ACCESS TO LAND, LAND CONFLICTS AND INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONSHIPS IN LOWER CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Jean-Philippe COLIN with the contribution of Georges KOUAME & Debegnoun SORO[1]

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The paper discusses struggles over land, but also, in some situations, the lack of struggle when one would anticipate it, in the context of a former no man's land, in Lower Côte d'Ivoire. Access to land in that area has been molded by the interplay between migration flows (first, people originating mostly from Central and Southern Côte d'Ivoire, then, these past decades, from Burkina Faso), the dynamics of the smallholder plantation economy (disappearance of the pioneering coffee and cocoa plantations, rise of pineapple cultivation) and the dynamics of institutions governing access to land (especially land markets). The picture that results from this study is that of a situation where, contrary to the current situation in Southern Côte d'Ivoire, land ownership rights are only exceptionally contested – a result that we link to the lack of autochthonous land stake. The crucial land issue in the region comes from the very active land lease market, with a large acreage of land rented out to Burkinabè pineapple producers – again, without major conflicts. This situation is contrasted with the neighboring Abouré country, where a large conflict over the tenancy practices arose in 2001. However, the lack of conflicts does not mean the lack of tensions, as the analysis of the current situation shows.

Introduction

The autochthon-migrant (Ivorian or foreigner) dichotomy structures the land issue in Southern Côte d'Ivoire. The smallholder plantation economy expanded in forested Côte d'Ivoire in areas of low population. Its development therefore relied on the massive arrival of immigrants coming from regions ecologically unsuited for coffee and cocoa cultivation (center and northern savannah of Côte d'Ivoire, Haute Volta, Mali), as wage laborer or looking for "black forest"[2] to clear in order to create plantations. The conditions of access to land for these immigrants varied from one region to another, from the "gift" of black forest to its "purchase" or the purchase of plantations. The autochthon-migrant relationship regarding access to land was often characterized by the social embededness of these land transfers. Under the institution of *tutorat*, the migrant gaining access to land through "gift" or "purchase" remained – or should have remained, in the native's perspective – under an obligation to the one who "gave" him or "sold" him the land (Chauveau, forthcoming). Tensions and conflicts between natives and migrants often find their roots in disputes over the content of land rights which were transferred to the migrants. These tensions had been documented for long in different areas of Southern Côte d'Ivoire (Raulin, 1957; Dupire, 1960). The conflictive interests were kept under control during the colonial period as well as during the first decades of Independence to the detriment of the autochthons, as public policies tended to favor the strangers' settlement in order to stimulate economic development, relying on the principle "the land belongs to the one that cultivates it" (Dozon, 1997; Chauveau, 2002). That issue has resurfaced openly and widely these past ten years, with natives contesting past land transfers in order to establish a "land due" or even to get the land back. In this process, the young autochthons who no longer have economic perspectives in the urban sector play a leading role. The political debate has taken up the question of land property rights as a major issue, in a context were the public authorities no longer support indiscriminately the migrants' interest. The post-Houphouët-Boigny era marks "the return of the autochthony". In that debate, the Ivorian-foreigner opposition prevails over the usual opposition between autochthons and Baoulé or "Dioula[3]" migrants. The 1998 land law, voted unanimously, clearly goes that way by excluding foreigners from land ownership. The land issue becomes a burning question in the current socio-political context of Côte d'Ivoire, especially since the dramatic events that started in September 2002.

This paper deals with the relationships between access to land, inter-ethnic relations and land conflicts in a situation which is specific regarding this general context. This former "no man's land" in Lower Côte d'Ivoire offers quasi-experimental conditions to develop a comparative perspective in which the role of tutorat in land transfers – a fundamental ingredient of the struggles over land – is neutralized. The area is located at the furthermost bounds of the Agni kingdom of Sanwi, in the Eotilé vassal territory, and not far from the Abouré country. The Eotilé, fishermen, were settled along the banks of

the lagoons, and neglected the interior of the country (Rougerie, 1957). The southwestern border of the Agni kingdom, which isolated it from the Abouré country, remained therefore unoccupied until the beginning of the 20th century, when immigrants started to arrive from various regions of Côte d'Ivoire, Haute Volta and Mali. This immigration flow became significant at a regional scale as early as 1935. After World War II, it turned into a rush.

The empirical data come from investigations realized in three villages, Djimini-Koffikro, Kongodjan and Petit-Paris. In Djimini-Koffikro (3000 inhabitants), the ethnic appropriation of land corresponds to a real patchwork, with Baoulé, Agni and Abouré as the dominant groups. Kongodjan (530 inhabitants) is a Senoufo village, in terms of population as well as land control. The village of Petit-Paris (300 inhabitants) is populated with Abouré and Mossi, but most land is owned by Abouré[4]. The pioneer phase developed in the region from West to East, starting in Djimini-Koffikro in the twenties, then in Kongodjan in the thirties and Petit-Paris in the forties – a time lag which gives the opportunity to capture the relationships between land access in a pioneer area and the increasing perception of the vanishing of the forest.

