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Diasporic Politics, Transnational Media Circulation, and the Multifocality of Côte d'Ivoire

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Abstract

This article proposes a framework of "multifocality" to think about the role of place within the national political cultures of postcolonies with active migrant and diasporic communities abroad. I build my argument on an ethnographic exploration of political activism among networks of Ivorians living in North America, Europe, and Africa during the last twelve years of civil strife in Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa. Tracing media circulation and political party organizing within and across several continents, I show how the political culture of the Ivorian nation arises, exists, and is negotiated within a number of non-connected places (multiple foci) both within and beyond the official territory of the nation-state. Activists and government officials travel to, live in, and shape sites within a number of nation-state territories in order to be in the middle of Ivorian politics. My analysis underscores the need for more theoretical attention to the specific and often uneven ways in which the political structures of many postcolonies are being re-territorialized through transnational forms of public culture. The recent conflict in Côte d'Ivoire—a conflict centered around questions of national belonging based on people's relationships with the national territory—offers a particularly interesting case study through which to think about relationships between national political communities and nation-state territories. As participants mobilize resources in certain locations while dodging place-based limitations of others, the multifocality of Ivorian political discourse emerges as key to its negotiation. [Postcolonialism, nationalism, politics, diaspora, media, Côte d'Ivoire].

Introduction

As Côte d'Ivoire celebrated its 50th year of independence in 2011, an embattled presidential election and period of civil unrest once again launched the country into the headlines of newspapers around the world. Ivorians reading the headlines from within the U.S. were quick to recall the role of diasporic Ivorians in the previous election. During the counting of ballots in 2000, then ruling military junta and presidential hopeful General Robert Guéï learned that election results were being updated hourly on an Ivorian website. Behind in the polls, Guéï sent soldiers to destroy what he believed to be the source of the postings: computers at the headquarters of the oppositional party *Rassemblement des Républicaines* (RDR). But Guéï could not stop the dissemination of results because they were being input into a computer outside the country. Like many Ivorian oppositional organizations, the RDR had located its website domains outside of Côte d'Ivoire. An insider in the ballot counting room was calling in the results by cell phone to

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RDR members in Washington, D.C. who posted them online and circulated the information to foreign news agencies. Their actions prevented Guéï from throwing the election. When he claimed he had won, public outrage and international scrutiny culminated in an uprising that ousted him. Now, in 2012, an Ivorian who lived in the U.S. for several decades has assumed the presidency of Côte d'Ivoire after winning the 2011 election with the assistance of his large support base of activists and voters throughout North America, Africa, and Europe.[1] His RDR party, operated out of D.C. since 1994, has once again succeeded in ousting a top official of Côte d'Ivoire.

Relationships between postcolonial nations and their politically and economically active diaspora have received a great deal of attention from scholars, governments, and policy makers in the last two decades (Bernal 2004; Grewal 2005; Vertovec 2011). While postcolonies have long been governed by Western-educated native elites and international institutions, new forms of wide–scale political, economic, and social activities that cross nation–state borders mark a significant departure from the first several decades of postcoloniality (Hansen and Stepputat 2005; Piot 2010). Both elites and non–elites migrating to wealthier countries in record numbers have found ways to simultaneously participate in the political economies of their home and host nations (Leonard 2007; Ong 2006; Smith and Bakker 2007; Stephen 2007). They engage in their homelands' political affairs in real–time, travel more cheaply between host and homelands, and take advantage of "home" government outreach programs to diasporic citizens such as dual nationality, citizenship for second generation expatriates, absentee voting, financial incentives, and tax breaks.

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Such new forms of governance have ushered in new ways in which national politics are understood to be territorialized. Many nations' political structures increasingly appear to be reconfigured as not simply negotiated by forces abroad, but actively located abroad. Scholars have offered theoretical frameworks such as "long-distance nationalism" (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001); "politics beyond the nation-state" (Duany 2002); "expanded nations" (Laguerre 2005); and "transnational terrains of nationhood" (Bernal 2004) to describe the recent growth of many postcolonial nations' political cultures outside of their nation–state's borders. While these approaches have proven extremely useful, they focus primarily on the social spaces, rather than physical locations, in which people live and act (Duany 2011; Vertovec 2009:96) and, as a result, paint newer forms of nationalism as expanding amorphously in ways that are free flowing and all inclusive.

I propose in this article a framework of "multifocality" to think about the role of place within the national political cultures of postcolonies with active migrant and diasporic communities abroad. I argue that the political culture of many nations arises, exists, and is negotiated within a number of central, physically non-connected places (multiple foci) both within and beyond the official territory of the nation-state. The specific ways in which political participants and discourses interact with, and

shape spaces is key to multifocal politics. I build my argument on an ethnographic exploration of political activism among networks of Ivorians living in North America, Europe, and Africa during the last twelve years of civil strife in Côte d'Ivoire. Between 1998-2001 and 2006-2010, I conducted 21 months of fieldwork among Ivorians on differing sides of the conflict living in Washington, D.C. and in urban and rural areas of Côte d'Ivoire who consume, produce, and influence news media coverage of the crisis as a form of political action.

The recent conflict in Côte d'Ivoire—a conflict centered around questions of national belonging based on people's relationships with the national territory—offers a particularly interesting case study through which to think about relationships between national political cultures and nation-state territories. The country first entered into what has become a prolonged period of crisis known as *la crise ivoirienne* in 1999. La crise, which I describe in the following section, quickly came to be seen as a humanitarian crisis negotiated under significant pressure from representatives of "the international community." As a result, political struggles over the nation have been increasingly fought through its representation to "outsiders" via news coverage. Activists exchanging news reports about la crise between Côte d'Ivoire, neighboring West African countries, North America, and Europe have emerged as an influential element of national politics.

