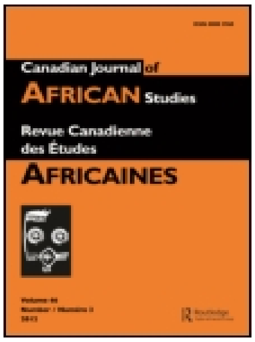

Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines

ISSN: 0008-3968 (Print) 1923-3051 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcas20

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To cite this article: Jeremy Speight (2014) Warlord undone? Strongman politics and post-conflict state-building in Northeastern Côte d'Ivoire (2002–2013), Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines, 48:2, 223-241

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2014.943136

Published online: 06 Feb 2015.

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Canadian Journal of African Studies/ La Revue canadienne des études africaines, 2014
Vol. 48, No. 2, 223–241, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2014.943136

Warlord undone? Strongman politics and post-conflict state-building in Northeastern Côte d'Ivoire (2002–2013)

Jeremy Speight*

Department of Political Science, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada

Résumé

Cet article examine le rôle joué par les hommes forts de la reconstruction post-conflit de la Côte d'Ivoire. Bien que de nombreuses personnes reconnaissent l'influence sans entrave, voire renforcée, dont jouissent souvent ces acteurs grâce à leur relation avec l'État dans les contextes post-conflit, les débats existants en Côte d'Ivoire, ainsi qu'ailleurs, continuent souvent d'être formulés en termes des implications des relations de ce type. Le fait de travailler avec des hommes forts ruraux associés à des insurrections antérieures renforce-t-il l'autorité de l'État central ? Ou bien les alliances de ce type amoindrissent-elles les institutions publiques capables d'introduire un ordre politique à long terme dans les zones périphériques ? Cet article minimise ces questions. Au lieu de cela, il examine les alliances qui se forment entre les hommes forts et d'autres acteurs en situations de conflit concernant l'autorité durant la reconstruction post-conflit. Il suggère que la configuration précise de ces alliances a une importance au moment de déterminer l'utilité de s'allier à des hommes forts locaux durant les transitions guerre-paix. Cet article examine ces luttes à travers le cas de Morou Ouattara et de l'administration des Forces Nouvelles (FN) à Bouna, nord-est de la Côte d'Ivoire.

Abstract

This article examines the role played by strongmen in Côte d'Ivoire's post-conflict reconstruction. While many acknowledge the unhindered or even the enhanced political influence these actors often enjoy as a result of their relationship to the state in post-conflict contexts, existing debates in Côte d'Ivoire, as well as elsewhere, often remain couched in terms of the implications of these kinds of relationships. Does working with rural strongmen tied to former insurgencies enhance the authority of the central state? Or do such alliances wither state institutions capable of providing long-term political order in peripheral areas? This article downplays these questions. Instead, it examines the alliances which form between strongmen and other actors amidst conflicts over local authority during post-conflict reconstruction. It suggests that the specific configuration of these alliances matter in determining the utility of allying with local strongmen during war to peace transitions. This article examines these struggles through the case of Morou Ouattara and the local *Forces Nouvelles* (FN) administration in Bouna, Northeastern Côte d'Ivoire.

Keywords: Côte d'Ivoire; warlordism; civil war; post-conflict; authority

In Africa, as elsewhere, rural constituencies have played integral roles in the construction and maintenance of political order during the post-colonial period. In reference to the political challenges confronted by African leaders after the introduction of multiparty politics in the 1990s, Catherine Boone has argued that rural elites and their backers provided the "ballast they needed" to defend themselves against political challenges posed

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*Email: speight.jeremy6@gmail.com

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by rivals based in urban areas (2003, 318). Mobilising the support of key constituencies in rural areas becomes equally as important in post-conflict contexts after civil war, when the stability of national-level coalitions forged between former combatants are at their most precarious (Spears 2000). In diverse cases of post-conflict reconstruction, "warlords" – or strongmen tied to former armed challenges to the state – have emerged as strategic allies for leaders looking to extend the reach of their authority (Giustozzi 2003, 2007; Marten 2006/07, 2012; Beswick 2009; Mukhopadhyay 2009; Reno 2009a, 2009b; Utas 2012).[1]

Current debates surrounding the role of warlords or strongmen amidst post-conflict reconstruction are couched principally in terms of the *implications* of these kinds of relationship (see Marten 2006/07, 2012; Beswick 2009; Mukhopadhyay 2009; Reno 2009a, 2009b). Does working with strongmen tied to former armed groups enhance the authority of the central state? Or do such alliances wither state institutions capable of providing long-term political order in peripheral areas? The appropriate role of rural strongmen in processes of post-conflict reconstruction is currently the subject of heated debate in contemporary Côte d'Ivoire. In early October 2012, three former *Forces Nouvelles* (FN) commanders were named as administrative *préfets* in different regions across Côte d'Ivoire by Ivoirian president, Alassane Ouattara. These moves complement the preceding appointments by Ouattara of former FN leaders Chérif Ousmane as the second in command responsible for presidential security (*Group de sécurité de la Presidence de la République*) and Fofié Martin as the head of the military company (*Compagnie territoriale*) in Korhogo in Northern Côte d'Ivoire (see Mieu 2012). For Ouattara, drawing on the support of former FN commanders stems largely from the ongoing political clout many of them still enjoy. However, these appointments have come under some criticism largely because of the human rights violations committed by many of the FN's former military leadership while in control of the North, as well as during the final assault on Gbagbo's forces in Abidjan and the West in the last days of the rebellion (International Crisis Group 2006, 7; Human Rights Watch 2011). Observers have been critical of the decision to politically reward those accused of perpetrating these acts. In the longer term, it is suggested that efforts at reconciliation could very well be endangered by not holding these actors accountable for their role in the violence.

