

Pushing a Political Agenda: Harassment of French and African Journalists in Côte d’Ivoire’s 2010–2011 National Election Crisis

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Côte d’Ivoire’s national election in 2010 descended into civil war into 2011 when incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo refused to concede the presidency to the internationally recognized winner Alassane Ouattara. The three political players in this election—the parties of Ouattara, Gbagbo, and France—had deep economic incentives in the outcome of Côte d’Ivoire’s election. Drawing from interviews conducted in 2016 and 2017 in Côte d’Ivoire with 24 journalists, findings show that journalists endured many acts of harassment from political parties trying to manipulate the news coverage of this election. I argue that the mechanisms observed in Côte d’Ivoire’s electoral crisis reflect how conditions of war activate informal power alliances within the political-economic dynamics of a Global South nation in the postcolonial era. These alliances push on media in ways they would not normally during peacetime. Côte d’Ivoire is a former colony of France. It is a part of “*Françafrique*,” a region of 12 French-speaking African countries where France still retains considerable economic impact and has intervened militarily dozens of times since the colonies were emancipated in the early 1960s.

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In sub-Saharan Africa, political turmoil can jump the fence from published news to the actual physical world of journalists, bringing conflict to their door. In 2010, Côte d’Ivoire held a stymied presidential election, in which incumbent Laurent Gbagbo and candidate Alassane Ouattara clashed forces in a conflict that lasted almost four months. The three major political bodies in this election—the parties of Alassane Ouattara, Laurent Gbagbo, and France’s military branch *Licorne*—had deep economic incentives in the outcome of Côte d’Ivoire’s elections, and were willing to manipulate journalists to push for their own agendas. Côte d’Ivoire is a former colony of France. It is a part of “*Françafrique*,” a massive region of 12 French-speaking African countries (former colonies of France) where France still retains considerable

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economic impact and has intervened militarily dozens of times since the colonies were emancipated in the early 1960s.

Fieldwork interviews conducted over the summers of 2016 and 2017 in Côte d'Ivoire with 24 journalists reveal extensive patterns of clandestine harassment of local and foreign journalists. I argue that conditions of war and conflict can stress the political-economic context of media outlets to the point that journalists and their news content become compromised in trying to report neutrally beyond the subtle editorial leanings seen in more peaceful eras. The informal network of political friendships and alliances that underpins the political-economic context of Côte d'Ivoire's media ended up playing a powerful behind-the-scenes role in the lives and safety of journalists in the crisis, as politicians pushed for their own outcomes. The escalating violent conditions of Côte d'Ivoire's electoral crisis pushed these existing political-economic structures to the limit, wreaking a special kind of editorial chaos on the international news on the crisis. Inevitably, the governments of Nicholas Sarkozy, Ouattara, and Gbagbo were manipulating different media outlets to ensure an electoral outcome that served their respective political agendas.

This study offers a theoretical contribution to political economy of the media in the Global South by assessing how conditions of war can activate and exacerbate power alliances among the political elite to push on media in ways they would not normally during peacetime. As a theoretical contribution, we learn how times of violence and chaos often challenge an existing network of power relations and the goals of those elites (e.g., the 600 French corporations whose profits tanked during the election crisis), prompting those in power to aggressively push for their own goals, which often includes manipulating the media to help achieve those same objectives.

These behind-the-scenes relationships of power had major consequences for the news content about Côte d'Ivoire consumed by international audiences. Journalists often found themselves negotiating the political agendas of their media owners or people of influence in the larger Ivoirien society in perhaps a more extreme manner than in times of peace for the Côte d'Ivoire. For example, Ouattara's administration was willing to financially reward journalists who were loyal to his RDR party before he came to power by awarding them well-paid positions in his cabinets or the state-funded newspaper *Fraternité Matin* after he was in power.

The purpose of this study is to (1) show patterns in how local and foreign journalists were either incentivized or harassed by political bodies to issue favorable content or stifle their coverage and (2) locate these patterns within the greater neocolonial and political-economic interests of France, Alassane Ouattara, Laurent Gbagbo, and major media groups operating out of Côte d'Ivoire. The extreme political party allegiances of Abidjan's printed newspapers also complicate how journalists were treated. Interviews were taken in French and translated into English.

Politics and the Media in Côte d'Ivoire: A Shifting Landscape

Ivoirien Laurent Gbagbo became president of Côte d'Ivoire in 2000 as the leader of the Front Populaire Ivoirien. His administration experienced unsuccessful military coups in 2002 and 2004 from the Forces Nouvelles rebel group, in which Ouattara has also been suspected of participating. France built its

own military base, Operation Licorne (Unicorn), outside the main city of Abidjan following the military coup in 2002. In 2003, the United Nations set up a permanent base in Abidjan as well, in what would become Operation des Nations Unies en Côte d'Ivoire.² In November 2010, the country finally held its long-awaited presidential elections. Gbagbo rejected the alleged victory of his political opponent Alassane Ouattara. In early December 2010, both Gbagbo and Ouattara held separate, official press conferences, in which their loyal cabinet members swore each of them in as the rightful president; Côte d'Ivoire now had two presidents. The African Union, the United Nations Security Council, and the Economic Community of West African States all issued public statements supporting Ouattara as president and asked Gbagbo to step down. As the United Nations had declared Ouattara the rightful winner, the international organization converted the entire Golf Hotel into a safe sanctuary for Ouattara, his family, his administration, and military officials and then barricaded it from the public for the four months of the crisis (Fessy, 2010). The United Nations funded most of the operation to keep Ouattara's camp housed at the hotel, another clear indication of international support for Ouattara's win in the controversial and botched election.