Djimini-Koffikro was the object of an intensive field research from 1983 to 1985, including the mapping and the "biography" of all plots in the village (origin of the first cultivation right, then transfers through inheritance, *inter vivos* donation or sale). Exhaustive data were also collected on land use and tenancy contracts (Colin, 1990). A second fieldwork phase started in 2001, aimed at capturing the dynamics in land rights, distribution and use, since the eighties. Intensive case studies have been combined with exhaustive surveys regarding land owners and tenants in the village, dealing with land transfers and land conflicts. Kongodjan was also studied at the beginning of the eighties, altough not as intensively as Djimini-Koffikro. In Kongodjan as well as in Petit-Paris, the current research, which started in 2002, parallels the one conducted in Djimini-Koffikro. This paper will rely mainly on the Djimini case, but will as well draw comparative elements from Kongodjan and Petit-Paris.

The first part of the paper analyzes the dynamics of land appropriation in the absence of autochthonous land stakeholders and discusses the issue of the lack of major conflicts during that process. The second part of the paper deals with the development of an active land lease market for pineapple production by Burkinabè tenants, underlying the quite smooth functioning of that market in the area under study, which greatly contrasts with the neighboring Abouré country where severe troubles occurred in 2001 when young Abouré tried to expel the Burkinabè tenants. The last section of the paper deals with the situation in the region in the current socio-political context. This situation is characterized by the total absence of inter-ethnic open conflict, which however conceals perceptible tensions.

1. The emergence and transfer of land property rights in a former "no man's land": the dynamics of land appropriation in the absence of autochthonous stakeholders

1.1. The pioneers' time: when the Far East was not a Far West

The pioneer phase in this region did not turn into a conflictive rush, even if it lacked customary socio-political institutions or if resorting to colonial authorities remained exceptional. Briefly reviewing the history of access to land during the pioneer phase brings to light shared principles which played a central role in the coordination of individuals' actions. At the same time, it shows how the rise of conflictive interests through the pioneer phase, with the perception of the vanishing of the black forest, reflected upon actors' practices.

The first settler to arrive in what will become Djimini-Koffikro was A.K., an Abouré who established a game encampment there, around 1915. In the 1920's, people from different origins arrived (mostly Baoulé and Agni, but also Nzima, Gagou or Yacouba[5]). The abundance of black forest incited them to settle there to create plantations, at a time where cocoa and coffee smallholder plantation economy was starting to develop. When they arrived, A.K. "set up" the first newcomers in different areas – i.e., showed them where to start clearing the forest. These first migrants began, in turn, to set up the

newcomers, each one in his respective sector. As “regulators”, A.K. and the first Baoulé, Agni and Nzima migrants designated to the newcomers where and in which direction they could start clearing the forest to create plantations. The clearing of the forest was then sufficient to insure one's uncontested individual right over the land. The newcomer was set up in the forest, at such a distance from the other planters that he could not jeopardize an expected expansion of his neighbors' plantations – therefore creating a reserve of black forest for these planters. The limit was defined only when two clearing fronts came close, in order to avoid conflicts.

In the fourties, competition over access to the black forest appeared. Without an *ex ante* delimitation of the forest to clear, and with the fundamental rule that it was the cutting down of the forest which created a property right, anticipating strategies were then developed in order to protect one’s interest. Installing newcomers in such or such place became a way to stand in the path of pioneers from neighborhood villages. Clearing techniques were also sometimes used; these consisted of multiplying the clearing epicenters in order to isolate a central area as a reserve. Orienting the clearing of the forest in such or such direction was also a way to take preeminence over a neighbor. These strategies nevertheless did not create conflicts as the principle “the labor creates the right” was somehow legitimizing these practices. Another element explaining the lack of conflict at that time is that as the fourties ended, all of what is now the village territory was appropriated, including reserves of black forest. In other words, when the rush for the forest took on a major emphasis in the region, at the end of the fourties and in the fifties, property rights were already established and socially recognized in Djimini-Koffikro.