Yet an overwhelming focus on the implications of relationships that form between central states and local strongmen in post-conflict settings misses the intense struggles over power and authority in which these actors are often themselves enmeshed at local levels. Armed conflict and violence commonly create opportunities for significant political and social change (Wood 2008). Accumulation of diverse material, social and symbolic resources during conflict periods make strongmen tied to armed movements a credible threat to established social and political hierarchies (Wood 2008, 550; Englebert 2009, Ch. 5; Peters 2011). However, the challenge they pose to these power structures rarely goes uncontested. Existing elites often retain substantial clout even during conflict periods and can mobilise support in defence of their pre-conflict political positions. The stakes of these debates are decidedly heightened amidst post-conflict transitions, as different actors and groups attempt to shape the institutional design of the post-conflict state, to their own advantage and the advantage of their political backers (Tull 2010; Raeymaekers 2013, 613). Where, as in Côte d'Ivoire, transitions are accompanied by post-conflict elections, different social groups commonly "perceive the transition from war to democratic politics as a fresh start, a defining moment that may provide a unique opportunity to make claims and to shape the reconstruction project" (Tull 2010, 644). What are the lines of contestation that underpin these debates? What alliances are formed in the process of claims making? In sum, if state structures are but particular political arrangements that are subject to ongoing processes of political renegotiation, of significance are the processes by which "hegemonic constellations of power" form during these transitions (Lund 2006, 698).

This article examines the struggles unleashed by post-conflict transitions through the case of the local FN administration based in Bouna, Northeastern Côte d'Ivoire. The case of the FN in Bouna is illustrative because of the degree to which the town's occupation by the northern rebellion was openly reviled by many of its residents.[2] Much of the Lobi community in Bouna (the largest ethnic group in Northeastern Côte d'Ivoire) were particularly resentful. Many Lobi felt that they were the specific targets of the tax regime installed by the rebels. These tensions were reinforced by the conflict between the FN zone commander[3] in Bouna, Morou Ouattara, and the prominent Lobi politician and long-time Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) member, Palé Dimaté, which endured throughout the crisis period. Growing frustration with the local branch of the northern rebellion ultimately resulted in a 2007 tax revolt led by a number of Lobi youth.

This article represents part of a larger research project examining the local politics of rebel government. It is based on interviews and archival work conducted in Abidjan and in different sites across Northern Côte d'Ivoire between August 2010 and March 2011. The first part of this article provides a quick historical summary of the Ivoirian crisis, leading up to Laurent Gbagbo's forced removal by domestic and international forces in April 2011. The second half of this article shifts the focus to the local level, and examines changes in the pre-conflict relationship between the two prominent groups in this part of the North: the "native" Koulongo and the Lobi, who have arrived in growing numbers since the beginning of the twentieth century. The following three sections link the broader political effects of the rebellion (in terms of marginalising the Lobi community) in the Ivoirian Northeast (Section III) to the elite conflicts that manifested as result, between Ouattara and Dimaté during the conflict and post-conflict periods (Sections IV and V). The conclusion offers some initial thoughts regarding how the case of the FN in Bouna contributes to existing debates surrounding warlordism and post-conflict transitions.

I. The "Ivoirian crisis" and the politics of post-conflict state-building in Northern Côte d'Ivoire

Côte d'Ivoire was once the model for economic growth and political stability in sub-Saharan Africa. Under the tutelage of the country's long-time president, Felix Houphouët-Boigny, and the PDCI one-party state, Côte d'Ivoire became a world leader in the production and exportation of cocoa. As a means of developing the cocoa sector, Houphouët-Boigny promoted migration to the cocoa-growing regions of the Southwest. Beginning in the colonial period, successive waves of migrants – Baoulé migrants from the centre of the country and, later, migrants from the Ivoirian North and elsewhere in West Africa – constituted the basis of the smallholder production responsible for much of Côte d'Ivoire's economic growth during the post-colonial period. Not surprisingly, migrants would form the principal political constituency supporting the PDCI in this part of the country (Boone 1995; Chauveau 2000; Woods 2003).

Migration heightened tensions between newcomers and groups indigenous to the Southwest. Contributing to these tensions was the fact that migrants were gaining increasing control over the use and allocation of land at the expense of autochthonous groups. Nonetheless, open dissent against the single party was for the most part contained as long as urban employment and education were made accessible by the government for younger generations, particularly for those from the Southwest. However, by the 1980s reduced global commodity prices, over-borrowing from international lenders and an overall decline in commodity production ultimately culminated in the reluctant acceptance of an IMF loan. The restructuring of the public sector that followed greatly reduced the ability of the PDCI to buy off the support of urban groups. As a result, many young people returned to the rural areas of the southwest only to find that much of the land was already in the hands of migrant groups (Sall 2004, 603). The old cleavages deriving from the political strategies employed by the old single party during the early post-colonial period came to the fore in 1990 after the PDCI handily won Côte d'Ivoire's first multiparty elections. The principal opposition party running against the PDCI, the *Front Populaire Ivoirian*, led by Laurent Gbagbo, contested the victory, claiming that Houphouët-Boigny had relied on the votes received from "foreigners" to steal the election (Fauré 1993, 326; Crook 1997, 222; Woods 2003, 649).

These tensions intensified after the death of Houphouët-Boigny in 1993. The emergence of a new party, the *Rassemblement de Républicains* (RDR) and Houphouët-Boigny's former prime minister, Alassane Ouattara, as potential contender for the presidency forced the former president's constitutional heir, Henri Konan Bedié, to take drastic action to marginalise the "northern" threat Ouattara and the RDR posed. Bedié's introduction of the nationalist notion of *ivoirité* (that Ivoirian citizenship should be based on belonging to a group native to Côte d'Ivoire, not residency) represented a thinly veiled attack on Ouattara, the RDR and their backers, specifically "northern" or immigrant voters. Ultimately, Ouattara was prevented from running in both the 1995 and 2000 elections. Bedié was eventually ousted in a coup d'état in 1999 led by General Robert Guëi. Guëi himself was chased from power after massive demonstrations when he declared himself victor in the 2000 elections. Gbagbo subsequently assumed the presidency despite the fact that two of his principal opponents, Ouattara and Bedié, were prevented from running. The PDCI and RDR immediately called for a fresh set of elections. However, Gbagbo remained in power and continued to attack perceived supporters of Ouattara and the RDR. In September 2002, a group of Ivoirian exiles based in Burkina Faso, many of whom were former Ivoirian army officers and victims of the crackdown against Gbagbo's opponents, organised a simultaneous attack on three major cities in Côte d'Ivoire: Korhogo, Bouaké and Abidjan. Although the attack on Abidjan failed, the rebels retained control over Korhogo and Bouaké, effectively partitioning the country in two. In November of the same year, two movements emerged in the Western part of the country – the *Mouvement pour la justice et la paix* (MJP) and the *Mouvement populaire Ivoirian du Grand Ouest* (MPIGO) – to join the original group involved in the September attacks, the *Mouvement patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire* (MPCI). By December 2002, the MJP, MPIGO and the MPCI had formed a coalition – the *Forces Nouvelles* – under the leadership of the former student leader, Guillaume Soro (International Crisis Group 2003, 2–8).