By late December 2010, Abidjan began to descend into violence as death squads and road blockades from both political sides attacked opponents (Bax & Mark, 2010). The rising gun battles and bloodshed in Abidjan's streets inevitably subsumed journalists working for pro-Ouattara or pro-Gbagbo newspapers, as soldiers with opposing politics hunted down these journalists for their political allegiances.

By March 2011, Ouattara had rallied his militia (Forces Republicaines Côte d'Ivoire and Force Nouvelles) in a countrywide sweep to overthrow Gbagbo's strongholds. Licorne and Operation des Nations Unies en Côte d'Ivoire offered substantial military force in the final days of capturing Gbagbo (Martin, 2011). On April 11, 2011, French and Ouattara forces arrested Gbagbo at his palace and he was later transferred to the Hague in Switzerland to be tried by the International Criminal Court. More than 3,000 Ivoiriens are estimated to have died in the election violence.

Political economy of the media and postcolonial theory are used to assess how these journalists' work was subject to socioeconomic forces in times of war in the Global South. In finding patterns in journalists' testimonies, this study connects how these instances of media manipulation happened because of the financial agendas of media executives and politicians in Côte d'Ivoire and West Africa. Results of the study also show the political and financial incentives for Ouattara and the government of Nicholas Sarkozy to take military measures: Political and financial stability for French investments in Côte d'Ivoire is one of the payoffs for France.

A case study of a single nation in francophone West Africa limits the ability to generalize conclusions; yet, French media dominate audiences in nine other francophone African nations. The treatment of journalists during Côte d'Ivoire's election crisis can give insight into the broader regional dynamic among France, its former colonies, and the underlying rhizome of political-economic structures of the media that pin together this region. Consider the involvement of France in Gabon's presidential

² Operation des Nations Unies en Côte d'Ivoire officially disbanded in 2017, after the country's politics calmed.

elections in 2016, the Central African Republic civil war in 2012–2014, the coup in Burkina Faso in 2015 led by the Regiment of Presidential Security, the Guinea–Bissau civil war in 1998–1999, and Togo’s political crisis in 2005 following the death of dictator Eyadéma Gnassingbé, among other conflicts. Lessons learned about political economy of the media in times of crisis in Côte d’Ivoire speak to similar situations in other francophone countries.

Postcolonialism and Françafrique

Despite massive efforts to decolonize and re-establish independent nations with independent systems of commerce and governing, many African nations, including many former colonies of France, still find themselves “entrapped within a disciplining colonial matrix of power” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. xi). Scholars can still point to the world’s wealthiest and most powerful people/nations and articulate a noticeable “coloniality of power,” to which Global South nations still largely play subservient economic roles (Boyd-Barrett, 2015; Memmi, 2006; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Melkote & Steeves, 2015). Coloniality of power refers to the ongoing extension of Western colonial practices in Global South nations despite the formal end of colonialism (Mignolo, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Quijano, 2000; Said, 1981).

French corporations have made millions of dollars from Ivoirien-based companies in the more than 70 years since emancipation in 1960. The postcolonial conditions in Côte d’Ivoire deeply orient and stress the economic and political landscape on which Ivoiriens and their news media operate. France built a military compound, the 43e Bataillon d’Infanterie de Marine in 1978, which in 2002 housed Operation Licorne, France’s active military base in the country.

France has a vested interest in controlling its public image in the media coverage of its military actions in Françafrique because France wants to protect its businesses (Mieu, 2013). Journalists say that Ouattara campaigned on a protrade, pro-France platform, meaning that France favored him and was willing to lend him military support during the electoral crisis. France also supported his TV channel by offering 24-hour armed guards of the campus (Golf Hotel) he and his political party were barricaded in during the 2010–2011 crisis, from which he broadcast his personal TV station. There are more than 600 French corporations operating today in Côte d’Ivoire, including ones that run the country’s airport, electricity, and telecommunications system (Orange). Sitting President Alassane Ouattara’s slow climb to national prominence in Côte d’Ivoire began with a career with the International Monetary Fund in the 1970s, along with his long-time friendship with former French president Nicolas Sarkozy. Ouattara’s first year as president (2011–2012) was adorned with many new trade agreements signed between the French government of Sarkozy and Côte d’Ivoire. A flurry of new gas and drilling contracts were signed between Ouattara’s new oil ministry and French corporate giants such as Bouygues, Total, Foxtrot Internationale, BTP, and Bolloré in 2011–2014 (Mieu, 2013). In 2012 and 2013, Ouattara’s oil ministry signed off on 18 different oil-drilling contracts with mostly European investors from major oil companies, including Anadarko, Tullow, Lukoil, and Total (Bavier & Flynn, 2014).