Access to land in Djimini-Koffikro was conditioned by the perception of the area as a no man’s land. All the old pioneers interviewed in the eighties said that at that time, "the land belonged to nobody.” They knew that they were in Agni country, but the Agni and the Eotilé were living far away. Indeed, the Agni who settled in Djimini do not consider themselves as “the” natives – and they definitely are strangers in the Sanwi country, as they come from other Agni groups (Bongouanou and Indénié). Access to land therefore rested on shared principles, which legitimized and regulated the land control and the organization of the settlements: (i) the principle, commonly found in African contexts, that labor creates the right on land and (ii) the principle that the anteriority in the arrival creates a legitimacy to regulate the settlement of newcomers. The fact that the “regulators” were acknowledged as those organizing the settlement of newcomers in the forest did not give them rights over the land cleared by these newcomers. They just received the usual bottle of gin, or some liters of *bangui* (palm wine). This lack of socially legitimized right over the uncleared forest explains why one does not find, in Djimini, access to land through the *tutorat* institution: there were no autochthonous hosts, and the first settlers did not turn later into *tuteurs* regarding newcomers, if one defines *tutorat* as an enduring system of social obligations, perpetuated after access to land.

The first Voltaic settler, A.T., a Senoufo, arrived in Djimini-Koffikro in 1933. He was given access to the forest in an area located a few kilometers from Djimini-Koffikro, where he founded a compound, Kongodjan ("remote plot"). Kongodjan was later settled by Voltaic Senoufo and Malinké from Mali; since the sixties it is an independent village. A.T. himself turned into the “regulator” for newcomers who gathered in his compound. As in Djimini, the encounter of the clearing fronts defined the limits between the pioneers’ pieces of land, and no *tutorat* relation was established through access to land. Kongodjan pioneers found themselves soon blocked in their progression in the forest by Abouré who bypassed them when theu settled in what became the village of Petit-Paris. As the old chief of Kongodjan recounts: “*At that time, forest was everywhere, we did not imagine that we could be blocked up. We stayed together in our sector because chimpanzees destroyed our crops; it was easier to keep watch on. Each day the Abouré were passing to enter the forest. When we were asking them what they were doing, they always answered that they were going hunting or collecting fruits. Instead, they were marking trees. When we wanted to clear the forest farther, we realized that the Abouré had taken everything by marking trees, even if the forest was still there. Really, we have been had! If we had known, we would have marked the forest from the beginning, but we did think of doing that, we thought that the forest was plentiful and that we had time to clear it*.” This case shows the encounter of two legitimizing principles in forest appropriation. As in Djimini, Kongodjan pioneers considered that

clearing the forest made the land yours; they were still relying upon a cognitive map which took for granted that land was abundant. Whereas the Abouré newcomers had a clear consciousness of the increasing scarcity of the forest[6] and relied on the principle that you can reserve yourself a place just by marking it. What is interesting is that people from Kongodjan did not contest this second principle; they just regretted not having thought beforehand of using it.

As a result of the conditions of access to land during the pioneer phase, one notes a clear ethnic polarization of land control at the end of that phase:

Table 1. The distribution of land possession at the end of the pioneer phase, according to the planters' ethnic group

	Djimini-Koffikro		Kongodjan		Petit-Paris	
	Acreage (hectares)	Number of estates	Acreage (hectares)	Number of estates	Acreage (hectares)	Number of estates
Abouré	144,7	7	-	-	318	11
Agni	194,6	12	-	-	-	-
Baoulé	415,6	44	-	-	99	2
Nzima	91,1	6	-	-	5	1
Northern Ivorian[1]	55,6	4	-	-	100	5
Other Ivoirian[2]	95,9	11	22	1	40	4
Total Ivorian	997.5 (95%)	84 (94%)	22 (15%)	1 (6%)	562 (96%)	23 (96%)
Voltaic[3]	50,4	5	87	14	22	1
Malian[4]	-	-	40	3	-	-
Total foreigners	50.4 (5%)	5 (6%)	127 (85%)	17 (92%)	22 (4%)	1 (6%)
Total	1047,9	89	149	18	584	24

In Djimini, the data are based on the measurement of all plots in the village. In Kongodjan and Petit-Paris, these results correspond to declarative statements. (1) Malinké, Senoufo; (2) Gban, Yacouba; Attié; (3) Mossi, Senoufo ; (4) Malinké.

As a result of the history of access to land in the three villages, none presents a specific land regulation authority. There is no *chef de terre*, no rituals provided by the first settlers or their descendants. Contrary to what is usually observed in Côte d'Ivoire, none of the first settlers became the first village chief. In the three cases, the chieftaincy looks only as an administrative rung, with no real authority except to deal with minor problems. They just operate as the link between the villagers and the administration – the *subdivision de cercle* of Assinie-Maffia and then Adiaké during the colonial time, the *sous-préfecture* of Adiaké now.

1.2. The pioneers' relief: fighting my cousin rather than the stranger

With the end of the pioneer phase, direct access to land under the conditions that have just been described no longer operated. From then on, access to land property came from inheritance, *inter-vivos* donations or purchase (in the second part of the paper, we will turn to the issue of the delegation of use rights through the tenancy market).