As a result of what would be a series of failed efforts to peaceably resolve the conflict, the FN remained in control of the northern half of the country for the better part of the decade, leading up to the 2010 presidential elections. Buoyed by the support given to him by Bedié and the PDCI, Ouattara emerged as the victor in the second round of these elections, garnering 54 per cent of the vote.[4] However, soon after the announcement of Ouattara's victory by Côte d'Ivoire's independent electoral commission, the courts nullified the results, citing voting irregularities in the north that had skewed the results in Ouattara's favour. Votes cast in the northern departments under question were subtracted from the original total, which then swung in favour of Gbagbo, with 51.45 per cent of the vote. Gbagbo was subsequently sworn in as president by the courts on 4 December 2010.

After a four-month stalemate following Gbagbo's refusal to cede power, the rebels, newly-named the *Forces Républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire* (FRCI), with support from the *Opération des Nations unies en Côte d'Ivoire* (ONUCI) and French forces, launched an attack on the southern half of the country on 28 March 2011. By 3 April, the FRCI controlled the entire country. Ouattara gained sole control over the presidency on 11 April 2011 (Bassett 2011, 472–478).

The removal of Gbagbo and the ascendency of Ouattara to the presidency provoked significant changes in the balance of power between different groups at local levels throughout Côte d'Ivoire. Gbagbo's fall left the FN's zone commanders with little justification for maintaining control over the north. Nonetheless, it should be stressed that the enduring political clout of these actors became the subject of intense debate well before the forced removal of Laurent Gbagbo. Since the signing of the Ouagadougou Peace Accords (OPA) in 2007, the redeployment of state institutions represented a key goal in moving the peace process forward. In 2008, Gbagbo and Guillaume Soro, the former leader of the FN, signed an agreement that officially transferred local administrative and financial powers from military *com'zones* established by the former rebels throughout the north, to the bureaucratic agents of the central state. For Gbagbo, this agreement represented the beginning of the end of the power of the *com'zones* ("*mettre fin au pouvoirs des 'com'zones'* ") (AFP 2009a). For Soro, efforts at state reconstruction in the north represented a sensitive political issue that challenged his ability to balance his dual role as both the neutral broker of peace *and* the leader of the former rebellion.

Efforts at state reconstruction in Northern Côte d'Ivoire after the signing of the OPA, and continuing after the removal of Laurent Gbagbo highlight the tensions inherent in the process of post-conflict state-building. The rebuilding of effective political institutions after civil war is viewed by the international community as a necessary step before the holding of elections during post-conflict transitions (Paris 2004; Paris and Sisk 2009). In Côte d'Ivoire, these twin goals were very much at odds. For Gbagbo, the disarmament of the FN and the transferring of political and military powers from the *com'zones* to the bureaucratic agents of the central state were seen as a necessary precondition for the holding of elections. However, the pace of reform in the north was slowed by the widespread suspicion of Gbagbo's intentions, felt by many within the FN, as well as the stakes many of these actors had in retaining political control over the north. Soro himself was caught between these two sides. As prime minister, Soro was forced to play the role as neutral arbiter between the FN and Gbagbo's government; his legitimacy rested on the continued perception that he was facilitating the peace process. Yet, Soro also needed to appease the interests of other powerful actors within the FN. Indeed, Soro's efforts to hasten the process of administrative reunification were commonly met with criticism from a number of former members of the old rebellion (Coulibaly 2008; Didi 2008; Stanislas 2008; Kouamé 2009). Alassane Ouattara inherited a similar challenge in balancing the political demands of much of the former rebel leadership with international and domestic calls for justice regarding the human rights violations committed by many within this same group. The key point here is that the continued position of these actors did not simply rest on their desire to retain their local positions of authority, or even the desire of national-level actors (Gbagbo or Ouattara) to enact these institutional reforms. Decisions to draw on the authority of former FN commanders were also determined by important dynamics and processes at the local level that had their roots in the crisis period. In the Ivoirian northeast, the inability of zone commander, Morou Ouattara, to mobilise support for his authority in this part of the north became increasingly clear during the early stages of Côte d'Ivoire's "post-conflict" transition.

II. The history of Lobi/Koulongo relations in Northeastern Côte d'Ivoire

Bouna was founded in the mid-sixteenth century, and would become one of a number of powerful city-states emerging in West Africa during this period (Boutillier 1969, 4, 8, 1993, 22–24, 29–31). The countryside surrounding Bouna is inhabited by a number of ethnic groups, including the native Koulongo as well as Lobi, Peul and Malinké migrants. Pre-colonial dynastic Bouna was hierarchically organised. The king, the Bouna *isié*, maintained centralised control and political cohesion of the monarchy through a number of mechanisms, including a system of intra-elite power-sharing and hierarchical networks of chieftaincies appointed by the king (Boutillier 1969, 4, 1993, Ch. 5, 211–218).

Although it is the Koulongo who are considered "native" to Bouna and the surrounding countryside, Lobi migrants make up the largest portion of the current population. Historically, the Lobi have occupied a shifting territorial space crossing the borders that now separate Burkina Faso, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Lobi migration to Northeastern Côte d'Ivoire from Burkina Faso did not commence until the late nineteenth century after the Franco-Samory war (1882–1898) and the beginnings of formal colonialism in French West Africa (Fiéloux 1980, 25; Savonnet 1986, 5; De Rouville 1987, 51; Kambou-Ferrand 1993, 85–86). In contrast to the Koulongo, there are few actors, within and beyond the village, capable of wielding legitimate authority over others in Lobi communities. Adding to these challenges, Lobi villages themselves are small and spatially dispersed (Savonnet 1962, 12, 1986, 12; De Rouville 1987, 14; Bonnafé and Fiéloux 1993, 110). Indeed, governing the Lobi – extracting economic surplus, controlling population movements and limiting the use of violence – has represented an enduring challenge for French and Ivoirian administrators during both the colonial and post-colonial periods (Fiéloux 1980, 27; Kambou-Ferrand 1993, 17).