Scholars have long pointed to the postcolonial ties between France and its former colonies in Françafrique as a continued exercise in the French accumulation of wealth. France’s shunning of anti-French Gbagbo and welcome relationship with Ouattara was all too obvious to spectators:

Gbagbo was not, of course, the first African leader to run afoul of the French ambition. Many others, before him, were dethroned or eliminated, particularly during the era of emancipation in the 1950s and 1960s; Djibo Bakary in the late 1950s in Niger, Mamadou Konaté in Mali in the 1950s, Sylvanus Olympio in Togo, assassinated in 1963, Ruben Um Nyobè, killed in 1958 by the French colonial army in Cameroon, etc. Each time, the objective for the French authorities was to dethrone these men or political parties which were making susceptible the interests of France in Africa. (Pigeaud, 2015, p. 318)

The postcolonial nature of Côte d'Ivoire's and other francophone African national politics is still intensely entangled with France and French corporations, leading African leaders such as Gbagbo to often campaign on a pro-French or anti-French platform. Gbagbo, his political party Front Populaire Ivoirien, as well as "la presse bleue" newspapers, have all historically embraced an anti-Western, anti-French rhetoric as the nation struggled to build its own political independence in the 21st century. Other postcolonial scholars writing about Françafrique have noted the difficulty these nations have had in establishing a stable, fair economy that is independent of French corporations (Pigeaud, 2015).

Political Economy of the Media

A critical political-economic assessment of the media examines how media ownership and relationships of power, commerce, and financial conditions affect the news content of media organizations.

Murdock and Golding (1995) provide a general political-economic assessment of mass media: ownership of media corporations, the effect of advertising dollars on the media content, the impact of a strong or weak economy on media as businesses, and the operation of media agencies as businesses driven to earn profits. In a nutshell, the political economy of the media assesses how the media ownership structure of a media entity impacts the coverage of that institution, often to the promotion of ideologies that benefit those in power. Scholars in this field are interested in such questions as the following: How does media ownership of a media outlet affect its coverage? How does a government strategically influence the media for its own objectives? What are the political objectives and influences on the owners of a particular media outlet? Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's (1988) *Manufacturing Consent* crystallizes many of the issues raised by Curran et al. (1982), as well as Murdock and Golding (1995). Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model argues that economic and political contexts force media corporations to filter news through five filters, ultimately creating a media environment in which the government "manufactures" a consenting attitude from the population. Relevant to this study, their first filter argues that media ownership and earning a profit have a great impact on what news is published. The third filter argues that the media are trained to source news from cultural and political elites, thus complicitly furthering the same system (and the accompanying ideologies of its elites) that journalists profess to "hold accountable." Critical political economists argue that the commercial and political leanings of corporations pressure journalists to write news in favor of their owners' financial and political interests (Chomsky & Herman, 1988; Shepperson & Tomaselli, 2009).

The political economy of the media in Africa is also intrinsically related to the operational politics of each country, including how journalists of that country operate and are governed. Borrowing from the four theories of the press (authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and Soviet communist; Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956), a more Soviet model of journalism means that the media tend to report stories that support the interests of the ruling party. Many democratic nations in Africa could fall under this model when one considers the extent of state-funded TV, radio, and newspapers throughout the continent (Karam & Mutsvairo, 2018, p. 5; Lemke, 2018; Shepperson & Tomaselli, 2009). Other media scholars have since critiqued and evolved the four theories of the press as too entrenched in the politics of the Cold War era. Ostini and Fung (2002) offer a model classifying media systems that relies on two axis: democratic to authoritarian societies, and conservative journalist values to liberal journalist values. During times of peace, Cote d'Ivoire's journalists were free to write how they pleased. Yet, during the electoral crisis, the results show that their working conditions quickly became censored and threatened. The transition between these two periods of working conditions can be traced within Ostini and Fung's model as moving from a conservative-democratic journalism model (Cote d'Ivoire in times of peace) to a more conservative-authoritarian model (the electoral crisis).

Taken together, a critical political-economic assessment of the news in a country such as Côte d'Ivoire, where many newspaper and radio stations are ruled by political parties, will necessarily mean viewing those in politics as those who are involved in media ownership. Consider the following frank statement on the relationship between politics and journalists in Zambia and other African nations:

The African press is a political press through and through. It was conceived as such and operates as a political tool. Politicians, particularly those in government, have, necessarily, always been involved in and with the press, legally and extra legally, ordering journalists to do this and that, complaining about acts or omissions about journalists and the press, warning journalists and the press to report what those in the government are saying even if it does not conform to what they are doing or not doing. (F. Kasoma, 2000, p. 84)

Critical political-economic assessments of the media in Africa wrestle with issues of media censorship, state-sponsored violence against journalists, and political strangling of freedom of the press (Duncan, 2009; Kanuma, 2004; Karam & Mutsvairo, 2018; T. Kasoma & Pitts, 2018). However, it is only when political parties aspire to a Western model of democratic journalism that concepts such as freedom of the press have value to that government:

Media control is a notable habit of other long-serving African presidents, including Paul Biya of Cameroon, Eduardo Dos Antos of Angola, and Equatorial Guinea's Teodor Obiang Nguema, who have a combined uninterrupted leadership reign of 105 years. . . . Long-serving presidents within totalitarian African states consider independent journalists agents of the neoliberal model of democracy, which is mostly supportive of Western institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. (Karam & Mutsvairo, 2018, p. 13)

Media Ownership in Côte d'Ivoire

Côte d'Ivoire's print newspapers are almost all party-owned publications that subscribe to a particular editorial line. In addition, as part of the Françafrique region (countries formerly colonized by France), Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, is home to a host of French state-owned media, such as Agence France Presse (AFP) and Radio France Internationale (RFI).