The land market only operated significantly in Djimini, where one third of the total acreage of all land estates have been the subject of at least one transaction; two-thirds of the estates existing at the end of the pioneer phase have been sold partly or totally. Two transactions occurred in Kongodjan (13% of the total acreage of the village's estates) and seven in Petit-Paris (4% of the total acreage possessed at the end of the pioneer phase). Contrary to other regions in Côte d'Ivoire, land sales in the region can be considered as "complete", as "outright sales" (Hill, 1963): the buyer is free from any obligation towards the seller, once the transaction realized. All transactions have been realized outside the legal framework, with in some cases a "formalization" through a simple written receipt. The fact that Djimini-Koffikro was an immigrant village facilitated the constitution of a land market on two accounts: most pioneers could manage their land patrimonies as they wished because these had not been acquired through customary inheritance, and the return of pioneers to their native village prompted the supply on the land market. Most land was indeed sold by planters leaving the village to go back home, or by planters' heirs unwilling to settle in Djimini-Koffikro. With the exception of the Abouré, all ethnic groups have participated in land transactions. This ethnic exception – Petit-Paris shows the same Abouré specificity - can be explained by the proximity of Bonoua and the fact that the pioneer's families would strongly disapprove his selling the land when it was so scarce in Bonoua. In

Petit-Paris, those who sold land were Attié, Baoulé, Gban or Malinké. In the case of Kongodjan, the lack of land sales has to be related to the fact that even if some pioneers went back home, most were replaced by family members (the two sellers were an Attié and a Malinké).

The opening of the land market in Djimini led more to a renewal of the group of the planters than to a land concentration in favor of already settled planters. In this process, the ethnic or national control over land somewhat shifted, part of the buyers originating from Northern Côte d'Ivoire, Mali or Haute-Volta / Burkina Faso:

Table 2. The distribution of land estates in 2002 according to the ethnicity or nationality of the planters

	Djimini-Koffikro		Kongodjan		Petit-Paris	
	Acreage (hectares)	Number of estates	Acreage (hectares)	Number of estates	Acreage (hectares)	Number of estates
Abouré	127,9	11	-	-	317	28
Agni	198,9	21	-	-	-	-
Baoulé	321,9	46	-	-	100	5
Nzima	140	10	-	-	5	1
Northern Ivoirian[1]	125,9	11	113	15	105	4
Other Ivoirian[2]	40,1	3	15	1	26	3
Total Ivorian	954.7 (89%)	102 (84%)	128 (100%)	16 (84.2%)	553 (94%)	41 (89%)
Voltaic/Burkinabè[3]	85,6	14	21	3	28	4
Malian[4]	21,9	5	-	-	6	1
Nigerian	11	1	-	-	-	-
Total foreigners	118.6 (11%)	20 (16%)	21	3	34 (6%)	5 (11%)
Total	1073,3	122	149	19	587	46

Note: between the end of the pioneer phase and 2002, the total acreage controlled by the planters slightly increased through purchases in neighboring villages. (1) Malinké, Senoufo, Tagbana; (2) Yacouba; Attié; (3) Mossi, Senoufo ; (4) Malinké.

A striking result of the table, when compared to the data regarding the end of the pioneer phase, is the transformation of Kongodjan villagers from Voltaic or Malian origin into Ivorian. In the study conducted at the beginning of the eighties, interviewees presented themselves as Senoufo from Haute-Volta or Malinké from Mali. Since then, they got Ivorian identity papers. They now present themselves as Senoufo or Malinké from Kong (North of Côte d'Ivoire). We will later turn back to this issue.

Most land property transfers since the end of the pioneer phase occurred through inheritance and inter-vivos donations. Intra-family tensions and conflicts over these transfers are common. In Djimini-Koffikro, out of the 54 estates over which we have the information at that time, 27 have been affected by an intra-family contestation of land property rights. These tensions are much more frequent in matrilineal groups and become "structural" among the Abouré.

Extra-family land conflict are not uncommon, but concern mainly plots' limits. Compared to other regions of Côte d'Ivoire, contesting one's property right in land by questioning or renegotiating one's past conditions of access to land remains exceptional, even in the current socio-political and legal context. Six cases took place in Djimini, and no case was documented in Kongodjan and Petit-Paris. Five of these conflicts relate to cases in which, at the end of the pioneer phase, planters gave some of the forest reserve they had constituted to wage laborers whom they could not pay at the end of their contract. The conflicts occurred when the former laborers tried to sale the land, or when the heirs of the planters who had "given" the land asked for "gifts". What has to be underlined is that in all these cases, the claims occurred regarding plots of forest which were already clearly appropriated when they were given to the former laborers. The limitation (prohibition of sale) or attempts at getting some belated profit (asking for "tips") could be somehow legitimized because of these conditions –therefore leading to a type of situation which corresponds to what is often observed in Southern Côte d'Ivoire, when natives try to renegotiate the past conditions of migrants' access to land. No such claim has been formulated regarding plots cleared under the "regulation" of the first migrants. Discussions today with the heirs of the first Baoulé pioneers who "installed" the newcomers show that questioning now these past access to the forest is completely out of the question, as it would lack any element of legitimation – whoever got that access, foreigner or Ivorian, Ivorian "from the South" or Ivorian "from the North".