Tensions between the Lobi and the Koulongo grew over the twentieth century as a result of a number of broad inter-related historical processes. The first was demographic: during this period the Lobi became the numerically dominant group throughout the Ivoirian northeast. After Bouna was invaded and destroyed by Samory Touré's *sofa* army, its population drastically declined from an estimated 10,000 to no more than 1000 by 1904. The majority of surrounding villages in rural areas simply ceased to exist (Boutillier 1993, 135–137). Population growth after the Franco–Samory wars and the advent of formal French colonial rule was largely a result of Lobi migration. Between 1904 and 1980, Boutillier estimated that Bouna's Koulongo/Dyula population increased incrementally from 5250 to 7000, while the number of Lobi living in the region rose far more dramatically, from 5000 to 45,000 (Boutillier 1993, 370).[5] Increased Lobi migration coupled with environmental pressures (land degradation, drought) heightened competition over land between these two groups (Savonnet 1986, 25–26, 50–52; Chaléard 1996, 421–422; 1998, 482).

Largely because of their demographic superiority in the countryside, the Lobi also slowly emerged as the dominant economic group. In 1990, Chaléard reported that the Lobi accounted for approximately 98 per cent of all profits derived from yam sales, the region's most important export crop (1990, 133). Growing inequalities between these two groups resulting from the production and exportation of yam further undermined Koulongo authority over land. Growth in the sale of yam allowed Lobi migrants to politically challenge Koulongo chiefs. In some cases Lobi settlers refused to pay Koulongo chiefs for the use of land. In others, Lobi leaders began appropriating the role traditionally played by Koulongo chiefs in the allocation of land (Chaléard 1998, 482–483). Yam sales also allowed aspiring Lobi politicians to build connections with national-level actors, and further circumvent the authority of Koulongo chiefs. By the late 1980s, many middle-aged Lobi family heads who were capable of supporting larger family units through yam sales increasingly began to monopolise political positions such as village chiefs, heads of collective work projects – *Groupements à Vocation Coopérative* (GVCs) – and the local branches of the old single party, the PDCI (Chaléard 1996, 425). All of these changes – demographic, economic and political – collectively contributed to a straining of the relationship between these two groups over the twentieth century by reversing the traditional hierarchical relationship between stranger and host.

III. Bouna's wartime order

One of the striking features of the FN in Bouna appeared to be how the movement positioned itself very differently vis-à-vis local struggles surrounding autochthony and belonging, compared to elsewhere in Côte d'Ivoire. For much of the movement's leadership, armed opposition to Laurent Gbagbo was originally justified as a means of defending those *allogènes* targeted through government-led efforts at restricting Ivoirian citizenship. In other parts of the country, autochthones were commonly the political *targets* of the northern rebellion because these were the constituencies from which Gbagbo drew much of his support. In the region around Man, native groups such as the Guéré and the Wobé were commonly viewed with suspicion by the rebels. Not surprisingly, these groups often demonstrated reluctance to support the rebellion and, in some instances, organised armed resistance directly against it (Heitz 2013, 64, 204–205). In contrast to Man, the cleavages driving the conflict at the national level aligned with local debates over belonging in a far more counter-intuitive way in Bouna. Overall, the FN appeared to target the Lobi and other non-native groups to Bouna in Northeastern Côte d'Ivoire. During the conflict period, many in the Lobi community felt that the conflict and the installation of the FN administration burdened their community disproportionately and represented a means by which the Koulongo could temporarily check the gap in political and economic power that had been growing between these two communities since before independence. Part of this stemmed from the ethnic make-up of the FN in Bouna. Although most of the movement's leadership were Senoufo (from the central part of the north, around Korhogo), Morou Ouattara, the region's zone commander, was a Koulongo from Doropo, just north of Bouna. Yet, similar to the case of Man, it appears unlikely that these acts were driven by "ethnic" considerations per se (Heitz 2013, 204), but rather a combination of the facts that the Lobi were the demographically and economically dominant group *and* the political affiliation of many of the most prominent Lobi elites was with the PDCI.[6] Overall, it seems that strategic considerations trumped the position taken by the rebels on debates surrounding political community and belonging in this part of the north. This section briefly explores the political tensions generated by the movement.

Like other parts of the north that came under control of the FN after the beginning of the civil war, criticism of the rebels in Bouna frequently focused on the extensive set of roadblocks and taxes they had put in place. Monthly taxes were levied on shopkeepers in the city centre. Trucks carrying yams or cashews passing through the city were expected to pay entrance and exit fees. Individuals were required to pay small sums at checkpoints around the perimeter of the city (Abalo 2007; Kouamé 2007a). Beyond the actual cost of these exactions, many within the Lobi community were critical of the rebels because they felt they were the specific target of this system of taxation. It is difficult to tell if this was actually the case, or if it appeared to be because the Lobi were simply the economically and demographically dominant group. Regardless, this was the suggestion made by many:

> When they come into the city today it is the Lobi as a group who are against the rebels, since it is the rebels who are present in the corridor and it is the Lobi who have the money. It is the Lobi who have suffered a lot by the presence of the rebellion, as a result of the rebellion. They have been broken, bullied and exploited by the rebellion. (NGO worker, Bouna, 22 January 2011)[7]

> Since the beginning of the rebellion, the Lobi, who come to the market every Sunday, pay much more because each time they have to pay 100 CFA or 200 CFA. They even have to pay twice (on their way into market and on their way out) and if they don't have the money they [the FN] will just take two yams. This has been the cause of the problem. (Local politician, Bouna, 25 January 2011)

Others specified the gendered aspect of these fiscal demands. Many of those preyed upon within the Lobi community were young women carrying yams to market in the city centre (Local politician, Bouna, 17 January 2011; Radio/government worker, Bouna, 19 January 2011; Abalo 2007; Arouna 2007). To target women, FN members often set up roadblocks along the many narrow pathways surrounding Bouna that women took to bring their yams to market. Many Lobi women do not speak French and thus struggled to negotiate their position with intimidating FN combatants.

