment that leads to interpretation of a conflict in terms of cosmic war against evil increases the intensity and violence of underlying conflicts. Based on Juergensmeyer's (1993) and Huntington's (1996) influential works, other scholars and public debate therefore, it is a common conception that mixing religion, either deliberately or sincerely, into a conflictual

relationship brings the stakes up, increases the willingness to fight, makes compromises harder to reach, and that this make conflicts more intractable and violent.

Perhaps more so than what sets them off, Huntington focuses on processes of escalation as typical of fault line wars. The escalation process affects not only the way conflict is fought and the results in terms of violence and bloodshed, but also the actors of the conflicts, their identities, the issues involved, and geographical spread. The problem with fault line wars is that there according to Huntington (1996), are no disinterested parties, and the conflict will therefore in most cases reignite. Fault line wars are more likely than other wars to escalate geographically and to involve more than the initial protagonists through the ‘kin group syndrome’ (Huntington, 1996). Unlike communal conflicts, fault line wars are between groups which are part of large cultural entities, and therefore they are more likely to spread and involve additional participants – kin groups in other countries or parts of the world (p. 254). The conflict cannot be contained because kin groups outside the initial conflict zone will align with their civilizational kins. The local war becomes redefined as a war of religions, a clash of civilizations, “fraught with for huge consequences for humankind” (p. 270). Huntington (1996) goes as far as to claim that support from kins is always forthcoming, but it can be covert or overt and occur in different forms.

Huntington emphasizes the central role of Muslims in fault line wars. The main fault lines, or the fault lines most associated with conflict, are the ones between Islam and the other civilizations. One key factor behind this, particularly in the 1990s but also in general, is changes in demographic balance. Huntington interprets the level of violent conflict between Islam and Christianity throughout history to be a function of *demographic shifts* amongst other things. When one group rises in numbers relative to other groups sharing the same geographical area this generates political, economic and social pressures as well as military pressures on other groups. This sets off fears, and induces countervailing responses.

In the next section I evaluate the degree to which the conflict in Cote d’Ivoire fits the image of a fault line war, using the indicators discussed above. The discussion is structured around the actors of the conflict, the issues involved, and the escalation processes. Particular attention is given to how the rhetoric of the actors reflected and contributed to changes towards a polarization of the identity landscape.

Two melting pots, and one came to a boil

The ethnic landscape of Cote d'Ivoire is fragmented. Over sixty minor and four or five major ethnic groups are found in Côte d'Ivoire (US State Department, 2002), and most of the principal divisions have a significant presence in neighboring countries. The Baoule and Bété dominate the south, and have ethnic kins in Ghana and Liberia respectively. The two predominant groups in the north are the Senufo and the Malinke/Mande. The Senufo can be found in an area spanning from southern Mali and the extreme western corner of Burkina Faso, eastern Ghana, to Katiola (Bouale capital) in Côte d'Ivoire. The Mandé descend from ancient Central Saharan people, and live scattered around western Africa, without constituting a majority in any country.

Religious affiliations tend to follow ethnic lines. Although Muslim groups are found in the greatest numbers in the northern half of the country, they also are increasingly numerous in the cities of the south, west, and east due to immigration, migration, and interethnic marriages. In 1998, Muslims composed 45.5 percent of the total urban population and 33.5 percent of the total rural population in Cote d'Ivoire. In terms of religious dominance, the civilization border between the Islamic and the African civilizations passes through Cote d'Ivoire, as Muslims dominate the northern and north-western parts of the country, and Christian and animists dominate the south. Those identity differentials between a Muslim north and a Christian south has been commonly referred to in media reports about the conflict, and although not portrayed as a conflict spurred by religion per se, it has been portrayed a as conflict between Muslims and Christians.

Immigrants constitute a large share of the population of Cote d'Ivoire. They were initially encouraged to migrate to Côte d'Ivoire to work on the large cocoa and coffee plantations, and at the time of the outbreak of conflict they constituted approximate 40% of the total population, as many of them were then second or even third generation immigrants. Of the more than 5 million non-Ivoirian Africans living in Côte d'Ivoire, one-third to one-half are from Burkina Faso; the rest are from Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Benin, Senegal, Liberia, and Mauritania (US State Department, 2006).

Like in Cote d'Ivoire the ethnic landscape in Ghana is fragmented, and there is a clear polarization between the south and the north both in terms of religious belonging and socioeconomic status, where the north is predominantly Muslim and

poor, and the south is largely Christian and richer. Although both Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana are split between a Christian southern and a Muslim northern population, the share of Muslims in Côte d'Ivoire (approximately 35–40%) is larger than the share in Ghana (approximately 16%) although the Muslim community in Ghana has protested these figures, asserting that the Muslim population is closer to 30 percent (US State Dept., 2002). Like in Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana has experienced mass migrations of different ethnic groups in the pre-colonial era but also later in the colonial and post-colonial periods. The first arrivals were soon overrun by many different groups of migrants, and this led to intermittent wars and competition over resources, particularly land (Tsikata & Seini, 2004: 14). A dichotomy between natives and strangers emerged, of which the latter group was largely stigmatized and left to do low-paying jobs or work under strong terms of tenancies. As a result of pre-colonial migration and later labor migration from the north, no region in Ghana remained ethnically homogenous, but the north-south split is still evident.