Since the 1990s, Côte d'Ivoire's political newspapers have been split into two groups. La presse bleue papers are left-leaning socialist newspapers that support a host of anti-French, anti-Western political parties on one end of the political spectrum. At the other end is the la presse verte, whose newspapers (such as *Le Patriote*) typically support the more right-leaning party, Rassemblement des Republicaines, the party of Ouattara, now the sitting president of the country. The political ownership of these newspapers has traditionally produced heavily editorialized content for the paper's party line (Campbell, 1998; Théroux-Bénoni, 2009).

In addition, the primary French media in West Africa are typically sponsored by branches of the French administration, opening up their editorial practices to a critical political-economic assessment of the political motivations of France. In general, the French government is motivated to maintain its military and political influence within its former 12 colonies to create prosperous economies for the 600-plus French corporations located there. Some French media outlets are funded by the French government (RFI, AFP, and France 24) or private French entities (*Le Monde Afrique*). Two scholars, both former journalists for AFP, have written extensively about the manipulative editorial practices of French media operating in Côte d'Ivoire during the electoral crisis (Pigeaud, 2015; Youant, 2016).

The following research questions guide this study:

- RQ1: What do the personal experiences of both local and foreign journalists tell us about the behind-the-scenes battle for control over Côte d'Ivoire's media?*
- RQ2: How does a critical political-economic framework help explain the media ownership structures for which these journalists work and the underlying motivations of France, Laurent Gbagbo, and Alassane Ouattara's political parties?*
- RQ3: What does the case study of Côte d'Ivoire's media tell us about how the political economy of the media functions in times of crisis?*

Method

Interviews

With the foreign press, I interviewed nine journalists from the following agencies or publications: AFP, Associated Press, RFI, Reuters, *Jeune Afrique*, and *Liberation*. It is important to note that the majority of journalists working for foreign news outlets in Côte d'Ivoire are Ivoirien; just three of these

journalists were not Ivoirians (two French and one Canadian citizens). With the local press, I interviewed 15 journalists (all Ivoirien) from the following news agencies: Alert.info (an online text-based news agency), Abidjan.net (Côte d'Ivoire's main online news agency), *Le Temps*, *Le Nouveau Courrier*, *Notre Voie*, *Fraternité Matin*, and *Le Patriote*.

I first conducted interviews with journalists in September 2016 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. I conducted two Skype interviews in May 2017 with international journalists located in Canada and France. While in Abidjan in 2016, I met participants by first calling their newsroom office, explaining my research, and asking if their editors or journalists were interested in participating. I then conducted in-person interviews in their physical newsrooms. Interviews ranged from 15 to 60 minutes in length. Interviews were recorded. Twenty participants were men and four were women. Twenty-one of these journalists were Ivoirien, two were French, and one was Canadian. A typical Ivoirien journalist was male, had worked for his newsroom for 10 years or more, and was supporting a family on his monthly salary. All journalists were in their 30s, 40s, or 50s. My university's internal review board approved this research project in June 2016. Under the board's direction, journalists signed a consent form that guaranteed their anonymity in this study.

Coding Interviews

After reading through multiple transcripts from my time in Côte d'Ivoire and reviewing my research questions, I assembled four preliminary, open codes for analyzing interviews: conditions facing journalists, their opinions on the political intentions and role of local press, their opinions on the political intentions and role of international press, and the role of France in Côte d'Ivoire.

For example, if I was speaking with local journalists and they mentioned that their organization's news team was forced to flee their newsroom and report from the editor's home, I added this statement to the code "conditions facing journalists." Once all transcripts were assembled into these four open codes, I then used axial and selective coding (typically used in grounded theory to connect basic themes within open codes) to find final themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The final selective codes formed the results of this study. The media ownership structure for local newspapers in Côte d'Ivoire is different from that of the transnational media outlets of AFP or AP, and as such, interviews with local and foreign journalists formed their own separate categories.

Results

Results from the interviews with local and foreign journalists reflect deep-seated patterns of political and editorial "hacking" from multiple fronts. During the four months of the electoral crisis, journalists seemed to face harassment or incentives from two distinct sources: their newsroom owners (such as the French government, in the instance of AFP) or frenzied military soldiers working for either Gbagbo or Ouattara's political parties. Results are analyzed separately between local and international journalists, and then compared as overlapping systems affected by the political-economic order in a time of crisis.

Themes Among the International Press

Two major codes emerged on the data on the international press: media ownership of one's outlet affects journalistic coverage and harassment of journalists based on their outlet affiliation or race.

Code 1. Media Ownership of One's Outlet Affects Journalistic Coverage

An emergent theme in conversations with foreign journalists showed that most felt there was an occasional pattern of editing bias on the part of the journalists' management and administration, which journalists were able to directly connect to the political motivations of their media owners. Properties in this code included journalists disapproving of bias in AFP and French newspapers or editorial pressure for journalists to write a particular narrative. In particular, journalists working with AFP and other French newspapers noticed a strong bias in AFP that favored Ouattara's administration and did not favor Gbagbo's staff.