Another common criticism was the rebels' enforcement of national identity laws. For passage through this part of the north, the FN generally required the presentation of Ivoirian identity cards. Individuals travelling between Bouna and the surrounding rural areas were often pulled from buses because they lacked adequate national identification. Payment was typically required if documentation could not be provided. This was at the very least a puzzling feature of the rural order established by the FN in this part of the north, given that the strict definition and enforcement of Ivoirian citizenship was one of the principal reasons, cited by FN leadership, for the beginning of the rebellion in the first place. As some suggested, rather than reflecting a commitment to the enforcement of national citizenship, demanding proper identification represented just another means of extracting resources from the local population (NGO worker, Bouna, 22 January 2011; Radio/government worker, Bouna, 19 January 2011). For the Lobi community (particularly those in rural areas), demanding identification represented a direct attack on a population who, despite their long time residency in Côte d'Ivoire, had never acquired the necessary documents for proof of national citizenship, nor were they really aware of what Ivoirian citizenship *was*. One NGO worker, explaining his work to me, emphasised the important task of "approaching the [Lobi] population and explaining to them that the times have changed and that you can no longer live without being identified by the *état civil*. We are helping them obtain a birth certificate for the first time in 60 years" (NGO Worker, Bouna, 27 January 2011).

Other complaints revolved around the provision and consumption of collective goods. Some objected to the fact that, under the FN, the Lobi were paying the lion's share for community projects. In the past, costs for the construction and maintenance of new housing, health clinics, schools and stores were shared between the Koulongo, Lobi and Peul communities. However, under the FN, many Lobi felt that they were the only ones paying for these projects, and that the Koulongo and Peul were paying very little, despite the fact that everyone benefitted from their usage. Nonetheless, many Lobi have not come out and said much publically about this situation because "around their homes there is only the FN, who has the guns. They are for the Koulongo and against them" (NGO worker, Bouna, 27 January 2011). There were also some complaints about how the Koulongo used their customary authority over land to derive a disproportionate share of the benefits of internationally-led relief efforts. For example, in Bania (southwest of Bouna), soon after the beginning of the conflict, UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) initiated an agricultural production project in which everyone contributed equally during its initial stages. However, when it came time to harvest, Koulongo chiefs, citing their position as the customary owners of the land, claimed a disproportionate share for themselves. In other cases, the Koulongo used the context of the war to push Lobi back from lands that encroached onto Koulongo villages. One observer explained, "all these frustrations piled on to each other, and as a result the Lobi cut all ties to the Koulongo: no more funerals together, no governance together, and no funding for the constructions of schools and voila, that's how things began to change. The Koulongo even threatened to chase away the Lobi from their communities" (NGO worker, Bouna, 27 January 2011).

All of these frustrations culminated in an attack against FN forces in Bouna organised by a small group of Lobi youth on 21 October 2007. The violence occurred after unsuccessful meetings with the FN leadership and the Ghanaian generals representing ONUCI in Bouna, where a number of Lobi youth attempted to express their criticisms regarding the rebels' behaviour. Subsequently, this group organised attacks against the FN checkpoint leading northward of the city, between Bouna and Doropo. FN soldiers retaliated and chased many of the attackers back to Bouna and some eastward to the border with Ghana. Many of the Lobi youth involved in the attack were injured, one of them fatally. Bouna residents generally refer to this day as "*dimanche noir*" (Radio/government worker, Bouna, 19 January 2011; Local politician, Bouna, 17 January 2011; Arouna 2007).

IV. Authority, elite politics and "post-conflict" state-building in the Ivoirian Northeast

At the core of the problem between the FN and the Lobi community in Bouna during the conflict period was that this group had few actors or institutions they could turn to who could represent their interests in any fair way. Up until Gbagbo's removal in 2011, there remained a profound distrust between this community and the former rebels. In addition, the 2002 civil war and the subsequent political stalemate also had the effect of politically marginalising willing elites who were capable of defending Lobi interests. Before the onset of the civil war, changing demographics and the increasing economic clout of the Lobi community in Bouna allowed the Lobi to further augment their power and cement their position in the northeast by capturing an increasing number of local-level political positions, particularly the local branches of the former single party, the PDCI. But with the beginning of the civil war against the Gbagbo government, the security of the Lobi at the local level, through its ties to national-level politics, became seriously compromised. Most Lobi politicians with national level ties to the PDCI were either prevented from returning to Bouna from Abidjan due to security concerns, or just no longer had access to the resources necessary to enact their authority in any meaningful way. Ultimately, the absence of any political actors representing Lobi interests on the ground, ongoing conflicts between the state (and hence most Lobi politicians) and the FN hierarchy in Bouna, and the appearance that the rebels were siding with, and militarily backing, the native Koulongo, all collectively worked to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the rebellion in the eyes of many Lobi living in this part of the north.

The initial days of the civil war in Bouna were characterised by insecurity, uncertainty and apprehension on the part of parties on both sides of the conflict. Sorting out the interests of the different parties involved and who supported whom was a delicate process that took time. Initially, there were many suspicions and accusations regarding who was on which side of the national-level cleavage driving the conflict. One local-level Lobi politician described how he was accused of siding with the government by FN leadership during the early stages of the conflict:

> Me, for example, he [the *commandant de zone*, Morou Ouattara] said that I was part of the gendarmerie! I was not part of the gendarmerie! Those guys, they knew exactly who the gendarmerie was. The guys that came, they didn't understand many things before we started to meet with them … there you go, the relationship between us, there was little confidence, really, you know, you doubt, you doubt and you doubt, it was a bit difficult. But now, everyone knows who is who, and voila, we understand now. Everyone understands. (Llocal politician, Bouna, 2 January 2011)

Also, although there were accusations and uncertainties on both sides of the conflict, attacks on Lobi politicians appeared more commonplace because of their ties to the central state.