The sixth extra-family conflict over land property rights we mentioned relates to the only contestation of a land sale that occurred in Djimini, Kongodjan or Petit-Paris. The general picture that emerges therefore is one where land rights are frequently contested within the families, but remain quite secure otherwise, even in the present socio-political context. Compared with other regions in Côte d'Ivoire, we interpret this lack of conflict as the result of the absence of autochthons who could present claims over land.

2. The outburst of a tenancy market: the surge of a "Burkinabè tenants *versus* Ivorian landowners" dichotomy

The salient feature of the land issue in the region located between Bonoua and Adiaké is the emergence and dramatic development of a land lease market for pineapple production. This market is grounded in a dichotomy between Burkinabè tenants who grow pineapple and Ivorian landowners leasing out land. The striking observation that can be drawn in this respect is that our study area, in Adiaké *sous-préfecture*, kept out of the conflict that surged in 2001 between the Abouré natives and the Burkinabè tenants in the neighboring Bonoua region.

2.1. The conditions of emergence of a tenancy market and the "Burkinabè tenants versus Ivorian landowners" dichotomy

The emergence of a tenancy market in the region is directly linked to the mutation of the local smallholder plantation economy, combined with a strong immigration flow since the end of the seventies. During the pioneer era, coffee and cocoa plantations were developed over all the area suitable for that purpose. The issue of the renewal of this form of plantation economy emerged as soon as the end of the sixties, with the ageing of the initial plantations. The intervention of different parastatals or private companies which introduced new crops in the region (coconut tree, oil palm tree, rubber, pineapple) re-boosted the local economy. Nowadays, pineapple covers more than 400 hectares over the 1073 hectares of Djimini-Koffikro territory. The dynamics of pineapple production is mostly induced by a "second immigration flow" of people coming from Burkina Faso and having access to land through tenancy contracts. The mutation of the local plantation economy has indeed been accompanied by a strong development of the land lease market, which concerns one-third of the total acreage of the village lands in 2002; 93 estates out of 122 lease out. Almost 80% of the land cultivated in pineapple is leased in, through fixed-rent or sharecropping contracts.

The dichotomy between landowners and landless people is almost complete, as only a small group of people owning land (or whose family owns land) lease in. Due to the history of migration and land appropriation in Djimini, the tenancy market shows a bi-polarization between Burkinabè tenants and Ivorian landowners:

Table 3. Ethnic or national origin of people leasing land in and out in Djimini-Koffikro (2002)

		Landowners leasing out[1]	Tenants	
			Owning land[1]	Landless
Ivorian	Akan group[2]	101	14	-
	Ivorian from the North[3]	12	8	10
	Others[4]	3	-	-
Foreigners	Burkinabè	5	7	125[5]
	Malian	2	5	15
	Others[6]	1	-	9
	Total	124	34	159

(1) Including members of families owning land; (2) Baoulé, Agni, Abouré, Nzima; (3) Tagbana, Senoufo, Malinké; (4) Yacouba, Gban; (5) mostly Mossi (116 over 125); (6) Nigerian (landowner leasing out), natives from Togo and Benin (tenants).

This dichotomy stretches out much further than Djimini-Koffikro. It characterizes in fact the whole area comprised between Adiaké and the Abouré country of Bonoua.

2.2. Ethnic tensions in the land lease market: the Adiaké – Bonoua contrast

2.2.1. Tenancy practices in Adiaké sous-préfecture: a secured informal market

All the landowners leasing out in Djimini and all tenants who live in Djimini and lease in land in Djimini or in other neighboring villages have been interviewed through a detailed survey regarding the problems they might have encountered since they lease out/in. With regard to the importance of leasing practices, the tenancy market comes out as quite secure, even if it remains informal. Out of 124 people leasing out land, only four problems were mentioned (late return of the plot, conflicts over the contractual obligations[7]). The same picture emerges from the tenants' perspective. Over 159 landless producers leasing land in, only 15 conflicts were documented[8] (when a landowner leases out the same plot to two different tenants, or try to takes his plot back before the full harvest of the shoots, etc.). The tenancy market in the area is then quite secure.