Although the cultural landscapes have many similarities in the two countries, the way identities and identity differentials have been handled from the elite level differ substantially in the years leading up to the outbreak of conflict in Cote d'Ivoire. The strategies have diverged in that the purposive identity polarization has become a political instrument used by those in power and been used for political gain of on group over others in Cote d'Ivoire of ethnic identity has versus a strategy of downplaying differentials and focusing on nation building in Ghana. This may explain the difference in identity polarization in the two cases, and possibly also the different conflict levels.

Identity politics: Identification vs. nation building

Identity politics has received much attention when academics and others have tried to explain the conflict prelude in Cote d'Ivoire. The factor that has received the most attention is the autochthony discourse and the concept of *ivoirité* but also issues of economic and political inequality.

Identity, redistribution and inequality

Azam (2001) highlights the importance of redistribution between different identity groups as the primary role of the state to avoid conflicts. The system of redistribution is key to creating the solidarity links and the breakdown of such links is liable to

trigger political violence (Ibid: 430). First President Houphouet-Boigny of Cote d'Ivoire was able to keep the "tribalization" of his country at bay by distributing state patronage widely amongst all ethnic groups (Polity, 2003). His policy was that the land belonged to whoever cultivated it, and his Pan-African ideas and the need of labor in the cocoa production were central to his deliberate encouragement of immigrants to push the "frontier" of cocoa production further into the South (Dozon, 2001). Houphouet-Boigny also encouraged the political efficacy of immigrant community groups when he provided them with the right to vote. Azam (2001) calls Côte d'Ivoire's former President Houphouët-Boigny a "maestro in the art of buying the loyalty of the most active representatives of the different ethnic groups", and the policy of visible public investment in the various regions "provided the cement of the emerging Ivoirian nation" (p. 431).

Langer (2005) has investigates horizontal inequalities in Cote d'Ivoire, and found that "the Ivorian case demonstrates that the simultaneous presence of severe political horizontal inequalities at the elite level and socio-economic horizontal inequalities at the mass level forms an extremely explosive socio-political situation because in these situations the excluded political elites not only have strong incentives to mobilize their supporters for violent conflict along ethnic lines, but also are likely to gain support among their ethnic constituencies quite easily" (p. 25).

Cote d'Ivoire is characterized by a serious socio-economic north–south divide. In 1974, the income per capita of the four northern departments was significantly below Cote d'Ivoire's national average (Langer, 2005) and although the public investments in the north improved somewhat during the following years, the north remained backward compared to the south, and in 1998 northern regions and northern ethnic groups were "significantly less well-off from a socio-economic perspective than the southern and western ethnic groups (the Akan and Krou)" (Langer, 2005: 39). There were also severe political horizontal inequalities in Cote d'Ivoire which were aggravated when Gbagbo became president. According to Langer (2005: 42) Gbagbo effectively guaranteed that the northern ethnic elites were "deprived of any executive power". Although the representation of the north improved in August 2002 with the introduction of a government of "national unity", political inequality was still extremely high compared to the other governments since 1980 (ibid.).

Ghana clearly also expose a similar pattern of socio-economic horizontal inequalities along religious identity groups as Cote d'Ivoire. The spatial distribution

of the two major religions, Islam and Christianity, almost coincides with the division into the northern half which is poor and disadvantaged, and the southern half which is wealthy and more developed (Asante & Gyimah-Boadi, 2004). In 1999, poverty levels are highest in the three Northern Regions, and in those three regions 70-90% of the population was classified as poor compared to 50% in the southern regions (ibid.). Asante & Gyimah-Boadi (2004: 8) conclude that "inequality and ethno-regional rivalry may cause tensions" but unlike in Cote d'Ivoire they have not erupted in violent conflict in Ghana "largely because successive Ghanaian governments have adopted practices of symbolic distribution, representativeness and inclusion" (p. 8). Whereas winning the elections in Cote d'Ivoire in the last years prior to the conflict meant the opportunity to shift power and development to the winning group, something which was indeed practiced, there has been a more conscious policy in Ghana to avoid tension and create equal opportunities for all Ghanaians irrespective of regional and ethnic belonging.

Autochthony: Ivoirité vs civic identities

Autochthony implies localized forms of belonging. In Cote d'Ivoire this meant that every citizen must prove their citizenship valid by reference to the village in the territory of Cote d'Ivoire that they come from, and this verification of an authentic Ivorian belonging must be confirmed by the citizens of the village. The period leading up to the conflict outbreak was marked by politics of place and the contestation of belonging, identity and citizenship.