One of the more prominent examples lasting throughout the duration of the FN occupation of Bouna was the conflict between the *commandant de zone*, Morou Ouattara, and the prominent Lobi politician, National Assembly member representing the PDCI, and deputy and president of the *conseil general*, Palé Dimaté. Dimaté saw his powers drastically cut by the beginning of the civil war. The civil war precipitated a drastic decline in the resources made available to National Assembly members, and at some points during the conflict Dimaté was allegedly not permitted to return to Bouna from Abidjan by the FN. This obviously put him at odds with Morou Ouattara, who had some political and economic interests in maintaining control over Bouna and prolonging the de facto partition of the country. These conflicts came to the fore during the visit of the former US ambassador to Côte d'Ivoire, Aubrey Hooks, to Bouna during his 2006 tour of the rebel-held north. After discussing the heated squabbles over control of Hooks' agenda while in Bouna, the embassy report describing Hooks' brief stay in Bouna highlights the political conflicts between these actors after private conversations with the ambassador:

> In separate conversations with the Economic Chief, Dimaté expressed anger over the FN's high-handed administration of the region. Accusing them of pocketing money levied from merchants and real estate, as well as funnelling the cashew crop through their hands, without spending anything on civil works or administration, Dimaté said that the *com'zone* and his immediate entourage gets wealthy while average FN soldiers are exploited for their loyalty to the northern cause. Dimaté said that the FN have been a bane in the areas they control, that everyone feels that way, but were too intimidated to say so in the public meeting. Dimaté also said that the FN has been hostile to the Lobi [some 45 per cent of the region's population] who are more heavily taxed as a result … Mayor Ouattara agreed with much of what Dimaté had to say concerning the FN's management of the region, while also castigating Dimaté himself for failing to aid the region, in his 16 years as the region's representative in Parliament and obliquely accusing him of corruption. The *com'zone* repeatedly made the same accusations about Dimaté to the Ambassador during the course of the visit. (US Embassy, Abidjan 2006)

Perhaps more importantly, Dimaté was implicated by the FN in the planning and staging of the attacks on the FN by *dimanche noir*. No one outside of the FN, among those interviewed by the author, suggested that this was the case. Moreover, the FN leadership in Bouna has not presented any evidence to support their claim that Dimaté was involved. Nonetheless, the FN military leadership in Bouna has been adamant in claiming that "the youth were manipulated," (Kouamé 2007b) and that "it [*dimanche noir*] was organized by the politicians, with the objective of destabilizing the regime of the FN in Bouna. They created a problem out of nothing" (FN member, Bouna, 26 January 2011). In a communiqué issued by the FN in Bouaké, the former rebels claimed that the attack was organised by a small number of youth leaders in Bouna who had direct ties to Dimaté (Kouamé 2007c). The significance of this strategy of explicitly tying Dimaté to the events of *dimanche noir* was twofold. First, this strategy aimed to delegitimise the political position of Dimaté; it rendered him an external actor situated on the other side of the *zone de confiance*, not unlike the others in government fought by the rebels. But perhaps more importantly, it delegitimised the movement itself, implying that it was exclusively externally sponsored with no legitimate grievances underpinning it locally.

The marginalisation of Lobi politicians such as Dimaté by the FN, created a context whereby there were few political actors on the ground capable of legitimately representing the Lobi community while Bouna was under the control of the rebels. This was explained to me by one NGO worker and youth organiser in terms of the problem of taxes:

> They [the Lobi] are without a voice, they are a people without a voice, thus the intellectuals, the politicians can't defend their cause. Sadly, for them it isn't that way [things are not getting better]. They say everything is OK? Meanwhile, the peasants are still suffering. (NGO worker, Bouna, 22 January 2011)

The larger consequence of the marginalisation of Lobi political representatives was that the FN itself was forced to play some role in the management of everyday social conflicts, such as those over land, marital disputes and the distribution of aid. Some NGO workers in Bouna explained to me that the capacity and legitimacy of the rebels to play this role was limited:

> In fact, the FN, when they arrived, they did not have the aptitude for understanding these relations [between the Koulongo and the Lobi]; they came because of the war. They managed security issues, how to advance or how to secure their territory. That was their competence, for the rest they didn't have a lot of competence. In this zone there was some sort of organization that used to exist, but now the authority of the chief is gone, the authority of the prefect isn't there; the authority of the judge isn't there. Thus, the population had to rapidly invent new mechanisms, but all of that had to be made under the authority of the FN. (NGO worker, Bouna, 27 January 2011)
>
> At the beginning, the FN even had to manage land issues, and they did that, but after they ceded to the pressure because when the Koulongo kingdom was re established, the problems over the land question, women problems, all of that returned to the customary chief. But at the beginning, the rebels managed everything, land problems, any problems; they managed everything. (NGO worker, Bouna, 22 January 2011)

In Bouna, the former rebels were effectively thrust into a "political role" they were ill-equipped to play because of the weakness of local institutions to perform these functions. One former rebel commander consistently reaffirmed the military mandate of the movement in the early days of the rebellion. Nonetheless, in the eyes of the local populations, many decisions taken by the rebels – over land, women and divorce, and tax payments – appeared *ad hoc* and self-interested. In many cases, rebel decisions resulted in the exacerbation of these conflicts, rather than their resolution, heightening tensions along class, gender and ethnic lines in the process. (NGO worker, Bouna, 27 January 2011)

V. Contentious state-making in post-conflict Northeastern Côte d'Ivoire

During fieldwork in January 2011, soon after the contested presidential elections in late 2010, what became clear was that many in the Lobi community retained a deep resentment towards the former rebels. Leading up to the elections, representatives of the Lobi community in Bouna repeatedly expressed their desire for the FN to give up its control over this part of the north (Abalo 2007; Arouna 2007; Kouamé 2007a). Soon after *dimanche noir*, a prominent Lobi youth leader in Bouna claimed that, "since they have not won their war against the regime of Laurent Gbagbo, we are going to make them leave Bouna" (Kouamé 2007a). Another stated that, "if the FN does not find a solution to all the problems raised by the people, next time, it will be all of Bouna who will revolt to request that the FN leave" (Abalo 2007). These public statements reflect the general sentiments held by the majority of Bouna's Lobi community. What was less clear were the views of the Koulongo. In some respects, the Koulongo certainly appeared to use the rebellion to temporarily check the growing political clout of prominent Lobi politicians such as Dimaté. Yet, what appeared to unify these communities was the recognition that regulating the tensions between them which had been generated by the rebellion required the strengthening of state institutions. As explained above, the rebels themselves lacked the legitimacy and capacity required to manage these conflicts. The authority of the Koulongo, particularly their authority over the management of land use, declined dramatically over the post-colonial period. As a result, collective feelings of frustration in Bouna were reinforced by the fact that the FN was doing little to expedite the process of administrative reunification. The office of the *préfet*, headed by Kouassi Aka Bio, was officially opened in September 2007 soon after the signing of the OPA. As a means of enacting his authority, Bio initiated a political structure that he called the "summit of the authorities" as a forum through which all of the key political actors in Bouna – all elected officials, bureaucrats and the FN – could work to collectively solve the important problems confronting the city. Despite these efforts, Bio, like most other political actors outside of the FN in Bouna, recognised that power still lay in the hands of the former rebels. The fact that the FN still controlled the lion's share of the tax revenue greatly restricted the autonomy of other political groups and actors (AFP 2009b).