The formalization of the contracts through a written paper is often seen in the literature as an efficient device to facilitate their enforcement. It is also recognized as such by both landowners and tenants in Djimini. However, "making a paper"[9] is not (yet?) a general practice (it concerns 11% of the contracts). In contrast, the presence of witnesses is almost systematic. The fact of not making a paper, when such a practice is presented as desirable in general conversation, can be explained by the combination of two registers: a paper is considered as unnecessary when people trust each other, and the social relationship is such that asking for a paper is often seen as totally inappropriate. Many tenants state it that way: "*I know my landowners very well; they are old people so asking them to make a paper would be as if I do not respect them*." Not asking for a paper does not always signify a trusting relationship, it can also reflect a concern for not creating distrust: "*I do not ask for a paper because I do not want the landowner to think that I distrust him."* The partner is usually not an unknown person and a screening process, on the basis of personal experience of reputation, is usually seen as efficient by the actors in order to prevent conflicts.

The lack of conflicts regarding tenancy practices does not preclude a perceptible resentment against Burkinabè tenants. This resentment found all its expression in the troubles that occurred in Bonoua in 2001.

2.2.2. From intra-family tensions to inter-ethnic conflict: The Abouré-Burkinabè conflict in Bonoua

In 2001, a conflict erupted in the Abouré country of Bonoua, opposing Abouré and foreigners – mostly Burkinabè. On January 16, 2001 a young Abouré had an argument in the Bonoua market with one of Burkinabè watchmen. As the Abouré ended up knocked out, the news spread out immediately and Abouré youngsters rose up and destroyed more than seventy foreigners' shops. In the following days, the Abouré youths organized a general meeting which culminated with a note that they handed over to the Bonoua *sous-préfecture* and to the Abouré King's Court. This note pretended to establish a set of restrictive rules regarding foreigners in the Abouré country: among other things, it imposed a curfew on them, declared an Abouré monopoly over all trading and transport activities, prohibited marriage between Abouré and foreigners, and prohibited leasing out them land - all demands were rejected as illegal by the *sous-préfecture*. However, this attempt of redefining the relationship with the non-Ivorian was already on its way even before the market incident. In September 2000, a "reflection seminar" of the *Association des ressortissants de Bonoua*[10] dealt with "The evolution and adaptation of the customs to the reality of social life in Bonoua", stating that "*leasing out land directly to non-Ivorian is forbidden.*" That report was signed by the King of the Abouré, the chiefs of the age sets and neighborhoods, and by *notables*.

What happened in Bonoua finds its roots in a strong resentment against the Burkinabè. The following interview, realized in August 2001, greatly illustrates the general discourse one hears throughout the region, when discussing with young people whose families own land – Abouré in Bonoua, but also Baoulé or Agni in Djimini. That discourse expresses a boiling resentment against the Burkinabè, whose economic success is particularly hard to come to terms with. The economic success of some

Burkinabè pineapple growers is indeed quite perceptible: some have bought a tractor, a truck, a car. They employ wage annual laborers that they bring from Burkina Faso – whereas Abouré, Baoulé or Agni planters do not any longer find such type of laborer and have to contract laborers on a daighly or piece-rate base, much more expensive. The bitter observation is then "*look at this guy… when he arrived, nine years ago, I employed him to weed my fields, and now he drives a Pajero…*" "*The problem with the Burkinabè is that they have to stop pineapple business, they earn too much money! They go back home with the money; over 1000 Burkinabè in Djimini, how many have built a house here? Over all Djimini there are only two. They show no respect for us. They do not contribute to the life of the village. They have children but they send their girls back home, so they should leave our women in peace! Because they earn of lot of money, they can pay 25 000 to sleep with a girl here. As long as they behave this way and show that lack of respect, there won't be a solution to the problem. The Burkinabè do not want to work* [for us as wage laborers]. *If we take back the land, they will have to work…*".

Anyone familiar with the literature dealing with the autochthon – migrant relationships in Southern Côte d'Ivoire would have noticed familiar arguments. Some decades ago, or even more recently, the accusing finger was pointed in the same way at Baoulé migrants: they invest at home the money they earn locally, they do not build a house in the village, they show no interest in the village affairs, they show no respect… (see Dupire, 1960; Köbben, 1963; Hecht, 1985). Nowadays in the region, the Baoulé have been substituted by the Burkinabè, the tension is rooted in land lease rather than in land appropriation rights, but the economic dynamism of (new) migrants remains the invariant crystallization factor of resentment.

One has to point out an issue more specific to the Abouré group: the intra-family "sharing out of the pie." A frequent complaint expressed by the young Abouré is that the elders lease out too much of the land they inherited. At first, the argument is "*we don't have enough land to work*", but it quickly boils down to "*our old men keep the money for themselves*". This issue is particularly exacerbated among the Abouré because of the high tensions around inheritance and the management of inherited land that characterize that society. In other word, the Abouré-Burkinabè conflict over land lease reflects to a large extent intra-family tensions among the autochthonous population and, more generally, the issue of intra-family land access and management in the Abouré society.