In this article, I focus specifically on the circulation of print and electronic newspapers among political networks in several continents to illustrate a deeply nationalistic discourse that is territorialized within a number of borders. The place-based characteristics of this form of political discourse are key to its success. Participants mobilize resources and people in certain locations while dodging the limitations of others. Members of oppositional parties often locate themselves outside of the boundaries of Côte d'Ivoire to take advantage of the Ivorian state's inability to suppress them. Government officials travel to court powerful foreign leaders and lobby for the support of international organizations. All of the major Ivorian political parties have established bases in wealthy Western countries to access cheaper and more accessible communication technologies, reliable infrastructures and higher wages. The resources and territories of a number of countries thus become inextricably incorporated into the terrain of the Ivorian nation's politics.

Political culture is territorialized within pockets of political activity inside the borders of Côte d'Ivoire as well. Since the inception of the Ivorian colony, certain spaces within the territory have been politically and economically valued at the expense of others. Within la crise, multifocal politics have served as a device to exclude certain places (and the people within them) from the right to participate in national discourse. Areas predominantly inhabited by people deemed "foreigners" or "questionable nationals" have become sites in which Ivorian political discourse is *not* thought to be meaningfully produced. The notion of a multifocal terrain for national politics can allow us to see the geography of this influential form of public culture as a smattering of polka dots

rather than one large balloon or ink blot that spans all areas evenly. The political scape can be traced through a number of anatomically distinct nodes within and beyond the nation–state territory that together constitute the nation's political geography. Activists and government officials travel to, live in, and shape spaces within a number of nation-state territories in order to be in the middle of Ivorian politics.

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Multifocality departs from concepts of "multi–sitedness" in that it values each node as equally central (though not necessarily equal in size or amount of activity). The multi–sitedness of many postcolonial political cultures has intensified to a point of becoming multifocal. National public culture lacks a clear, single source of origin (i.e. is not seen to emanate primarily from the nation–state territory). Rather, it is understood to originate within locations outside of the nation–state territory just as much as from inside. It is centered within foci scattered across several nation–states with the "home" territory no longer privileged above all others. Significantly, these foci change over time as situations, resources, needs and participants change and move, so that the relationship of the nation's politics to territory constantly shifts. As Ivorians territorialize national political culture through their activity, it emerges within different foci at different moments. My analysis underscores the need for more theoretical attention to the specific, and often uneven ways in which the political structures of many postcolonies are being re-territorialized through transnational forms of public culture. A framework of multifocality allows us to consider the significance of space and the making of "place" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997) within political processes.

In the following sections, I trace media circulation and political party organizing within and across several continents to illustrate how Ivorian national politics is impossible to localize within one central territory or "place." Rather, it simultaneously arises within a number of non–connected foci. First, I offer a brief history of the nation, la crise, and the role of Ivorians abroad. Second, I examine the dramatic increase of media circulation among Ivorians as a form of national public culture that strategically crosses borders. Third, I illustrate through the political activities of Ivorians abroad how national public culture has become multifocal. And finally, I discuss the negotiation of certain sites within Côte d'Ivoire as significant political foci while other areas are excluded.

The Ivorian nation in crisis

Revolving around struggles for the presidency among longtime political players in the midst of economic crisis and a transition to a democratic system, la crise has become a crisis of national identity with deep roots in the country's colonial and postcolonial political economy (Dozon 2000; McGovern 2011; Zolberg 1969:4). Controversies over who can claim citizenship, own land, vote, and run for elected office, can be traced back to the colony's early days (Banégas and Marshall-Fratani 2007) while emerging, through the recent conflict, in newly articulated forms (Collett 2006; Newell 2012).

First established as a French colony in 1893, the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire became an independent nation in 1960. Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the colony's elected representative to the French Constituent Assembly since 1945, ruled the newly sovereign nation as president for more than thirty years under the one-party system of his *Parti Democratique de Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI). The nation grew to be the world's largest cocoa supplier, the fifth largest supplier of coffee, and a key port for trade between West Africa and Europe. It also became the primary destination in West Africa for immigrants from neighboring countries seeking employment. Things began to change in the late 1980s and 1990s with the collapse of global cocoa and coffee prices, the devaluation of the *Communauté Financière Africaine* (CFA) franc, and implementation of IMF structural adjustment programs. Houphouët–Boigny legalized a multi–party democratic system (which he continued to forcefully dominate) in 1990 in response to domestic and international pressure.

Houphouët–Boigny's death in 1993 and the country's first democratic elections in 1995 prompted what has evolved into almost two decades of struggle between four major political figures. The first, Henri Konan Bédié, was Houphouët–Boigny's handpicked successor who assumed the presidency in 1993, and again claimed the post in 1995 after disqualifying his main opponents from running in the elections. Bédié's presidency was unpopular. He favored certain ethnic groups and excluded others from his administration, mismanaged the national economy, and alienated foreign investors. His ousting from power by his own army in 1999 was widely celebrated. But Guéï, as the newly installed junta, quickly fell from favor as he stalled elections and then tried to claim the presidency despite his poor performance at the polls in the 2000 election. Upon Guéï's ousting in 2000, Laurent Gbagbo, a longtime critic of the PDCI administration and co–founder of the *Front Populaire Ivoirien* (FPI) party, was declared president after it was determined that he had the most votes of the few candidates Guéï had allowed to run. Gbagbo's first years in office were marked by civil strife as the supporters of Alassane Ouattara, who had been disqualified from running in 2000, refused to accept Gbagbo as the democratically elected president. Ouattara, the man whom many Ivorians consider to be at the epicenter of la crise, is a U.S. trained economist who spent 14 years in high–ranking positions at the IMF and three years in the early 1990s as the first Prime Minister of Côte d'Ivoire (brought in by Houphouët–Boigny to "fix" the country's economic troubles). Ouattara has striven for the Ivorian presidency since 1993. After trying to claim the post upon Houphouët–Boigny's death, he founded the RDR and declared his candidacy for the 1995 and 2000 presidential elections. Both times his opponents blocked him from running by questioning his national citizenship.