From the time of Houphouet-Boigny's death in 1993, the identity politics of Cote d'Ivoire changed. The four major politicians central in this important period have been identified as Bedie, Ouattara, Gbagbo and Guei – the Big Four. Much of what happened in the period leading up to the conflict was largely dependent of the relations between these actors, and their different agendas, particularly in terms of securing political power and resources, through playing up identity polarization. Gbagbo of the party FPI (le Front Populaire Ivoirien) had already in 1990, when the first multiparty elections took place, accused Houphouet-Boigny of using northern immigrants as his "election cattle" and campaigned to reduce "foreigners'" role in the national economy and against their voting rights (Marshall-Fratani, 2006). However, President Bedie, who came to power after Houphouet-Boigny's death, was the first to systematically play out the notion of *ivoirité*. This ideology made splits between those

who were the autochthones ("from the soil") to the Ivorian territory, and those who were considered foreigners (allochtones). The criteria for being allowed an Ivorian identity became increasingly strict, and documentation of the origin of one's parents had to be provided to be allowed residential status. Having a name that signaled being of northern and in particular Burkina origin became increasingly stigmatizing as the xenophobic *ivoirité* ideology became a weapon for political control and influence.

A first legal step in the *ivoirité* ideology was taken in 1994 when a new electoral code restricted the conditions for eligibility for elected office only to those born in Cote d'Ivoire with both parents themselves born in the country (Ceuppiens & Geshiere, 2005). The *ivoirité* discourse was foremost maintained to prevent a Muslim from the north, Alassane Ouattara, from running for president (ibid.). Former members of the PDCI's reformist wing formed the RDR (Rally of Republicans) in September 1994, and Ouattara was since 1999 the leader of the party. Now, most Muslims favor the RDR (Kirwin, 2006). Bedie described RDR as "a northern regionalist party with a sinister Muslim agenda" (Collett, 2006: 623) to delegitimize the party, but this turned according to Collett into a self-fulfilling prophecy where the perception was generated that Bedie was an anti-Muslim going to punish individual ethnic, religious, and regional groups for their divergent political views (Crook, 1997: 226).

Ouattara was born in Dimbokro in central Côte d'Ivoire, just east of Yamassoukro, but he is frequently presented simply as a Muslim from the north. Ouattara was the perfect incarnation of the perceived threat to the "autochthones" because of his upbringing in Burkina Faso and his professional life outside of the country in the World Bank and IMF. His parents were though to be immigrants from Burkina Faso, and this was used as an opportunity to limit his access to power in elections, and although the Prime Minister at the time of Houphouet-Boigny's death, Ouattara was prohibited from standing for elections as president due to the re-definition of who could rightfully claim to be a true Ivorian. RDR represented a threat to Bedie's presidency, as he feared the party might capture traditionally safe Northern votes from the PDCI.

Akides (2003) claims that the notion of Ivoirianness (or *ivoirité*) changed the face of nationalism in Cote d'Ivoire from being developmentalist, to turning tribal and ethnonationalist. There were two stages in this development. The first version of *ivoirité*, up to 1999 valorized Christianity and minimized the Muslim identity as a

socio-cultural component of social diversity in Cote d'Ivoire. This conceptualization was part of a mode of justification of Akan primacy. Then, in a coup at Christmas in 1999, Bedie was replaced by General Guei until elections were held in 2000. Guei's entry into Ivorian politics was celebrated by the general population but particularly northerners and westerners, and after his Christmas coup in 1999 he was referred to as Santa Claus, and the coup as a Christmas present. General Guei first opposed the idea of *ivoirité* but later used the concept after a change in conceptualization. This marks the second version of ivoirité which "was intended to be more selectively 'civic'" (Akindes, 2003: 13). However, although this second version was more inclusive to other peoples of the South, Centre and West, and not an exclusive Akan identity, it was no less exclusive to the northerners, hence building a clearer north-south identity dichotomy. The term 'Diola' (collective name used to identify ethnically diverse groups in the north) underlined a polarization in the population. In the collective imagination, Akides claims, there "remained a doubt as to the underlying reality of their belonging to the 'Ivorian nation'" (ibid.). This doubt was justified by the fact that the northerners often shared names and religion with the people of the neighboring countries to the north, and their Muslim religious belonging. The outcome of the process of identifying the 'true Ivorians' was that "Ivorian Muslims were amalgamated with foreigners" and "people from the north of the Ivory Coast were amalgamated with foreigners" (Akides, 2003: 14).

When the 2000 election drew nearer Guei used *ivoirité* to exclude Ouattara (Collett, 2006). The elections were marked by attacks on northerners and immigrants by FPI youth because of their support for RDR. The status of respect for religious freedom deteriorated, and violent clashes between security forces, RDR militants, and FPI supporters led to the death of hundreds of persons, most of whom were Muslims (US State Dept., 2001). The government monitored minority religions for signs of political activity it considered subversive or dangerous, and Muslims therefore believed that their religious and ethnic affiliation made them targets of discrimination by the government with regard to both employment and the renewal of national identity cards (ibid.). Woods (2003: 654) also finds that the violence emphasized the identity polarization building up in the populations and state that "increasingly, northerners viewed the state as dominated by ethnic groups from the south – particularly, the police and military. The ethnic killings that followed the 2000 elections targeted only northerners. It did not matter whether they were Ivorian

citizens or immigrants." A quote from the President of the Ivorian National Assembly is illustrative of the polarization of identities as he pointed out that "administrative and police harassment does not differentiate between a Diola from the Ivory Coast and a Diola from Mali, Burkina or elsewhere. A Diola was a Diola and it was only a collective term for several ethnic groups in the north of the Ivory Coast and ethnic groups from foreign countries" (cited in Akides, 2003: 15).