Journalists disapprove of bias in AFP and French newspapers. As one foreign journalist said, "We often put AFP up there with the BBC, but it really isn't the same quality of independent journalism" (anonymous journalist, personal communication, May 27, 2017). Another AFP journalist, an Ivoirien, resigned from AFP because he took issue with the frequent phone calls exchanged between France's special ambassador to Côte d'Ivoire Jean Marc Simon and AFP's operating bureau chief Thomas Morfin during the crisis:

What bothered me was the censorship that certain journalists at AFP were doing. It isn't AFP's behavior normally, it was individuals, one person, who I think turned things around in Côte d'Ivoire was Thomas Morfin. . . . Thomas Morfin set himself up as a protagonist in the crisis, like someone who was fighting too, like someone who was making war too. (Anonymous journalist, personal communication, September 29, 2016)

Journalists working with AFP said during the four-month electoral crisis that editors of their work in Paris seemed to edit their work to reflect a pro-Ouattara bias. As the AFP bureau chief is appointed by a branch of the French government, its editorial leanings often tend to point its coverage toward French policy.

A third AFP journalist pointed to the same problematic policy during the electoral crisis:

There were a lot of articles that weren't equal. When my paper criticizes Gbagbo, they just let it pass, but when you put something bad on Ouattara, they'll say no, you have to make it equal. (Anonymous journalist, personal communication, September 26, 2016)

It is clear that the political strategies of France interfered with the editorial end of AFP dispatches on the crisis. The French government had much to gain economically and politically from how editors chose to frame information to audiences in France, Europe, or the rest of the francophone world (AFP is also translated into other languages). Journalists told me that France had an extreme economic interest in installing Ouattara as president, as his trade-friendly attitude with France would usher in a more lucrative

financial era between the two countries. As one prominent political journalist who worked for *Fraternité Matin* commented,

The French interests in Côte d'Ivoire are huge, their economic interests are really big. You take our water, our electricity—that's all France. SODECI, Orange, all that is France. (Anonymous journalist, personal interview, September 15, 2016)

Pressure to write a particular narrative. A second property that emerged within the code of media ownership was journalists facing direct threats from their editors or powerful politicians to write a particular narrative. Those with influence over the media ownership were willing to pull strings to get the "right stories" published. This property emerged in multiple interviews. For example, a journalist with *Jeune Afrique* said he had written about the deaths of 65 civilians in an area secured by Ouattara's military well after the electoral crisis had finished (the inference being that Ouattara's soldiers murdered them). This particular story upset the presidency, as it published an unfavorable view of his administration in *Jeune Afrique*:

Since Ouattara came to power, I stopped writing politics for *Jeune Afrique*. Because under Gbagbo, we were more objective. Frequently, I'd write articles that Ouattara's people didn't like. But when the national power changed hands, because my boss has been friends with the Ouattara couple for many years. So, suddenly, all my sensitive articles started not being published or they would add in little things which didn't reflect the reality in Côte d'Ivoire, so I quit writing politics. . . . Me, I was summoned one time by the minister of the interior and also the wife of President Ouattara, at her house (because I'd written some sensitive articles in *Jeune Afrique* after the crisis that they didn't like). . . . There were more than 65 dead bodies and the site where the deaths happened, security is assured by the society managed by the brother of the president. When she [president's wife] received me, she said, "You know your boss is our friend? We go on vacation together, our children play together often. We could be very angry about this, but we always finish with an understanding between each other. But you, what are you becoming?" (Anonymous journalist, personal interview, September 29, 2016)

Ouattara's wife used her political connections to effectively push this journalist to stop writing such stories, creating a better public image for Ouattara.

A second example of journalists pressured by politicians to write a particular narrative comes from an interview with a foreign journalist working in radio. RFI is a worldwide radio service funded by the French Minister of Foreign Affairs in France (somewhat similar to Voice of America), with offices in many nations. Côte d'Ivoire's radio director is a politically appointed position by the French government and, at the time of the crisis, was journalist Norbert Navarro.³ According to an interview with an

³ Frenchman Norbert Navarro was appointed to RFI in Côte d'Ivoire by the French government after the former French journalist in this position, Jean Hélène, was shot to death by an Ivoirien police officer in 2003. Navarro knew he was in a precarious political position when the electoral crisis began in 2010, and as such,

anonymous foreign journalist in radio, Navarro broadcast several false radio reports on RFI that worked in Gbagbo's favor, at one point publishing a false story that the Ivoirien government was about to "shut down":

The point is that RFI put out this fake information in order to make things appear one way, so Gbagbo could twist the knife on whichever part of the government he was trying to pressure to do whatever by threatening to dissolve the government. Then everyone starts losing their minds, then someone capitulates, then they say, oh RFI was "just joking. Didn't actually happen." But because they [government officials] heard it on RFI, they thought it was real. (Anonymous journalist, personal communication, May 27, 2017)

Again, a pattern emerges in which Côte d'Ivoire politicians used their political leverage to manipulate news content for their own political agenda. Gbagbo was well aware that Navarro, as a Frenchman publishing in hostile territory, needed his political protection. The RFI station was an active target for angry Ivoirien citizens during the heated year of 2010. Gbagbo capitalized on the fact that common citizens knew that France paid Navarro's paycheck to call in favors that worked for Gbagbo.