Like many inhabitants of Côte d'Ivoire, Ouattara traces his ancestral lines across the nation's contemporary borders to a neighboring West African country and maintains dual citizenship and family ties in both. Ouattara's political opponents have focused on these ties to challenge his eligibility for president. In the months leading up to the 1995 election,

Bédié introduced a "cultural campaign" he called *Ivoirité* (Ivorianess) that equated Ivorian citizenship with pre–colonial autochthony. The descendents of the 60 ethnic groups believed to be indigenous to the territory were deemed "Ivorians of stock" while the descendents of Africans who, like Ouattara's father, had migrated to the territory since the creation of the colony were defined as "Circumstantial Ivorians" or "foreigners."

Bédié's notion of Ivoirité exploited existing tensions over belonging and rights to land inscribed in the history of the country's agrarian colonization that differentiated "autochones" (those seen to be originating 'from the soil') in the rural zones hosting coffee and cocoa plantations from "allocthones" (those originating from 'outside') brought in by colonists from neighboring colonies as laborers (Chauveau 2000; Marshall-Fratani 2006). While Houphouët-Boigny had instituted an "open door" policy for migrant laborers in the country that ostensibly granted them rights to vote and become citizens, members of his PDCI party held differing viewpoints on the requirements necessary to be recognized as "Côteivoirien" with rights to land (McGovern 2011:25). Meanwhile, Houphouët-Boigny's organization of the political economy of plantation agriculture created inequalities in the Ivorian southwest that remained, until the 1990s, limited to economic competition and struggles over land rights between local populations and migrants (Dembélé 2003; McGovern 2011:26). Bédié's Ivoirité campaign changed the landscape of these longstanding struggles by systemizing and sensationalizing a radical, political and cultural opposition between "Ivorians" and "foreigners" (Dembélé 2002). The declaration of Ouattara as a foreigner brought into question the citizenship of others whose ancestral lines branched across national borders. Bédié provoked widespread civil strife by targeting "foreigners" (estimated by his government to account for 40 percent of the population) as the cause of the country's economic troubles and encouraging unemployed Ivorians to "return to their land" to reclaim it from the foreigners cultivating it. He also changed the electoral code to stipulate that only "proven" Ivorian citizens could vote in the 2000 election.

Contestations over citizenship increasingly appeared to fall along regional, ethnic, and religious divides that had not previously been invoked

Things began to rapidly accelerate after Bédié's ousting. Guéï built on his predecessor's Ivoirité campaign by passing a Constitutional referendum that restricted presidential candidacy to those who could prove both their father and mother's Ivorian citizenship. Guéï, and later Gbagbo, used the referendum to disqualify Ouattara on the basis of his "doubtful nationality." Contestations over citizenship increasingly appeared to fall along regional, ethnic, and religious divides that had not previously been invoked (Collett 2006). Foreign press reports began to describe the crisis in terms of "Southern Christian Ivorians of Akan and Baoule ethnic groups" against "Northern Dioula Muslims" believed to support Ouattara.[2] In 2002, self–identified "rebels" with no official relationship to the RDR (first known as the *Mouvement Patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire*, or MPCI, and more recently as part of the *Forces Nouvelles des Côte d'Ivoire* or FNCI) gained control over the northern half of the

country. They demanded recognition of all of the country's inhabitants as Ivorian. Fighting between the government and MPCI intensified into a civil war with the country split along a North / South divide.

Although Gbagbo agreed to peace accords in 2003 and 2005 that called for a power–sharing government between the FPI, FNCI, RDR, and PDCI, civil unrest continued and the new government never emerged. Gbagbo repeatedly postponed the presidential elections scheduled for 2005 until 2011, citing lack of disarmament on both sides and disagreement over the registration of "eligible" citizens to vote. The country continued to fluctuate within a complex pattern of "neither peace nor war" in which the threat of violence was always present (McGovern 2011:171). The FNCI began to ally with the RDR as Gbagbo's supporters were accused of widespread human rights violations.

When elections took place in October and November 2010, Ouattara ran for the first time, allowed by Gbagbo in response to pressure from the UN. Gbagbo's refusal to recognize Ouattara as the winner (after discarding vote counts from areas he said included votes of fraudulent citizens) sparked a dramatic standoff that lasted five months and involved the deaths of over 3,000 people and displacement of an estimated 800,000 people.[3] The final "Battle for Abidjan" between Gbagbo and Ouattara supporters culminated in French and UN military involvement, Gbagbo's arrest, and Ouattara's installment as the new president.

The installment of a new president who lived in the U.S. for the better part of 35 years highlights the influential role of Ivorians abroad within the past, present, and future of the Ivorian nation. Elite Ivorians educated in Europe (and more recently North America) have occupied top governmental posts since the colonial period while maintaining residences and political networks abroad. Today the Ivorian population outside of Côte d'Ivoire is much larger and more heterogeneous than in the past, with an increasing number of non–elites, refugees, and asylum seekers. It has recently been estimated that 53,000 Ivorians live in Europe with the highest concentrations in France, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, Spain, and the United Kingdom (World Bank 2007:86). The U.S. Embassy in Côte d'Ivoire estimates that 25,000 Ivorians live in the U.S., with the majority living in New York, D.C., Atlanta, New Jersey, and Philadelphia.[4] Smaller communities can be found in Burkina Faso, Canada, Senegal, and South Africa.