The first semester of the year 2001 was hence marqued by troubles in the Bonoua region around plots of land leased in by Burkinabè pineapple growers. Recently planted shoots were pulled up in some parcels and the young Abouré stuck red flags or red sticks in plots which were being prepared for planting, when they suspected that these plots were leased in by Burkinabè planters. The message was clear: do not plant pineapple or the plantation will be destroyed. These troubles did not spread out to the Adiaké *sous-préfecture*, i.e., outside the Abouré country, but they did affect Burkinabè planters who leased in plots in "Abouré territory" and lived in the Adiaké *sous-préfecture*. In Djimini, 27 planters were concerned: 15 got the red flag and 12 had their plantation destroyed. The situation calmed down after some months and the pineapple production resumed for most planters.

How can the contrast between the region of Adiaké, kept out of that conflict, and Bonoua, be explained ? The argument put forward by Burkinabè as well as by Baoulé or Agni is that "*here, it is not Abouré land, the Abouré have no strength*." This point captures different ideas: the fact that there is no adhesion of non-Abouré regarding what Abouré youngsters did (which does not mean that there is empathy towards Burkinabè tenants); the fact that the Abouré are not in a position of strength, demographically and politically, in the area; the fact that the Adiaké *sous-préfecture* intervened to prevent the spread of violence in its jurisdiction.

3. The current situation: The lull before the storm?

Since the 2001 events, no inter-ethnic conflict has been documented in the region between Ivorian and foreigners as well as between Ivorian from distinct origins. Everywhere in our research area as well as

in Bonoua, a flat calm reigns. Whomever one speaks to, one hears at first the same discourse: "Everything here is OK, there is no problem".

Regarding the "Abouré-Burkinabè problem", the interplay of interests at stake seems to prevail. From the Burkinabè perspective, there is no alternative source of income that could be compared with pineapple production. From the Abouré perspective, two registers of interests intervene: the land rent, regarding the landowners leasing out, and the trading margin the cooperatives and private brokers get from buying the production of Burkinabè small planters and exporting it to Europe. The Abouré from Bonoua have largely contributed to the creation of these cooperatives, or invested them. The 2001 crisis ended up in the reduction of production and delays in the production plans prejudicial to the cooperatives or brokers. Huge financial interests are at stake. As commented a Mossi grower in Tchintchébé (a compound close to Bonoua) in September 2003: "*The pulling up of shoots has completely stopped. They themselves* [the Abouré] *want us to continue hard. If you need a plot to rent, you can find it right now everywhere. At that time it was hot, but thanks to God everybody has understood. That's something they did not catch: we plant, they buy, they transport, they export… If we don't work what are they going to do? Today brokers try to find fruits and they have problems, we are all behind schedule*[11]*. So there is no problem with them* [the Abouré]."

Turning to the local impact of the country socio-political situation, no single inter-ethnic conflict has occurred. The following interview, realized with a Baoulé planter in Djimini, illustrates the general first reaction of "Central and Southern Ivorian": "*There has been no problem here. Here in Djimini we did not lay a finger on foreigners. Anyway, they did behave in a good way. No one stood up to say that the rebellion was a good thing; no Mossi had bad-tempered gesture. Really the Burkinabè behaved well*." What appears clearly however, when pursuing the discussions, is that the resentment against Burkinabè – mainly Mossi – expressed before the September 2002 events is stronger than ever. The idea of refusing to lease them land often crops up when discussing with youngsters whose family owns land: "*When the old men would have died, we the youngsters we won't lease out any longer land to Burkinabè*". Some of them however are more realistic: "*It is said that we should not lease out land to Burkinabè but I say that it is not possible because when you lease out you have a reason. If today is the start of the new school year, if I have no money to send my children to school and if a Burkinabè comes to see me, I tell him OK, give me 100 000, and nobody can stop me*." The desire to break the basis of the economic success of the Burkinabè pineapple growers clearly conflicts with short term monetary needs… Indeed, those claiming that in a near future no land will be leased out to Burkinabè are themselves quite active now as suppliers on that market. One might expect such a dissonance to fuel even more the resentment against the Burkinabè.