The election led to Gbagbo being voted president, and the polarization between the pro-FPI and pro-RDR continued. However, the split was equally much a split between northerners and southerners. In line with his anti-Ouattara and anti-RDR rhetoric, Gbagbo allocated most government positions to his own party, which aggravated the existing feelings of political exclusion and inequality among the RDR supporters (Langer, 2005). State policy became more nationalistic, and outbidding because salient and apparent in the way Ghbagbo supported youth gangs attacks on the opposition (Kirwin, 2006). Pro-FPI youth groups also demanded strict prohibitions against allochtones, such as building of Mosques and commercial activities (Marshall-Fratani, 2006). A program of national identification, and issuing of new identity cards was put in place, and this factor is often cited as the prime motivation for joining the conflict amongst rebel recruits (Marshall-Fratani, 2006). The identity cards represented the concrete materialization of the *ivorité* ideology of polarization between the south and the north, which Gbagbo used "to consolidate governmental power in the south" (Collett, 2006: 626) importantly at the expense of northerners and Muslims who were increasingly associated with foreigners.

The religious identities at the elite level did not appear to be at the front stage in the early 1990s. During the years leading up to the outbreak of the conflict, however, the religious identity has become a clearer part of the entire conceptualization of a polarized and divided country between the northerners and the southerners. As tensions mounted, ethnic distinctions and the distinction between autochthones and allochtones, national and foreigner, has become increasingly blurred, as the polarization into north/south or a Muslim/Christian division seems to have increasingly taken centre stage. However, although this distinction seems to have become increasingly labeled as a religious divide, the division does not seem to stem from a religious mobilization per se, but rather through economic concerns. The northern identity was according to Collett (2006) constructed on the basis of regional economic concerns and relative deprivation. The southern identity and the *ivoirité*

discourse is also most probably motivated by access to political power and land. However, the discourse and description of the conflict as underway has increasingly been using religious rhetoric from the government side.

An autochthony debate has also been present in Ghana and there are intractable conflicts and tensions between “strangers” and autochthons although this has not in the case of Ghana led to massive violence (Tsikata & Seini, 2004). However, Tsikata & Seini argue that the seeming peacefulness of Ghana does not mean that the country is free of conflict, and point to a wide range of conflicts and disputes, inter-ethnic as well as intra-ethnic, and between religious groups. The description of Ghana in Tsikata & Seini’s work (2004) mirrors to a great extent the literature on the causes of conflict in Cote d’Ivoire. A polarization in terms of widening inequalities between a more developed coastal area and a more backward periphery in the Sahelian north is seen in West Africa in general, and both in Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana. The struggle over land and particularly the invaluable asset of the forest regions is portrayed as a premise for identity politics. The political elites in Ghana also follow the dichotomy of north-south to a large extent, and many political parties are ethno-regional, what some commentators have described as politicisation of ethnicity. Northern nationalism rose in the pre-independence period and beyond, and epithomimized with the formation of the Northern People’s Party (NPP) before the 1954 elections. In this sense the northern part of Ghana had a potential political gathering point, but still lacked of internal political unity and was not able to form significant alliances with partiers in the south (Tsikata & Seini, 2004).

Ethnicity and belonging is a mobilizing force in Ghana, and there has been some degree of north-south polarization. However, in the period since 1957 governance reforms, electoral rules and public policies in Ghana have been installed to gear nation building, check ethnic and north-south polarization and thereby promote national integration. At the elite levels, the Avoidance of Discrimination Act of 1957 banned the formation of political parties along ethnic, religious or regional lines (Asante, 2004). In addition, cabinet, bureaucratic and technocratic positions in the government and public sector and the military were informally balanced to reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the country (Gyimah-Boadi & Daddieh, 1999). Furthermore, the 1992 constitution and the Political Parties Laws provide for elaborate and far-reaching rules to check ethnic polarization (ibid). Unlike the autochthony discourse instigated and increasingly played up at the elite level in Cote

d'Ivoire, the 1992 constitution in Ghana requires the state to actively promote national integration by prohibiting discrimination and prejudice on the grounds of such factors as place of birth, origin, ethnicity, and religion (Asante, 2004: 11). An additional electoral rule which requires more than 50 percent support to be elected president also encourages different groups to forge large alliances and seek votes outside their more narrow regional or ethnic strongholds (ibid.: 12). In the 2000 national elections the New Patriotic Party was able to win office largely due to a repackaging and marketing as a national party (ibid.), and the vice Presidency was even given to a Muslim northerner.

Religious state policies

The state religiosity in Côte d'Ivoire is ambiguous, and the constitutional separation of religion and state is not evident in practice. On the one hand the government claims to provide religious freedom, but on the other hand the Muslim communities in the country frequently report that they have been repressed or discriminated against because of their religious belonging. Although there is no official state religion in the country, for historical and ethnic reasons the Government informally favors Christianity, particularly the Roman Catholic Church. Many senior government officials, including all heads of state since independence, have been Catholics (US State Dept., 2001). In Ghana on the other hand, the respect for religious freedom has been stronger. Very few infringements on this right has been observed, and no serious infringements have been observed that negatively affect the relationships between Muslims and Christians.

The Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) sums up the performance of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana on religious freedoms and finds that both in terms of government regulation of religion, government favoritism of religion, and social regulation of religion in Côte d'Ivoire is above the mean levels in Western Africa and the world as a whole, and above the levels in neighboring Ghana (ARDA, 2006). In practice the government does not respect the freedom of religion, and the relationships between religions in society are not generally amicable (ibid.). Some of this is a result of the conflict, as the ARDA indexes are based on the 2003 religious freedom reports of the US State Department (US Stat Dept., 2003) when the religious tensions were augmented. The US state dept. state that after September 19, "the Government targeted persons perceived to be perpetrators or supporters of the rebellion, who often

were Muslims" (US State Dept., 2003). But the State Department also reported in 2003 that "strong efforts by religious and civil society groups have helped prevent the crisis from turning into a religious conflict". In some respects, although there are clear religious tensions in Côte d'Ivoire, there are efforts made to counteract the negative effects of framing the conflict as a 'religious war', although the policies seem to diverge.

Grassroots identities

Dozon (2001) emphasizes that southerners in Cote d'Ivoire hardly distinguish between northerners as immigrants or citizens. The idea of *le grand Nord* from which all the so-called Dioula originated were considered a unified people characterized by similar characteristics such as being Muslim, despite the fact that they are from a wide array of ethnic groups and not entirely Dioula (Kirwin, 2006). This supports the idea that, at least for southerners, the 'other' was seen as a unified group opposed to the southern in-group, and the fragmentation of the other was downplayed, something which create a perhaps artificial sense of identity polarization or a perception of polarization. Akides (2003) also concludes that the *ivoirité* discourse "sowed the seeds of mutual paranoia" (p. 15) where communities began to fear each other on the basis of identities that had gone from being permeable to being gradually fixed in a dichotomy where all northerners and Muslims were the out-group.

Survey research can give a unique insight into the degree to which identity polarization is reflected in the populations of Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. Huntington (1996) assumes that populations would increasingly associate themselves with 'their' civilization and religious belonging, particularly in times of perceived threat to the identity; and that this would lead to conflict. Also, issues of religious culture should become increasingly important for their lives and how they perceive values and issues concerning their personal lives and not at least political and social life. If conflicts will increasingly be found in the fault lines of civilizations we could also assume that people will become increasingly skeptical to the 'other', and feel threatened by people of different civilization belonging. It is therefore interesting to see how people felt in terms of issues of religion and political and their own identity in the two countries.

The PEW Global Attitudes Project conducted a survey in both Côte d'Ivoire and neighboring Ghana in 2002, just prior to the conflict broke out in Côte d'Ivoire (available online at: http://pewglobal.org). In fact the survey in Côte d'Ivoire was

conducted just few days prior to the conflict outbreak. This gives a unique opportunity to evaluate the religious attitudes of the public towards issues related to religion and religious clashes. Some interesting patterns emerge from the two surveys: with a sample of 708 individuals drawn at random from Abidjan, Yamoussoukro, Bouaké and surrounding areas the overall impression is that people in general were more satisfied with their household income, family life, and job than were the Ghanaians, but the two populations were almost equally dissatisfied with the state of their country, although the Ghanaians were slightly more satisfied with the national economy than were the Ivorians.

On questions of what they saw as very big problems in their country, the reports about increasing xenophobia in Côte d'Ivoire is supported. 76% of the Ivoirians asked answered that they should be more restrict and control the entry of people into the country than what they did at the time. A dramatic difference is apparent between Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana when is comes to evaluate whether 'terrorism' is very big problem in their country (a term that was used more in relation to religiously based groups and particularly Islamic fundamentalists): In Côte d'Ivoire 63% of the people in the survey identified terrorism as a very big problem in their country, versus only 26% in Ghana, a difference of 37 percentage point between the two populations! Also, more Ivorians than Ghanaians see religious and ethnic hatred as the greatest danger to the world as a whole. This lends some support to the theory that the conflict was related to an, at least perceived, clash of civilizations, as the Ivoirians seem much more concerned about these issues than Ghanaians.

When asked more specifically about the role of religion the Ivorians in general were more supportive of a claim that religion is a matter of personal faith and should be kept separate from government policy, and they value highly that they can practice religion freely. However, several questions related more specifically to the role of Islam were asked to the Muslim populations of the two countries. Here there are also some interesting differences. The Muslims of Côte d'Ivoire felt that there were "serious threats to Islam today" to a much large degree than their Ghanaian counterparts (68 vs. 35%). They were also more inclined to want Islam to play a very large role in political life in Côte d'Ivoire and a considerably large portion of the Ivorian Muslims wanted religious leaders to play a large role in politics. 22% also felt that Islam at the time played a very large role in the political life of the country.

The Muslims of Côte d'Ivoire also had a stronger 'civilizational solidarity' than the Muslims of Ghana. More than half of the Ivorian Muslims said they felt "more solidarity today with Islamic people living around the world". The most astonishing difference is however that the more than five times as many of the Muslim respondent than the counterparts in Ghana felt that suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilians could often be justified in order to defend Islam. 25% of the Ivorian Muslims answered that this could often be justified versus only 5% of the Ghanaians. Almost three quarters of the Ivorian Muslims would feel that suicide bombing could be justified at least on come occasions, whereas 44% of the Ghanaians are not completely opposed.