Large numbers of Ivorians began to migrate to the U.S. in the 1990s as the economy of Côte d'Ivoire faltered and many became disenchanted with France. While an earlier wave of Ivorians in the U.S. consisted mostly of elites on student visas from the 1960s–1980s, it was the second wave of non–elites arriving on temporary visas in the 1990s and 2000s that created today's influential community. Many Ivorians in the U.S. today are elite and highly educated, but the new majority tends to be first–generation immigrants in search of jobs. Many have overstayed their visa limits and live as non–residents, although a growing number are obtaining U.S. citizenship. The Ivorian population in the U.S. is

strikingly more male than female, and younger rather than older, with the median age being between 22-35 years old. Many Ivorians of both higher and lower classes see their sojourn as temporary and plan to one day return to Côte d'Ivoire "to retire" with an elevated social and economic status (Newell 2005). Perhaps as a result of these plans, they often have limited English fluency and socialize predominantly in Francophone African circles. At the same time, they are entrenched in the economies and infrastructures of their host areas in both high paying, powerful jobs and informal, often undocumented work.

Media circulation between diaspora and homeland as national public culture

It is 2001, a year and a half after Gbagbo and his FPI party came into power, and 23 young students and professionals have gathered in a home in D.C. for a meeting of *Côte d'Ivoire Coalition* (CIC). Funded by the FPI party, the association dedicates itself in its bylaws to "countering the negative image of Côte d'Ivoire and its government in the Western press." Members give interviews on la crise to American news publications, run letter–writing campaigns to major newspapers in the U.S. and Europe, and intercept "false news reports" online. It is a typical CIC meeting. Several members are huddled around a computer where Olivier, a manager at a satellite communications firm in D.C., navigates between websites featuring news, video, and commentaries on Côte d'Ivoire.[5] Olivier produces a flash drive from his pocket to record a video of a rally. He clicks over to Abidjan.net, a website created by Ivorian M.B.A. students in San Diego which has become the most highly–trafficked site for Ivorian news, culture, and politics. A quick search of the political forums reveals a post claiming that the Ivorian prime minister had been prevented from entering an IMF building in D.C. by protesters throwing eggs at him. Olivier reads the article aloud and fires off his own response, typing "menteurs, liars, I was there and le PM n'etaient pas empeché" [Liars, I was there and the Prime Minister wasn't prevented from entering]. Olivier and his wife recently had appeared in a story printed in Côte d'Ivoire by the FPI newspaper Notre Voie after they protested a speech by Ouattara at The Freedom Forum, an organization in Arlington, Virginia promoting free speech. A photograph showed them hoisting over their heads documents they claimed would prove Ouattara was a national of Burkina Faso.

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Franck, a journalist for Notre Voie stationed in the U.S., is in town to cover a visit by the First Lady of Côte d'Ivoire. At the CIC meeting, he worries that Gbagbo doesn't realize "the importance of aggressive public relations in the international arena." The RDR party, he says, has capitalized on Ouattara's knowledge of "how things work" in the U.S. to gain favorable coverage in the Western press. Ouattara had recently answered questions about la crise during a formal chat session on CNN.com, and one of his supporters had published an opinion piece in

Le Monde. "Il faut etre addicte" (it is necessary to be an addict), Franck says, to *les nouvelles* (the news) in order to stay ahead in politics.

In this section, I examine the dramatic increase of transnational media circulation among Ivorians during the crisis period as a deeply nationalistic form of public culture that strategically crosses nation-state borders. Networks of media producers, circulators, regulators, and consumers located in a number of state territories have assumed urgency as a key site for national politics in a new era of instability, and as a battleground on which the nation and national community is negotiated through its representation. Ivorians living outside of Côte d'Ivoire like to talk about the stark contrast between today's vibrant news circulation and "the way it was before" the crisis began. La crise has become a moment for the mobilization of new media and circulation practices to (1) take advantage of the greatly increased coverage of Côte d'Ivoire in non–Ivorian press; (2) fill the spaces left by the breakdown of mass news communication in the country; and (3) "play politics" within the politically charged arena of Ivorian news circulation. European and North American news coverage of the country has more than quadrupled while blackouts of the state–dominated radio, television, printing press, and telephone landlines have become common. Satellite communication technologies remain operative during blackouts due to their privatization. This has resulted in a major shift in political culture. Many Ivorians inside the country now find that they can best access news through cell phone calls to friends and family living abroad with access to foreign news reports. Ivorians outside the country routinely pull up Internet news sites to tell their contacts in Côte d'Ivoire what is happening around them.

The Internet has become a celebrated channel through which *Internautes* (net surfers) participate in what they call "the cyberpolitics of Côte d'Ivoire." Hundreds of new websites, chat rooms, and bulletin boards have emerged while those pre-existing la crise received dramatic overhauls with new "headlines" sections, political forums, and links to Ivorian and foreign news sites. Activists mixing online and offline news circulation from locations inside and outside of Côte d'Ivoire hope to incite sympathetic action from both powerful non–Ivorians and fellow Ivorians. While CIC activists lobbied for the ruling party's interests during Gbagbo's term, those opposing his government struggled to capture the attention of Western human rights organizations and government leaders with the goal of having Gbagbo sanctioned, convicted in a human rights tribunal, or forcefully removed. Oppositional activists acted as informants for foreign reporters; authored opinion pieces drawing on concepts of democracy and human rights for major publications such as Le Monde and The New York Times; translated oppositional websites into English; and disseminated secretly filmed videos of government persecution. Gbagbo's government responded by sending high–ranking officials on international media tours to give Western correspondents special access interviews. Even now, as the ruling and oppositional party positions have reversed with the swearing in of the new Ouattara administration, activists on opposing sides continue to

wage battles through news circulation. As illustrated by the pivotal role of French and UN military force in Gbagbo's removal from power, activists are not at all unrealistic in strategizing to seize political power over the postcolony through engagement with powerful foreign audiences who can incapacitate or even dismantle a ruling government.