Five journalists quit writing for AFP. Five journalists resigned from writing about Côte d'Ivoire for AFP and another French newspaper because they found that their stories were edited in Paris to have an anti-Gbagbo bent. Four of these five journalists were included in this study. The last journalist, Theophile Kouamo, not interviewed for this study, resigned from *Jeune Afrique* and *Le Monde* in the late 2000s because his editors in France consistently edited his work to be more anti-Gbagbo. He instead moved to Paris and started his own Ivoirien newspaper, *Le Nouveau Courrier* (used in this study) in Abidjan (Théroux-Bénoni, 2009).

Code 2. Shutdowns, Harassment, or Attacks on Foreign Journalists Based on Their Race or Media Outlet Affiliation

Foreign journalist responses were clustered under this theme if they reported being harassed for their news outlet affiliation or saw other forms of censorship at the street level. Foreign journalists reported being targeted for their "Whiteness" or for their media outlet affiliation. All nine journalists had stories of finding themselves or their news team trapped with militia at the door or closing in. Militia working for Gbagbo were staunchly anti-Western and anti-French, and considered all journalists with the foreign press to be working for "the enemy." Most of the incidents that led to this code were perpetrated by militia that supported Gbagbo's Force Defenses et Securites. This is mostly because militia supporting Ouattara's Force Nouvelles knew they had the support of the international community and so were content to leave foreign journalists alone. In attempting to stifle or censor the voices of these foreign journalists, the agitated pro-Gbagbo militia on the ground had a cooling effect on the movement of foreign journalists around Abidjan.

ingratiated himself to sitting President Gbagbo to ensure his own political protection (anonymous journalist, personal interview, March 2017).

Journalists captured or beaten by military members. One AFP journalist (an Ivoirien) recounted a day when he and a White AFP journalist reported on an anti-Ouattara demonstration led by pro-Gbagbo leader Blé Goudé (now incarcerated at the Hague in Switzerland, along with Gbagbo):

I took a team with me and the cameraman was a little White. He couldn't get out and he left because people were threatening him. They said they were going to break his camera, so he went back to the office . . . youths were saying they wanted to be in the army against Ouattara. You got there and they'll ask you, "You are with which journal?" And I said, "I'm with AFP." "AFP, what's that?" It's all the same to these guys. Someone else hit me, and I said, "No, I just want to know what's happening here!" They started beating me. Then a moment came when someone saw me, a young guy I already knew, who calmed the crowd down. So, that's all to tell you, it was really difficult to work. Everyone who saw foreign journalists, they think you are people who are writing God knows what, they think "you are all liars, you aren't telling the truth." (Anonymous journalist, personal communication, September 26, 2016)

Another foreign journalist explained that many pro-Gbagbo soldiers working at roadblocks were swept up in the anti-French, anti-Western xenophobia of the time period. Even though he was an Ivoirien, he was stopped and arrested no fewer than three times in 2011 by soldiers angry that he was working for a foreign publication. Two of these occasions he was with a White television crew:

So, they arrested me. They told me they were going to burn me, they were going to kill me, and I wasn't alone either. I was with a team from British television. So they arrested all of us, they told us they were going to kill us. They surrounded us and started getting out matches and gas. But there were some street youths who recognized me, because every time I see them I give them money. And that day, they recognized me and they came to our defense. They took us to a nearby hotel and helped us get away. (Anonymous journalist, personal communication, September 29, 2016)

Harassment of journalists based on newspaper affiliation. A now-famous incident for harassment of foreign journalists in Côte d'Ivoire during the electoral crisis is the story of the Hotel Novatel evacuation, in which approximately 30 foreign journalists reporting from a downtown hotel became trapped when the region came under heavy crossfire in early April 2011.⁴ Four of the 11 journalists included in this study were part of this group of those trapped in the hotel. One international journalist recounted to me how he left his home of two years and ended up in the Hotel Novatel evacuation:

⁴ On April 4, a dozen men in military attire broke into Hotel Novatel. They found the director, Frenchman Stephane Rippel, and demanded to know whether any journalists were staying at the hotel, which he denied. The soldiers kidnapped Rippel, the president of French corporation SIFCA, as well as two other SIFCA directors ("Kidnapped Frenchmen Found Dead," 2011; "A Vous Quatre Qui Nous Avez Sauvé la Vie au Novotel d'Abidjan," 2011; Mark, 2011). Their bodies were found two months later in a lagoon behind Gbagbo's palace.