Towards these terminal stages of the conflict, the most prominent political challenge to Morou Ouattara and the position of the FN in the Northeast came from Dimaté. The already tense relationship between Ouattara and Dimaté reached new heights when in October 2010, after the first round of the presidential elections, Dimaté apparently publically stated his support for Gbagbo heading into the second round. The controversy began after President Gbagbo's decision to name Dimaté the *Haute autorité chargée du développement du Zanzan Nord*. According to Dimaté, in accepting this post, he was subsequently charged with supporting Gbagbo and kicked out of the PDCI. Only after being sidelined from his old party did Dimaté actually publically state his intention to support Gbagbo in the second round of elections instead of Alassane Ouattara, the candidate backed by Henri Bedié and the rest of the PDCI ("*Je dis que je suis Pdci mais je vote pour Gbagbo"*). Initially, Dimaté played a heavy price for his decision. In addition to being marginalised within his old party, his homes in Abidjan, Bondoukou, Bouna and Doropo were all attacked and pillaged by pro-Ouattara militants after the removal of Gbagbo in April 2011. Between April and December 2011, Dimaté was exiled in Paris, largely because of ongoing threats from Ouattara supporters stemming from his decision to side with Gbagbo during the presidential elections (Baikeh 2010; Tété 2010; Doualy 2011; Hyacinthe 2011; *Notre Voie* 2012). In December 2011, Dimaté returned, and ran as an independent in legislative elections, ultimately losing the seat to a member of the RDR. And in a part of the country where they had enjoyed continued success since the transition to multiparty politics in 1993, the PDCI was for the first time shut out of the region of Bunkani (Bouna, Doropo, Nassian and Tehini).

Nonetheless, by the summer of 2012, Dimaté was subsequently permitted by Bedié and other party leaders to rejoin the PDCI. Despite some ongoing sentiments that Dimaté's support was "bought" by Gbagbo during the presidential elections, many high-ranking PDCI members continue to acknowledge Dimaté's enduring political pull in the northeast. "Palé Dimaté is the leader of our region," suggested one PDCI member. Another argued that Bedié gave Dimaté another opportunity to join the PDCI ranks because of his role as a "unifier" ("*Dimaté est un rassembleur"*) (Didi 2012; Loukou 2012; N'Guessan 2012). Dimaté's acceptance back into the PDCI is widely seen as an important step in regenerating a party whose popularity had declined significantly since his departure. Subsequently, Dimaté and some of the PDCI's national-level leadership, including Bedié and Alphonse Djédjé Mady, have toured the northeast hoping to bring this region back into the PDCI fold. Working with Dimaté represented an important part of the party's efforts to remobilise its supporters in preparation for the municipal and regional elections held in early 2013 (*L'intelligent d'Abidjan* 2012; *La Mandat* 2012; N'Guessan 2012).

In contrast to Dimaté, Ouattara and the local branch of the FN in Bouna have shown some willingness to disentangle the movement from the local-level conflicts that had been the source of so much criticism from Bouna residents, particularly members of the Lobi community. One important move in this respect was that, soon after *dimanche noir*, power to tax the local market was officially returned to the local mayor's office from agents of the FN. Although the former rebels retained control over the most lucrative tax bases in the city, specifically those on long-distance trade, this delegation of authority represented an important political move. The reason for this move was simple: it signalled to local populations (specifically the Lobi, and Lobi women) that goods brought to the market on market day will not be taxed by the rebels. More broadly, this shift was the beginning of a process whereby the former rebels sought to limit their obligations vis-à-vis the problems of everyday governance in Bouna, and a recognition that their presence was becoming increasingly resented by a sizeable portion of the population. Maybe the more telling sign in this respect was Morou Ouattara's early admission that he did not plan to seek a political position in Bouna after his work with the FN was over. In an interview with the Ivoirian daily *Nord-Sud*, Ouattara claimed that, "[I am] fighting for the development of Bouna, not for a political position" and "I am not at all interested by an elected post in Bouna" (Kouamé 2007b). Ouattara would later accept a position within the FRCI as the *commandant de l'Unité d'Attingué*, stationed just northwest of Abidjan. In an attempt to control ongoing violence and economic predation in the Ivoirian Northeast, Tuo Fozié, the old head of the police and gendarmerie in the FN was named *le chef de l'Unité de lute contre le racket* and administrative *préfet* for the region of Zanzan by the Ouattara government (Bamba 2012).

VI. Conclusions

The challenges and choices confronting state-builders in post-conflict contexts are numerous. The political tensions inherent in the particular strategies by which leaders enforce post-conflict political order are certainly evident in contemporary Côte d'Ivoire. After almost a decade-long political crisis culminating in the forced removal of Laurent Gbagbo in 2011, current president, Alassane Ouattara, continues to confront a deeply divided political landscape. The appropriate role of many former commanders tied to the old northern rebellion, the *Forces Nouvelles*, in the emergent post-conflict political order remains one of the most hotly debated issues in Côte d'Ivoire. That many former FN leaders have been appointed to prominent military and political positions and that they have gone virtually unpunished for their share of the violence committed during the crisis, has garnered some criticism from observers in Côte d'Ivoire and abroad. Yet punishing and alienating this group might represent an equally perilous strategy. They played a prominent role in forcibly bringing Ouattara to power after Gbagbo's refusal to accept his electoral defeat. Many enjoy ongoing political clout in Abidjan and in different parts of the north formerly under the control of the FN. In the end however, it is difficult to tell what the long-term effects of the decision to support and politically protect this group will be. Will durable political order be jeopardised or buttressed as a result?

This article began by suggesting that this question formed the basis of much of the debate in the broader scholarly literature focusing on warlordism and post-conflict state-building. Some argue that, despite the unsavoury means by which many of these types of actor gain prominence, gaining their support often remains an important prerequisite for post-conflict peace (Beswick 2009; Mukhopadhyay 2009; Reno 2009a, 2009b). Conversely, others have focused on how warlords used resources derived from their relationship with the state to weaken and fragment public institutions in the longer term (Marten 2006/07, 2012). These questions and debates are important. However, by focusing overwhelmingly on the renewed political contests between centre and periphery unleashed by civil war and post-conflict transitions, these approaches commonly overlook the equally intense and significant struggles over political power occurring at local and regional levels, in which strongmen actors are often enmeshed.