Individual activists also go to great lengths to shape the news consumed by their fellow Ivorians. Some write articles and call in "scoops" for their parties' news publications. Others circulate different newspaper accounts of the same event in order to "get the whole story." Those traveling between urban and rural areas of Côte d'Ivoire, neighboring countries, Europe, and North America facilitate the hand to hand transfer of whole newspapers, letters relaying news, news clippings, recordings of television broadcasts, amateur videos, and photographs. Printouts of online news stories hang in mosques and churches. Gbagbo's government routinely arrested Ivorians found to be circulating media "evidence" of government transgressions and fired Embassy employees abroad accused of circulating anti–government news media. It remains to be seen how Ouattara will deal with the oppositional media activism that has begun to emerge around him. Already, there have been reports of pro-Gbagbo newspapers and journalists being suppressed. A popular refrain I heard during the first several years of crisis, "now anyone can be a journalist," evokes the ways in which activists' participation in news circulation has served as a form of journalism and politics in its own right. Media circulators, regulators, and consumers powerfully shape the Ivorian nation through a politics of representation that crosses multiple nation-state borders.

National Political Culture as Multifocal

It is 2008, nine years into la crise. As she drives to her job as a sales clerk at a Nordstrom in D.C., Karidja Conde describes her experience as an "active militant" of the RDR. Since arriving in 1995 to seek a degree in computer programming, Karidja has been unable to find a job related to her degree and instead has held side jobs while dedicating her skills to the RDR. As *Commissaire à la Communication* for the RDR in D.C., Karidja maintains the heavily visited D.C.–based RDR website (www.rdrci.org), updating it several times a day. She also organizes rallies for RDR militants in both the U.S. (in front of such places as the Embassy of Côte d'Ivoire, the World Bank, and the White House) and in Côte d'Ivoire. The RDR maintains an extensive network of more than 60 headquarters in 25 countries throughout North America, Europe, and Africa.[6] The *Secretaire National du RDR* oversees all *militants à l'étranger* (militants abroad) by traveling between RDR *Délégués Extérieurs* (delegations outside) while the RDR newspaper *Le Patriote* reports on their activities. Délégués Extérieurs in wealthy areas are paired into *jumellages*, or "twin" partnerships, with Délégués in Côte d'Ivoire. The D.C. Délégué, for example, supports the Délégué in the impoverished town of Kong with fundraisers and computer drives.

Karidja has found herself more central to Ivorian politics during Gbagbo's term through her activity outside of Côte d'Ivoire than she might be if she lived within its borders. Her access to communication technology that is exponentially cheaper and faster in the U.S. has been crucial to the RDR's success. The contacts Karidja and her colleagues have established with press agencies and government officials in North America provide publicity opportunities for Ouattara that remain out of reach for Gbagbo. Karidja has also found it easier to gain an audience with officials in Gbagbo's administration during their visits to the U.S. Using online forums and personal networks to locate traveling leaders, and taking advantage of the lack of force available to them to suppress protesters abroad, Karidja has made her opinions known in person to Gbagbo, his wife, prime minister, and minister of finance by appearing at their meetings in D.C.

In this section, I look at pockets of political activity outside of the boundaries of Côte d'Ivoire to illustrate how Ivorian political culture is centered within key foci on several continents. The RDR is not unique in its multifocality outside of Côte d'Ivoire. The FPI was also founded outside of Côte d'Ivoire (in France) and, along with the PDCI and FNCI, operates through extensive networks of headquarters in several continents.[7] The parties maintain their websites in a combination of locations in the U.S., Côte d'Ivoire, and Europe. During the 2002-2003 civil war, the MPCI site (now defunct) was maintained in France and Wisconsin. Today the FNCI maintains its site (www.fninfo.ci/) in Amsterdam and New York City. The FPI manages its party site (www.liberte.fpi.ci/) in Abidjan, its newspaper site (www.notrevoie.com) in New York and Paris, and its Facebook page in France. The PDCI operates its party site (www.pdcirda.org) in France and its Facebook page in France and Abidjan. The parties also submit also submit daily news stories to San Diego based Abidjan.net and station journalists in key nodes outside of the country at a cost of up to eight times the salary of journalists in Côte d'Ivoire.

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The D.C. area serves as one of a number of foci for political affairs. It hosts RDR, FPI, and FNCI headquarters and is widely recognized as Ouattara's political hometown. D.C. is home to over 30 Ivorian regional, ethnic, religious and national associations. Association membership numbers have increased almost tenfold since the crisis began, with Ivorians of varying socioeconomic backgrounds paying annual fees of $35 to $85. Associations play key roles within national politics, both as arenas for news exchange and as political tools. Members host visiting leaders and post videos of meetings on U.S. based sites such as AbidjanTV.net and IvoirTV.net for Ivorians in other locations to see.