One day, Blé Goudé (in fact, they are using this speech he gave in his war crimes trial in the Hague) where he went on television and (this is not a direct quote) said, I want . . . the youth of Ivory Coast, all patriots, to defend our country against the foreigners, set up roadblocks, check everyone's cars and don't let any foreigners in or out of your neighborhood. Of course, when he said "foreigners," it's all part of this code, that means northerners, it means Ouattara supporters. But you know, he said foreigners and I'm a White guy in a pro-Gbagbo neighborhood that already has crowds of armed teenagers running roadblocks every night. And I was like, "Uh, I think this is when we are going to be pulling the cord." (Anonymous journalist, personal communication, May 27, 2017)

The journalists were evacuated April 8 by French military buses and sheltered at France's 43ieme Bataillon d'Infanterie de Marine, the French military compound, four days before Gbagbo was arrested at his palace, April 11. Consequently, all of the international news that emerged after Gbagbo was arrested was written by these same journalists from the confines of the French military compound. Clearly, accepting this help from France affected how journalists wrote their stories and their framing of French military involvement, given that French soldiers had just rescued them. Francophone and anglophone audiences around the world consumed these news stories, which had a heavy layer of politics involved in their very production, a layer not visible to those same audiences.

Themes Among the Local Press

Two codes emerged among the interviews with 15 local journalists who were working for local newspapers: journalists forced to flee and journalists rewarded/punished after the electoral crisis was over.

Code 1: Journalists Forced to Flee

Journalist names on hit list for Gbagbo or Ouattara. Among the 15 local journalists interviewed for this study, a strong theme emerged of persecution and intimidation from the opposing political party. In particular, after Ouattara was installed in May 2011, soldiers for Force Nouvelles actively began searching for journalists who wrote for "blue" newspapers, notably *Notre Voie* and *Le Temps*. Well before Ouattara was officially inaugurated, both newsroom buildings were ransacked, robbed, and then set on fire. *Notre Voie's* entire printing press was burned to the ground. A journalist with *Le Temps* (pro-Gbagbo), a journalist with *Fraternité Matin*, and a journalist with *Le Patriote* (pro-Ouattara) each shared a similar story: Militia from the Force Nouvelles or the Force Defenses et Securites came looking for the journalists' homes. The journalists fled Abidjan and went into hiding where they continued to file news stories online from May to July 2011, when the city began to rebuild itself. A journalist with *Fraternité Matin* recounted how he found out that his name was on Ouattara's soldiers hit list:

I know that when the crisis was over, when they took Gbagbo, someone called me from the Golf Hotel and he said, because the men of Ouattara were searching out people who were pro-Gbagbo, the "LMPs." . . . They said that because I'm a journalist with LMP [La Majorité Présidentielle, Gbagbo's camp], I'm pro-Gbagbo. They said there is a list of journalists they are looking for to arrest and they told me my name is on the list. My friend called me to tell me, and so I disappeared. . . I fled my home on the 12 or 13th and I left for two weeks after. I hid more than two weeks and then I came back out in May. (Anonymous journalist, personal communication, September 14, 2016)

Structurally, this theme of fleeing militia points to the political agendas of Ouattara's Force Nouvelles and Gbagbo's Force Defenses et Securites. I locate the pattern of local militia chasing down party-affiliated journalists within Côte d'Ivoire's political structure because both military contingents sought to improve their party's public image by quieting the voices of opposing newspapers. *Le Temps* and *Notre Voie* are well known for their consistent anti-French rhetoric. In directing their respective military units to silence or imprison the right journalists, both Gbagbo and Ouattara were trying to ensure a better public image in the chaos of the election conflict. The use of violence to target an unpopular journalist still shows how politicians are willing to use unfair militaristic means to shape media content in their favor.

Major disruptions to newsroom routines. This theme of major disruptions to a journalist's reporting routine resounded throughout interviews with local journalists. By April 1, 2011, most local newsrooms had closed their doors for the past month or so in that fear their political affiliations would lead to attacks on the newsroom. Indeed, the newsrooms of *Notre Voie* and *Le Temps* were both burned. The printing press of *Notre Voie* was completely burned to a shell of black metal. These pro-Gbagbo newsrooms published their news commentary from the homes of their editors for almost a year after Gbagbo was captured because they feared revenge attacks. They continued to publish their editions online with Abidjan.net, but it was several months before they were able to get paper editions printed and out in the streets.

Code 2. Local Pro-Ouattara Journalists Awarded Better Pay/Positions Within Government After Ouattara Wins; Pro-Gbagbo News Outlets Struggle Financially

Writing in hope of a political payoff for one's party. Local journalists from both political sides mentioned that they were writing from an openly editorialized position so that their candidate could win. Journalists with local newspapers knew the funding for their newspaper could blow up overnight should their candidate win. And indeed, the journalists working for the pro-Ouattara press got immediate political recognition from the Ouattara administration for their coverage of the crisis. Two bloggers for *La Plume*, a pro-Ouattara blog, were given prestigious editorial positions in the state newspaper *Fraternité Matin* (blogger Venance Konan, a former journalist for FM, was reinstated as editor-in-chief of the newspaper by Ouattara after the war was over; anonymous journalist with FM, personal interview, September 16, 2016). A third *La Plume* blogger was hired as the director of the cabinet for the country's Ministry of Interior Security.