These findings indicate that the Ivorian Muslims at the time just a week before the outbreak of the civil war were significantly more radicalized than the Muslims in Ghana, and that they were less opposed to violent means, and also felt more strongly as a part of a larger Muslim community that the consider under threat.

Demographics

Huntington (1996) emphasizes that demographics can be a triggering factor of animosities between groups belonging to different civilizations. When a group from one civilization increases in terms of demographic dominance relative to a different civilizational group this might create fears and animosities in the group that is falling behind. The Ivorian *Counseil Economique et Social* already in 1998 expressed fear about modification of the religious balance in the country by the inflow of Muslim immigrants (Akides, 2003). Population growth and movement accentuated ethnic distinctions between the groups of the Sahel and those of the forest zone in the south in Cote d'Ivoire because of migration (US State Dept., 2001) and those distinctions have sometimes been expressed in terms of religion (e.g., northern Muslims and southern Christians and traditionalists) (ibid.). However, there are also differences in fertility amongst the different religious groups in Cote d'Ivoire. Based on the Demographic Health Surveys (DHS) some interesting patterns emerge. In 1993/4 comparable DHS surveys were conducted in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. When controlling for factors that typically affect fertility, such as age, education, and urbanization, Muslim women in Ghana did not have more children than other religious groups in the country, whereas there in Cote d'Ivoire was a slightly higher birth rate amongst Muslims than others, however only significant at the 10% level. In

1998/9 however, there had been some important changes in the statistics. At that time the Muslim women in Ghana gave birth to slightly fewer children than women of other religious background (significant at the 10% level) when we control for age, education and urbanization, whereas in Cote d'Ivoire the Muslim women had significantly more children than all other religious groups, and the effect is even significant at the 1% level. This difference between Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana might give some support to Huntington's claim that demographic shifts an produce a sense of fear of being out-numbered, and that this could play a role in spurring conflicts between groups in the one case and not the other.

Religion and the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire

As Ghana has stayed clear of large scale violent conflict, this section will not be comparative, but concentrate on the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire once underway. I first outline the role and identities of the actors partaking in the conflict and then address the issues of the conflict and the dynamics and escalation of the conflict to evaluate if and how religion played a part.

Conflict actors and issues

In the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire the elites on the two opposing sides were on the one hand President Gbagbo and his regime and on the other the rebel leaders, foremost among them Guillaume Soro. Largely Muslim, the rebels called the New Forces are based in Bouaké, where according to a Sunday Herald report "men with Kalashnikov rifles stroll through the market or showily flex their muscles from passing jeeps. Few have complete uniforms. Many wear T-shirts bearing images of Che Guevara and Osama bin Laden" (Sunday Herald, 2004). According to LeBlanc (1999: 489) "Bouake, in the social representations of both Muslims in the city and other Ivorians, is regarded as an orthodox Islamic city; in other words, Muslims in Bouake are regarded as particularly faithful to their religion" and remains one of the centers of the practice of Islam in Cote d'Ivoire today.

The motivation that Guillaume Soro, the most central rebel leader, states in his autobiography (Soro, 2005) is a sense of injustice, democratic deficit and discrimination of the northern parts of the country by the south. Guillaume Soro is a practicing Catholic (BBC, 2003) born in the far north of Côte d'Ivoire, just a few kilometers from the Malian border. He was a student leader in Abidjan, studied law in

France, and before that he attended Catholic schools. In his younger years he even planned to become a Catholic priest. He downplays the role of religion as the dividing line for him in the years prior to the conflict. His political orientation is leftist rather than nationalistic or religious. Although the MPCI consisted mostly of northern Muslims, the rebel movement did not proclaim an ethnic or religious belonging. It seems quite evident that the issue of religion played only a marginal role as an issue in the conflict at the onset. The rebels made no specific claims about aiming for a change in the religious orientation of the country or separatism that would create two religiously homogenous nations. However, although Soro portraits the identity divide as something far from his consciousness in his younger years and even today, Langer (2005) argues that a "a growing northern consciousness was an important change that contributed to the escalation of ethnic tensions at the beginning of the 1990s" (p. 32). Rather than portraying himself or the rebel forces as part of an Islamic civilization, Soro emphasizes the common Ivorian identity as something that he has always felt strongly related to (Soro, 2005). He attributes this to his childhood when he moved around in the country with his family, and the fact that he socialized with student from different groups, learnt different local languages, and therefore saw himself as an Ivorian rather than as a representative of a particular cultural sub-group.

There is also little if any evidence that other central rebel leaders have use religion as a motivation for fighting, or that they perceive of their role as religious combatants – there is even little evidence of any of them being practicing Muslims. Indeed, rather than being a movement consisting of actors of a clear northern Muslim identity, the rebels are quite mixed. For instance, on of the central leaders of the rebels, Louis Dacoury-Tabley is from the Bete ethnic group, and was up until 1999 Gbagbo's right-hand man. From the composition of the central rebel leaders, therefore, there is little evidence to support the notion of the Cote d'Ivoire conflict as a religious fault line war.