In addition to this economic-grounded tension, a political dimension is now added, as Burkina Faso is blamed for the September 2002 rebellion. Very quickly the possibility of a local open conflict pops up: following the statement that "our strangers behave well", one hears such discourse: "*If they didn't, if there is a move, if we feel here that they support the rebels… well, there is a camp of marine-commandos in Adiaké. They come often here and told us to inform them in case of trouble. So they* [the Mossi] *behave well... If there is a move there won't be any forgiveness. Really our strangers behaved well…*" "*When you discuss with youngsters, you see that they just wait for any spark in Djimini. They just wait for a Burkinabè to make a foolish mistake. Any spark and they start the fire. The Burkinabè know that, they understand and they do everything in order to have no fight with a young man from Djimini. They stay very calm, they refuse to have an argument. This could happen right now, suppose it is 6 p.m. and we hear that a Burkinabè head butted a Baoulé or an Agni during a football game, immediately all the Burkinabè will be attacked. It could turn bad here*." The Burkinabè we met are indeed aware of the potential risk of violent conflict and express a strong feeling of insecurity. A lot of them have repatriated their families to Burkina Faso – some had already done that during the 2001 events. They reduce their movements outside the village at a minimum, as well as contacts with Ivorian people. A wall of silence seems to surround the region.

The fact that Senoufo and Malinké from Kongodjan no longer recognize their Burkinabè or Malian origin is not a trivial matter. Anyway, they are still considered as foreigners by "Central and Southern"

as well as “Northern” Ivorian from Djimini, the distinction being made explicitly between “true Northern Ivorian” and Burkinabè or Malian. However, nobody questions their rights over land; the issue remains directly linked to the current political context.

Conclusion

The historical analysis has shown that the lack of customary framework did not mean really an institutional vacuum, as principles (elements of any “informal” institutional environment) shared by migrants of different origins avoided to transform the pioneer phase into a chaos. The condition of access to land during the pioneer phase (no “customary” land right holders, no *tutorat* institution), the lack of autochthonous land stake and the character of outright sales of land transactions explain the lack (or the very exceptional) of extra-family questioning of land rights.

The development of a tenancy market introduced the national origin as a discriminating factor in land practices and as such builded up the arena for a potential inter-ethnic tension. This tension does exist. It is rooted less in the tenancy transactions as such than in the Burkinabè’s economic success with pineapple production on leased land. This factor, combining with the strength of the organization of the Abouré society in Bonoua, led to the temporary attempt to evict Burkinabè tenants – while Adiaké sous-préfecture stayed out of that movement. However, the explicit temptation to create an ethnic segmentation of the tenancy market – “we will not lease out any longer to Mossi” – collides with the weight of short-term economic interest.

Since September 2002, the national socio-political situation gave more strength to that resentment, due to the perception of the role of Burkina Faso in the Ivorian crisis. The ingredients are ready for serious troubles, but up to now the tension has not translated into any open conflict. The future of this local situation largely rests on the capacity of the local administration (*sous-préfecture*) to prevent things from getting out of hand, as well as on the will and capacity of the “national reconciliation government” to solve the crisis through a political process.

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Notes

[1] J.-Ph. Colin is senior researcher, Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, Montpellier, France & Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, associated to the UMR MOÏSA, Montpellier (colin@ensam.inra.fr). G. Kouamé and D. Soro are PhD students, Institut d'Ethno-sociologie, Université de Cocody, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, members of the *Laboratoire d'Etudes Foncières de Côte d'Ivoire*. This research has been founded by IRD and by the European project CLAIMS (Changes in Land Access, Institutions and Markets in West Africa). A first and more detailed version of this paper was presented at the 46th meeting of the African Studies Association, Boston, October 30 – November 2, 2003.

[2] In local terminology, "black forest" designates a forest which has never been cut down in living memory. It is considered to be particularly suitable to develop coffee and cocoa plantations.

[3] Dioula is a generic term to refer to muslim people from Northern Côte d'Ivoire or Mali, mostly Malinké.

[4] The Agni, as the Baoulé, are part of the large Akan group. The Eotilé, the Abouré, the Nzima, belong to the *lagunaire* (lagoon) sub-group, also from the Akan group. The Senoufo group originates from northern Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Mali.

[5] The Gagou (or Gban) originate from the West-Center and the Yacouba from the West of Côte d'Ivoire.

[6] The Abouré had been driven back into a savannah region by the Agni. They had a very limited acreage of soils suited for coffee and cocoa cultivation – their neighbors called them *Ehounva*, landless men (Rougerie, 1957).

[7] Leasing out land might, in some situations, involve a risk, for the owner, of seeing his property right over that plot questioned (Lyne *et al.,* 1994; Kevane, 1997). This risk is totally absent in the region.

[8] We will deal later with the specific "Abouré problem" which did impact a number of pineapple growers living in Djimini and leasing some land in the Bonoua area.

[9] These papers usually indicate the identity of the parties, the name of the witnesses, and the amount paid. The plot localization and the duration of the contract are almost never mentioned.

[10] Association of people originated from Bonoua, including students or executives who live in Abidjan.

[11] November and December constitute the peak season for pineapple exports. The growers who do not export via cooperatives sell their production to brokers, who have to make anticipated deals with the planters in order to respect boat freight previsions (otherwise they have to pay for unutilized cargo capacity they have reserved).