Pro-Gbagbo journalists lose newsrooms/salary. In contrast, journalists with the pro-Gbagbo press saw their fortunes go awry as Ouattara's militia took over the streets following Gbagbo's defeat in early April 2011. In Code 1, we saw many journalists facing harassment from militia; many of these instances

happened for the pro-Gbagbo press after Ouattara came to power. Pro-Gbagbo journalists in interviews told me it was almost a year before they could raise the money to restore their burned, ransacked newsrooms. In addition, because many staff in Gbagbo's administration (Front Populaire Ivoirien) fled the country after Ouattara's installment, those Front Populaire Ivoirien politicians and military officials no longer had the funds to support the pro-Gbagbo press. Consequently, pro-Gbagbo newspaper journalists who earned relatively decent income before the civil war found themselves working for free or for very little pay. Several (such as *Le Courrier*) went out of business.

Conclusions: Stressing the Political–Economic Structures of Côte d'Ivoire

This study asked the following questions:

- RQ1: What do the personal experiences of both local and foreign journalists tell us about the behind-the-scenes battle for control over Côte d'Ivoire's media?*
- RQ2: How does a critical political–economic framework help explain the media ownership structures for which these journalists work, and the underlying motivations of France, Laurent Gbagbo, and Alassane Ouattara's political parties?*
- RQ3: What does the case study of Côte d'Ivoire's media tell us about how the political economy of the media functions in times of crisis?*

For Research Question 1, the data show that comments from journalists identified a powerful informal network of alliances among the elite parties that affected the country's politics. The testimonies of journalists revealed some shocking hidden alliances (such as *Jeune Afrique's* owner and his friendship with Ouattara) that would otherwise not be discovered without journalist interviews. For Research Question 2, a critical political–economic analysis of this media scene highlights how the politicians and other elite parties (e.g., media owners) of Côte d'Ivoire (France, Gbagbo, and Ouattara) began treating the media much differently than in times of peace. Their economic and political interests were threatened, and as such, these powerful entities went to great lengths to manipulate or incentivize the media in their own favor. Journalists found themselves pushed on as a result of these alliances, as they and their media outlets were subsumed in the conflict.

In response to Research Question 3, the following conclusions can be drawn. The network of informal relationships of power, common to West African nations, that holds together a country's socioeconomic politics, deeply affects how the news is reported. Conditions of war can easily threaten the political and financial agendas of those in this network of informal alliances, which forces actors in this network to take dramatic steps not normally be seen in times of peace. Actors take steps to protect their political and financial agendas. Journalists reporting in such nations quickly become casualties and political pawns when such powerful actors in politics feel their interests are threatened because politicians and their militaries begin manipulating or incentivizing journalists in ways that promote their own interests. Journalists are forced to act, sometimes politically, when the politics surrounding them force their hand. Even situations such as the Hotel Novatel evacuation, when 30 journalists needed the military protection of France, demonstrates how *Licorne* (and by extension, the public image of France) was able to incur favor for itself within the international media. Next, what we learn in Côte

d'Ivoire when we examine how the politics and economics of a situation can impact the media is that war can distort political-economic contexts deeply enough that journalists are immersed in systems of corruption at the editorial, street, and political-economic levels.

To revisit postcolonial concerns in light of these results, scholars and journalists alike must continue to question why France, no longer the colonial administrator of Cote d'Ivoire, had such a great hand in the electoral crisis. It is clear that Cote d'Ivoire is still caught up in the "disciplining matrix of colonial power" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. xi). Françafrique continues to be a hotbed of French neocolonial activity in terms of businesses and political sway, as is seen in how aggressively the French military and embassy fought to support Ouattara.

The lesson to be taken from this case study for other West Africa nations in Françafrique is a cautionary tale. Many other West African francophone nations have histories of political conflict, and French businesses continue to have a heavy hand throughout this region. Similarly, the informal network of political alliances seen in Côte d'Ivoire is quite common to West African politics (Hoffman, 2006, 2011). Political and electoral crises often usher in eras of violence in this region (Gabon's presidential elections in 2016, the Central African Republic civil war in 2012–2014, the coup in Burkina Faso in 2015 led by Regiment of Presidential Security, the Guinea-Bissau civil war in 1998–1999, Togo's political crisis in 2005 following the death of dictator Eyadéma Gnassingbé, among other conflicts). The case study of Côte d'Ivoire demonstrates that conflict in these other nations might also have the same types of repercussions within those nations' political-economic contexts, as the interests of political actors may also be threatened. One suggestion for future research is a comparative study between two francophone West African nations with strong ties to France (e.g., Gabon) to better understand how journalists face pressure from their editorial and political environment.

To cite the title of Herbert Schiller's 1991 article, Françafrique is not yet in the post-imperial era. The gravitational pull of France's sprawling corporate connections in the mass media and local politics of Françafrique affect most political crises in these nations, creating wary political parties that often must choose if they are pro- or anti-French when they enter politics. Journalists in West Africa working for local, party-affiliated newsrooms are clearly at the whim of heavy political tides, and if the presidential tide turns against them, newsrooms can be at the mercy of the storm. In times of bloody conflict, chaos, and discord, we learn that the agendas of politicians and military leaders, particularly France, can easily engulf entire news situations to push the narrative in a favorable direction. Furthermore, French media and foreign media, as entities supported with overseas money, will always be suspect to the political agendas and intentions of the governments providing that money. For the average West African consumer of news in any of these nations, it is clear that the political-economic structures operating behind the airwaves are extremely powerful in affecting news content in ways that favor those in power.

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