The centrality of the religious divide is often downplayed in retrospective analyses of the period leading up to the conflict. Collett (2006) claims that the north-south divide "was created by the transformation of political and ethnic identity rather than the politicization of pre-given ethnic identity" (p. 628) thereby arguing more for an instrumentalist view of the conflict, where the cultural identity is seen as less important. Other, such as Langer (2005) takes the cultural divisions as given facts, and claims that political and economic horizontal inequalities are what mobilized the

groups to conflict. The cultural divisions are seen as real and important, but they increase in significance due to grievances that follow the identity groups. He therefore does not give the religious dimension any leading role as the issue in the conflict.

Huntington argues that fault line wars follow patterns in which "the identities which were previously multiple and casual become focused and hardened" (Huntington, 1996: 266). The conflict which might have been started not so much as a religious or civilizational war, by time increasingly takes the form as a civilizational fault line war, and each side of the conflict will then make the distinction between the forces of virtue and the forces of evil. As violence increases the initial issues at stake tend to get redefined more exclusively as 'us' against 'them'' and group cohesion and commitment are enhanced (Huntington, 1996). Political leaders expand and deepen their appeals to ethnic and religious loyalties, and civilization consciousness strengthens in relation to other identities. A 'hate dynamics' emerges, comparable a 'security dilemma' in which mutual fears distrust, and hatred feed on each other (Huntington, 1996: 266). This dynamic can also to some extent be found in the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire. Indeed, Kiwin (2006) interprets the conflict in terms of a security dilemma.

On the government side the key actors, President Laurent Gbagbo but also his influential wife Simone Gbagbo, are neo-Pentecostal Christians. Simone Gbagbo holds a strong political influence in Côte d'Ivoire. Her influence on the rhetoric of the regime and various aspects of Ivorian politics should not be underestimated. They have both, but particularly Simone Gbagbo, portrayed the conflict in the Côte d'Ivoire as one of Christians vs. Muslims in order to rally their followers. Prophetism has had a long tradition of playing a role in politics in Côte d'Ivoire (Banegas, 2006). Ivorian ultranationalism and FPI's rhetoric is according to Banégas (2006: 546) "situated within a religious imaginary of deliverance".

The government side and forces connected to the government have resorted to religiously inspired characterizations of the enemy. Hate media have emission messages of xenophobia which have been paralleled with the 'mille collines' radio in Rwanda during the genocides in 1994. Although reports of such hate media has been found on both sides, the radio channels connected to the Ivorian government have received the most attention. The enemy is often described as 'evil', 'a devil' or 'a vampire' and this language is evident in popular newspapers close to the government. This falls into a general African trend sweeping the continent in recent years, the

discourse of the new Pentecostal churches that have based their appeal on the need to struggle against "the forces of evil" (Banégas, 2006). The reverberations between the politics of liberation and the idiom of deliverance can therefore be important, and parallel the liberation theology seen elsewhere in the world. Reference to salvation and the power of the Spirit to fight a war against the forces of evil has been observed as an important part of Gbagbo's rhetoric (Mary, 2002) and Banégas interprets this as a "fight to the death, with aspects of a total war against an enemy who is both within and without" (Banégas, 2006: 547) – the enemies are 'foreigners' or outsiders in the country, and the previous colonial masters. The political radicalization seen in the media fed on a strong rhetoric of a fight against the forces of evil. According to Banégas & Losch (2002: 155) this rhetoric borrows from two registers: the post September 11 fight against international Islamic terrorism and the neo-Pentecostal fight against the devil (the rebels were for example stigmatized as sorcerers). Verses from the Bible were frequently used in this discourse, and the influence of a millenarian discourse was and still is evident in the high circles of power. The outbidding of ethno-nationalist rhetoric and hate messages in the media went from bad to worse as foreign radio and television (who could have provided a diversification of the information) and local radio stations close to the RDR were forbidden or physically hindered from emission. The media spread messages that have been accused of encouraging and trivializing violence, thereby increasing the force of youth gangs attacks on 'strangers'.

Internationalization

One of the predictions implied in Huntington's (1996) thesis is that conflicts that occur on the fault lines between the major religions will run a higher risk of spreading across borders due to kin group alliances and intra-civilizational solidarity. The conflict in Cote d'Ivoire has certainly also had its international dimensions. Banegas & Marshall-Fratani (2007) state that the conflict "is by its very nature transnational" (p. 91) because of the politics of identification inevitably involved those nation-states from which the third of the population considered 'strangers' originate, and because of the long history of Houphouet-Boigny's involvement in other conflicts in the region.