The *Union Fraternelle des Ivoiriens* (UFI), formed in the 1990s to support new Ivorian arrivals to D.C., has emerged as a key site through which political struggles are actualized. As the largest officially "apolitical" association of Ivorians in D.C., it is granted special authority as representative of the D.C. community by Ivorian diplomats, U.S. government officials, and American NGOs. The UFI board has access to the Ivorian president and high level visiting government officials and acts as

the official filter for information between the government, major political parties, and Ivorian associations in D.C. As a result, leadership positions in UFI are coveted and its bi-annual elections have become sensational events covered by the domestic press in Côte d'Ivoire.

Activists incorporate a number of institutions, resources, and spaces in the D.C. area into Ivorian political culture through their actions. Both government and oppositional officials make personal visits to U.S. government agencies, the IMF, Intelsat (a satellite communications firm geared toward the "developing" world), Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and universities in the area. They claim as sites for Ivorian politicking the office buildings that house party headquarters, the rented state park fieldhouses that host party and association meetings; churches and collectively rented apartments converted into "Ivorian" mosques; private homes hosting communal satellite television news viewing; hotel ballrooms used by traveling government officials for meetings with Ivorians abroad; the Embassy of Côte d'Ivoire; the front steps of the White House and French Embassy which serve as sites for protests; and even the cables and telephone lines used to circulate information. Activists, themselves, are also deeply integrated into the D.C. political economy as employees (often specializing in Ivorian and West Africa affairs) of the IMF, UN, U.S. State Department, Voice of America, USAID, World Bank, Intelsat, and area universities. Others fund their activities through their entrenchment in the service sector of D.C. in a variety of jobs (grocery store clerk, nanny, parking lot attendant) that might otherwise seem to have little to do with the political affairs of a far-away African nation. In so doing, they help to shape portions of the D.C. area's political economy, much like parts of New York have been seen to be "Dominicanized" (Duany 2002:14) or made "Mexican" (Smith 2005) by diasporic inhabitants.

During his term, Gbagbo institutionalized the role of people, economies, activities, and spaces outside of the state territory within Ivorian politics by creating new offices and positions in his administration. He appointed ministers of "American Politics," the "French–speaking World," and "International Institutions;" dedicated a special office in Abidjan to "Ivorians Abroad;" and based Special Advisors throughout Europe and North America whose job was to "inspire" nationally focused economic and political activity among Ivorians abroad. As he prepared for the 2010 presidential elections, Gbagbo devoted special attention to Ivorian political culture originating outside of the state territory. He hosted in the presidential palace delegations of FPI "*compatriots a l'étranger*" (compatriots abroad) and publicly thanked them for carrying out his campaign abroad. At a 2010 colloquium in Geneva, Gbagbo's Deputy National Campaign Director Responsible for Ivorians Abroad declared to his "Brothers and Sisters Abroad" that

> "Geneva will be the starting point of the victory of Gbagbo . . . To you all, campaign managers for our candidate abroad in Africa, Europe and America, to your respective offices, directors of local campaigns in

> different countries and the presidents of parties, associations and movements to support the actions of President Laurent Gbagbo abroad, thank you for your determination to make our country up wherever you are . . . Remember that the campaign outside is as important as that which takes place in Côte d'Ivoire."

Remember that the campaign outside is as important as that which takes place in Côte d'Ivoire

The Deputy's words reflected an understanding of the nation's political culture as emanating from locations outside of the nation–state territory just as much as from inside. Citizens shape and territorialize national politics through forms of public culture like crisis news exchange and multifocal politicking. As Karidja explained to me, politically active Ivorians outside of Côte d'Ivoire consider themselves to be living smack in the middle of Ivorian politics through their activism in a number of state territories.

Multifocality within the Ivorian territory

It is 2010, and Oumar Ouattara, a law student in Washington, D.C., is furious with the impact the political situation has had on his family in both Abidjan and their village in the North. Oumar's older brother, Alajui makes his living driving a freight truck between Abidjan and various regions in the national territory. Alajui's wife had just travelled to the family's village for the birth of their child, and Oumar had sent gifts and $2,000 in cash by way of a friend traveling to Côte d'Ivoire. The plan was for Alajui to connect with Oumar's friend in Abidjan to pick up and then transport the goods to their village along the way to deliver desks to a school nearby. However, Alajui has just sent back word through a friend's email account that police confiscated all of the gifts at a checkpoint along his route. Thankfully, they had not found the cash hidden in Alajui's undershirt. The loss of the gifts is not a great surprise to Oumar, but more of an annoyance. Whenever he speaks with his brother by phone, he hears accounts of Alajui's harassment by police during his travels. They usually question Alajui's Ivorian identity papers, claiming they are fake. Alajui's last name, Ouattara, a family name common for Northern Dioula (and also, of course, the last name of Gbagbo's infamous political opponent in the upcoming 2010 election), is the butt of jokes. When traveling south from trips to the Northern region, Alajui is often told by police to "go back home" and refused passage until he pays substantial bribes. Oumar explains to me that he had never been particularly interested in Ivorian politics until he began to see their effect on his friends and family. He is now an active member of the FNCI in D.C.

This section examines the valuing of certain sites in Côte d'Ivoire as key political foci at the expense, and often forceful exclusion, of other areas (and the people within them). I illustrate how political culture is territorialized within pockets inside the nation-state's borders in concert with multifocal politicking outside. The political economy of Côte d'Ivoire has been multifocal in its relationship to the nation-state territory since the inception of the nation. The uneven way in which Houphouët-

Boigny structured the nation's infrastructure, economy, and governance resulted in the social, political, and economic inequalities between different regions that are now at the heart of la crise. The Northern region is strikingly poor and disenfranchised in comparison with the South. The cities of Abidjan, Yamoussoukro, and Boaké, and the cash crop plantations of the west have long been valued as central to the national political economy while areas in the North and Northwest were overlooked.

Struggles over land, resources, and political power that accompanied the transition to a democratic multiple party system in the midst of economic recession in the late 1990s led to contemporary contestations over who constitutes "the people" of Côte d'Ivoire (Dozon 2000) possessing "the right to participate in the struggle for resources" and, thus, in the politics of the nation (Cutolo 2010:531). Villages have emerged as foci of la crise in conflicting ways. Struggles over land have specifically focused on rights to land in rural areas in which cash crops are grown. Villages, as urban Ivorians' homelands and sources of autochonous citizenship (Chauveau 2000:94) in which large concentrations of "non-Ivorian" migrant farmers now live, have been central to political discourse (Kouamé 2009:127). As a result, rural areas have seen the most brutal violent conflict between "autochthones" and "allochtones" (Chauveau and Bobo 2003). Yet while villagers live, and sometimes fight, within key foci of the struggle, they are often excluded from other forms of political participation. Ivorian newspapers and television broadcasts, which reach villages in greatly diminished (and often delayed) capacities, mock villagers' "backwardness" and lack of understanding of both politics and satellite communication technologies. Villagers are acknowledged as being active within the political arena in certain ways, while simultaneously excluded from other, more elite forms of discourse.

It is significant to the framework of multifocality that struggles over belonging to the national political community have focused on people's relationship to place. Notions of citizenship as based on autochony lend themselves well to the imagining of a multifocal political landscape. Just as Ivorians in locations outside of the nation-state territory focus their patriotic energy on their homeland, so to are those deemed immigrants and foreigners within the Ivorian territory expected to participate *not* in Ivorian politics, but in the politics of their nations of origin. The multifocality of political participation generates a sense that the national political community, too, is multifocal. While most Ivorians outside of Côte d'Ivoire are familiar with the term *diaspora*, they tend to refer to themselves, and are referred to by those within the country, as either Ivoiriens à l'étranger or, more frequently, members of the encompassing *communauté ivoirienne* (Ivorian community), a term which is noteworthy in that it privileges no one territory as the nation from which citizens around the world are dispersed.

Just as national political culture is imagined by many Ivorians to be multifocal, it can be seen to simultaneously and often forcefully exclude large parts of the state territory and its inhabitants

Just as national political culture is imagined by many Ivorians to be multifocal in the way it incorporates locations and populations in wealthier areas of the world, it can be seen to simultaneously and often forcefully exclude large parts of the state territory and its inhabitants. For

many Ivorians viewing citizenship through the lens of Ivoirité, it is less problematic to imagine their national community as territorialized in ways that include members in nodes around the world than to picture it as inclusive of those deemed to be "non-Ivorians" living within the territory. Places inside of the country's borders predominantly inhabited by people deemed "foreigners" are seen as sites in which *Ivorian* political discourse is not meaningfully or legitimately produced. In this way, multifocal politicking serves as a way in which political citizenship is powerfully negotiated through the exclusion of certain people and places from the right to participate.

The making of "the North" as a place seen by those who subscribe to notions of Ivoirité as external to legitimate Ivorian discourse, has gone hand in hand with contestations over the national belonging of those living in, or with ethnic or religious ties to, the North. As the crisis has escalated, the Northern region increasingly has been imagined as home to the immigrant, Muslim, and Dioula populations in Côte d'Ivoire and the stronghold of rebel and oppositional political activism. Gbagbo's supporters consider the imagined geography of "the North" as present within the nation-state territory but *not*, in any recognizable sense, within the Ivorian political arena they engage. While Gbagbo's government could not ignore places like the Northwestern town of Odienné, which emerged as a key site of both oppositional activity and military suppression (Hellweg 2011:24), his supporters can refuse to acknowledge the political activities of those within the region as truly "Ivorian."

Members of the RDR and rebel coalition parties have expressed outrage at their opponents' attempts to redefine the national community as "*tous sauf Nordistes*" (everyone except for the Northerners). Rumors of Northern secession circulated in the early 2000s and the mayor of Kong briefly raised the flag of neighboring Burkina Faso over his town before rebels seized control of the Northern half of the country and kept it outside the state's reach from 2002-2007. The "zone of confidence," a territorial line patrolled by UN troops that divides the Northern and Southern regions, continues to serve as a site of violent conflict, policing, and political negotiation.

Of course, many of those who consider themselves, or are considered by others, to be "Northerners" live and travel outside of the Northern region so that the North is, in many ways, multifocal. Since the colonial period, large numbers of Ivorians have migrated from the North to more prosperous regions of the country to take advantage of the economic resources, jobs, infrastructure, and education opportunities. A 2001 census conducted by the University of Abidjan found nearly two-thirds of what it called the "Northerners of Côte d'Ivoire" living in regions other than the North (Institut National de la Statistique 10). Areas within villages and towns in which significant numbers of "Northerners" are concentrated have long been referred to as *Dioualabougou*s. These areas have been alternately ignored and targeted within the political conflict. Gbagbo's military regularly raided Dioualabougous in Abidjan thought to host Northerners, immigrants, and oppositional activists.

Throughout the conflict, people with seemingly foreign or Northern family names, dress styles, or appearances living outside of the North have experienced frequent harassment by police forces and their own neighbors who tell them to go "home."

During his term, Gbagbo went to great lengths to enforce long-held perceptions of certain people as historically tied to place within the national territory, while others were free of such territorial moorings. He initiated the systematic destruction, at checkpoints on roads between cities and villages, of the national identity papers of hundreds of thousands of Ivorians suspected of being foreigners These checkpoints served as significant political foci in which people were forcefully "placed" within disenfranchised and excluded areas of the national territory through both refusal to pass and the destruction of documents that would allow them to vote or travel.