The BBC reported in 2003 that the government of Côte d'Ivoire claimed the first mutineer rebels (the MPCI) were supported and directed from abroad, with the

backing of a foreign country (BBC, 2003). The most usual suspect was Burkina Faso, the country of origin of many of the foreign nationals in Côte d'Ivoire. The BBC found that no evidence was offered to support the claims, but it was clear that the rebels were getting funds from somewhere. Banegas & Marshall-Fratani (2007) maintain that, contrary to the claims of observers and journalists in the early days of the conflict, "the involvement of countries from the subregion goes well beyond the activities of poorly controlled armed groups" spilling over from the Mano river conflicts. Indeed, the MPCI were according to Banegas & Marshall-Fratani (2007) directly supported by Burkina Faso and President Blaise Compaoré, and indirectly from Mali. When Guillaume Soro (2005) discussed the role of Burkina in the conflict he admits that the country was a meeting place for the rebels before the conflict started, but that they never received funds from the country. The conflict has not spread to include the Burkina Faso army directly. Several explanations could pertain to this: One explanation is that Burkina is a land- locked country that depends on trading routes through Côte d'Ivoire. Risking an outright conflict between the two countries would therefore not be an economically viable strategy. One could also interpret this as an indicator that the conflict is not so much about religion; or more probably, that this case shows that religion or cultural ties does not in this case trump strategic economic interests and alliances.

The central role played by Liberians and Sierra Leoneans in the fighting in the western part of the country fundamentally changed the nature of the war (Banegas & Marshall-Fratani, 2007: 96) and made it more chaotic and violent. The rebel groups that later joined the conflict (the MPIGO and MJP) were supposedly created with the direct involvement of Charles Taylor and Sam Bocharie of Sierra Leone and also the MPCI, and included Liberian, Sierra Leonean and Burkinabe mercenaries. Charles Taylor, leading the RUF in Sierra Leone, is believed to have been instrumental in establishing MPIGO. RUF again received Libyan financial support and took inspiration from Gaddafi of Libya (Richards, 2005: 119), and reportedly have received arms and human resources from Burkina Faso (Reno, 1999: 81). The MJP was composed of Sierra Leoneans and Liberians and traditional *dozo* hunters. Gbabgo, on the other hand, used Liberian, South African and eastern European mercenaries, and received weapons from Angola (Griffiths, 2002). Although the patterns of alliances may bear some resemblance to wider cultural-religious communities, any religious dimension of the alliances is largely unsubstantiated, and

the liaisons between external agents and the parties to the Cote d'Ivoire conflict seemed to follow a logic of 'the enemy of my friend is my enemy' not one of religious alliances.

Conclusion

According to Banégas (2006: 535) Côte d'Ivoire "has been floundering in a poisonous morass of identity politics" ever since the outbreak of war in 2002. Inter-community relations have changed in nature since the outbreak of the conflict: They have been radicalized at both local and national levels, and the disputes that Banégas (2006) saw as originally grounded in problems of land and economics have become political and also cultural, and the motives for hatred have also gained religious aspects. Being considered a 'stranger' or foreigner has become ethnicized, and "criteria based on area of origin, culture and religious affiliation have become the prime markers of identity" (Banégas, 2006: 541), replacing the former identification according to socioeconomic criteria. Anyone with an identity as a northerner or a Muslim can now be considered a 'stranger' in Cote d'Ivoire and a representative of the 'enemy within' (ibid.). Other scholars, such as Woods (2003: 654) claim similar conclusions: "Ivorians from the north found themselves thrown into the same category as Muslim immigrants from neighbouring countries […] Thus, the rising levels of violence against Muslims created the conditions that led to the north rebelling and the onset of a civil war".

In almost all media sources giving their summary of the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire it is presented as one between the Muslim north and the Catholic or Christian south. The case of Côte d'Ivoire fits nicely into the view presented by Huntington (1996), and proponents of the clash-thesis might flag this conflict as a confirmatory case. In some respects they are correct to do so, first of all since the two main sides to the conflict generally have their 'constituency' among Muslims and Christians respectively. Also, even if the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire certainly was not a religious war at the onset, but religion is being increasingly mentioned in relation to the conflict dynamics and the rhetoric of the state protagonists. The rhetoric from the government side in particular is increasingly pointing to religion in understanding the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire which has contributed to creating a more polarized identity division in the country. Still, several important indicators show that interpreting this conflict as a religious fault line conflict is inaccurate. First, the story of the conflict is not a result of direct religious issues, but questions of political gains and power, and economic

security in times of instability and economic downturn. Second, the rebels are not a homogenous group in terms of religious belonging. Even the main rebel leader to instigate the war in 2002 is himself not a Muslim but a Catholic and he does not emphasize the role of religion in the rebel movement's 'raison d'etre'.

The state building strategies in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana have been markedly different. Socioeconomic distribution between Christians and Muslims in Ghana mirrors that if the situation in Cote d'Ivoire, as both countries have quite large Muslim minorities in the northern parts of the country, and these regions are generally poorer than the southern parts. However, the strategies in the two countries pertaining to political influence in particular differ and also the general identity politics. The exclusionary identity politics in Cote d'Ivoire is probably a central reason why the Muslims on Cote d'Ivoire were markedly more inclined to feel threatened than their co-religionists in Ghana prior to the conflict outbreak. Although autochthony debates were present in both countries, the *ivoirité* debate in Cote d'Ivoire led to politics of winner-takes-it-all and exclusion of large segments of the population from power and influence. Identity politics in Ghana, on the other hand, focused on building inclusive nationalism and state building, and policies have therefore been targeted at avoiding clashes between identity groups, and conscious policies of inclusion of minority groups encouraged and even legislated. This clearly shows that, contrary to Huntington's (1996) grim predictions, religious fault lines do not predetermine bloodshed.

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