The work of multifocal politicking as a device for exclusion within the country has inspired much of the multifocal politics abroad in which Northerners like Oumar Ouattara and others accused of "doubtful" nationality engage. Within North American and European contexts, their claim to both Ivorian citizenship and land rights in Côte d'Ivoire are more readily acknowledged by influential people and organizations operating with notions of national citizenship as based on birth rather than ancestral origin.

The work of multifocal politicking as a device for exclusion within the country has inspired much of the multifocal politics abroad

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that Ivorian political culture during la crise has become multifocal in the way that it incorporates certain people and places while excluding others. The multifocal framework I employ aims to push beyond the Ivorian case study to inspire dialogue about new spatializations of national political culture and citizenship. La crise marks an important moment in the history of Côte d'Ivoire: what has been called "the birth of a national political body" (Cutolo 2010:547) as part of an "overdue drama of decolonization" (McGovern 2011:27) referred to by Gbagbo's supporters as the nation's "second independence" (Banégas and Marshall-Fratani 2007). The key issues at stake within the Ivorian Crisis—national belonging, border control, immigration, and the threat of foreign so-called "terrorists" evoke similar tensions around the world (Geschiere 2009).

We are witnessing, in many corners of the world, a new period of postcolonial nation building (Piot 2010; Sassen 2006) in which the national political structures of many postcolonies are being dramatically reconfigured within the context of neoliberal global capitalism, mass migration, and debates over national citizenship and borders. Migration and transnational forms of public culture can serve as strategic ways for people disadvantaged by government policies to gain agency within their societies of origin (de Bruijn 2007) while state actors develop new ways to both contain and exploit transnational political fields and actors (Coutin 2007; Fitzgerald 2008). Rather than becoming "deterritorial-

ized" in a way that makes place and territory appear less significant than social space, postcolonial nations' political cultures and communities are being re–territorialized within "old" nation–state boundaries in new ways.

The framework of multifocality prompts us to think about the significance of both place and "place-making" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997) within political struggle. Further, it repositions our approach to diasporic and transnational populations as not necessarily displaced as they have so often been theorized, but as *placed* in significant ways. The ways in which Ivorians within and outside of the country perceive themselves, and are perceived by others, as significantly "placed" within the national political arena help to reveal which spaces in a number of territories are valued as central and which are not. The areas often theorized as "host" and "homelands" for migrant populations emerge not as separate and unrelated locales, but rather as hosts to varying numbers of lateral, decentralized nodes that are inextricably intertwined for those who inhabit them. The interplay between negotiations of the nation in nodes inside and outside of the nation-state's borders opens up questions about the relationship of national culture with space and place.

A lens of multifocality also provides a way to account for discontinuity and temporality in the way that politics and participants relate to, and negotiate, place. Social and spatial divisions are, of course, integral to politics. Political processes hop, skip, and jump within and across a variety of places in much the same way that economic networks in the neoliberal world order have been observed to connect politically and economically valued spaces around the world while excluding spaces in between (Ferguson 2006).

As political discourse emerges within multiple foci at different moments in time, the temporality of its territorialization becomes clear. While many spaces within the greater D.C. area currently serve as foci, their significance may shift over time. A number of foci have already emerged and faded away during the crisis period. The city of Brussels, for example, sprang up as a key node between 2001-2003 when an Ivorian human rights group filed suit against Gbagbo in a tribunal of "universal jurisdiction." Ivorian attorneys, witnesses, and victims congregated in Brussels in anticipation of a trial while events surrounding the lawsuit dominated the Ivorian press. When Belgium closed the tribunal and dismissed the case in 2003, most of the participants left Brussels and the site became virtually irrelevant to Ivorian politics. This is just one example of the ways in which the Ivorian political terrain constantly shifts, as the people, resources, circumstances, and laws in different nodes shift. Only time will tell if the striking multifocality of Ivorian politics is contingent upon the crisis situation. At the moment, it seems almost integral to both the object of political discussion and conditions under which politicking is produced. Perhaps it will become less multifocal in future years of peace as Ivorians find themselves drawn to other, less nationally focused pursuits. Or perhaps the relationship between the new Ouattara administration and the far–flung community that brought it

This is just one example of the ways in which the Ivorian political terrain constantly shifts, as the people, resources, circumstances, and laws in different nodes shift

into power will strengthen further. The coming of age of a second generation of non–elites abroad (today still school age and less focused on Côte d'Ivoire than their parents) will likely have a significant impact on the political terrain. Whatever happens, it is safe to say the political geography of Côte d'Ivoire will continue to undulate in bumpy and uneven ways.

Notes

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[1]Over 35,000 Ivorians abroad in over 24 countries were registered to vote in 2010 elections in Côte d'Ivoire.

[2]The term Dioula has come to be used by many Ivorians as an umbrella term for Ivorians believed to be from the North (most often ethnic Malinké or Senoufo) who speak some version of the Dioula language.

[3]Ouattara was recognized by the U.N. election observers and most of the international community as having won 54 percent of the vote compared to Gbagbo's 46 percent.

[4]Personal communication with author, December 19, 2010.

[5]In this article, I use pseudonyms for my interlocutors who are not public figures.

[6]RDR headquarters can be found in Canada, France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Italy, Denmark, Spain, Russia, Switzerland, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, and Senegal. In the U.S., the RDR locates its offices in Chicago, New Jersey, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Washington, D.C.

[7]Within the U.S., the FPI is based in New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, D.C., Delaware, San Diego, and Atlanta; the FNCI operates out of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, New York, and D.C.; and the PDCI is active within New York and San Diego.

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