In the case of Bouna, the counter-intuitive ways in which national-level cleavages driving the conflict during the crisis period – between the FN and those loyal to former President Gbagbo based in the south – were aligned vis-à-vis pre-conflict struggles over power and authority in this part of the North highlight the tensions that are often exacerbated during war to peace transitions. This article suggested that one of the unique features of the political order established by the FN in Bouna was how the rebels politically positioned themselves alongside autochthonous groups. This is not to say that the politics of nativism necessarily governed the alliance-building strategy they employed in this case. Quite the opposite: the FN rationalised its armed struggle against former President Gbagbo given the "exclusionary" politics his government was advancing. The tensions that emerged between the FN and the Lobi community in Bouna were more likely the result of the fact that the Lobi are the demographically and economically superior group. Tensions were heightened after Dimaté's decision to ultimately side with Gbagbo leading up to the second round of the 2010 presidential elections.

Herein lies the rub. Building post-conflict order by devolving authority to actors previously tied to the former rebellion would most likely work to exacerbate local tensions generated by the war, and drive a wedge between the central state and the Lobi community. Yet, reproducing the old pre-conflict strategy of allying with the Lobi elite appears equally unlikely given the decisions of those like Dimaté to ally with former President Laurent Gbagbo during the electoral crisis. If, as scholars such as Autesserre (2010) suggest, the success of peacekeeping operations and post-conflict transitions depends on the extent to which local conflicts are adequately addressed, the problem with Bouna is that many of the workable state strategies for addressing these tensions seem to have been closed off. The appointment of Tuo Fozié as *le chef de l'Unité de lute contre le racket* and administrative *préfet* for the region of Zanzan appears to represent an attempt at a middle ground strategy (a former FN member *not* stationed in Bouna during the conflict). To reiterate, these challenges do not stem from any particular decision to devolve authority to strongmen or, conversely, efforts to mitigate their clout; rather, they are a downstream effect of the kinds of alliances, or the particular constellations of power generated by the conflict itself. The case of Bouna shows how the specific ways in which national-level divisions are "grafted" onto local cleavages during the conflict period (Kalyvas 2006, 382–383; McGovern 2011, 191) go far in opening or closing opportunities for building a durable political order during war to peace transitions.[8]

Acknowledgements

Earlier versions of this article were presented at the 2013 annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association and the 2012 annual meeting of the African Studies Association. The author would like to thank Amy Poteete, Shane Barter, Elizabeth Bloodgood, Catherine Boone, Kathrin Heitz, Maja Bovcon, Daniel Douek, Kenneth Martin, Stephanie Ferrara and two anonymous reviewers for their insightful feedback on earlier versions of this article. Financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) is gratefully acknowledged.

Notes

1. While there is little agreement over a precise definition of warlordism, there are a handful of general characteristics used by observers. Generally, most studies of contemporary warlords agree that these actors: control a small piece of territory within the boundaries of existing "weak" states, rely heavily on the use of force as a means of social control, are embedded in (sometimes illicit) transnational markets, and do little to institutionalise or legitimise their political positions vis-à-vis the populations they control (Giustozzi 2003, 1–5; Jackson 2003, 137–139; Marten 2006/07; Beswick 2009, 338; Utas 2012, 14–18). Marten adds that warlords in the contemporary international system are unique, compared to historical cases of warlordism, because they are commonly sustained "through the complicity of state leaders" (2012, 3). I do not use the term "warlord" in any intended "derogatory sense" (Hills 1997, 36). I use the terms "strongman" and "warlord" interchangeably throughout this article.
2. In terms of levels of contestation, it is difficult to determine exactly how unique Bouna is as a case. Descriptions of other areas that fell under the control of the rebels suggest that the level of discontent with the rebellion in Bouna was particularly high. On Korhogo during the rebellion, see Förster (2010). See also Heitz (2009, 2013) on Man while under FN control.
3. For more on the organization of the rebellion in Northern Côte d'Ivoire, see Fofana (2011, 168–171) and Balint-Kurti (2007, 22–24). For the organisation of the rebellion in Bouna, see Speight (2013).
4. As part of a strategy for defeating Laurent Gbagbo, the main opposition parties had formed a pre-electoral coalition in 2005 called the *Rassemblement des houphouétistes pour la démocratie et la paix* (RHDP). The RHDP included the RDR, the PDCI, the UDPCI (*Union pour la Démocratie et la Paix en Côte d'Ivoire*) and the MFA (*Mouvement des Forces de L'Avenir*).
5. For Bouna-Téhini, Georges Savonnet (1986, 23) estimated that in 1975 there were 10 times more Lobi living in the region than Koulongo, putting the numbers at 75,000 to 80,000 for the Lobi compared to 7500 for the Koulongo.
6. Although much of the PDCI would ultimately side with the Ouattara and the RDR after the first round of the presidential elections in 2010, it is important to remember that Bedié was one of the principal political architects of the policy of *ivoirité* during the 1990s. It was only after the formation of the RHDP in 2005 that it was fairly certain on which side of the conflict Bedié and the rest of the PDCI would position themselves. Leading up to the 2010 elections, Bedié embarked on a tour of the north in an effort to distance himself from the nationalist agenda now advanced by Gbagbo.
7. All of the interviews included in this article were conducted in French. They were transcribed in English by the author.
8. Kalyvas (2006, 383) refers to similar processes as "alliances", or the "convergence of interests via a transaction between supralocal and local actors, whereby the former supply the latter with external muscle, thus allowing them to win decisive advantage over local rivals; in exchange, supralocal actors are able to tap into local networks and generate mobilization". Building on Manchester School anthropology, McGovern (2011, 191) looks at what he refers to as "intercalaries", who are actors that "do the work necessary to align the interests and strangers of high-level state actors and those of local actors, down to the level of farmers in the village".

Notes on contributor

Jeremy Speight is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Political Science at Concordia University and a visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at Memorial University. His research explains variations in the coalition building strategies employed by armed movements at local levels and how these variations impact post-conflict state-building. His work has been published in the *Canadian Journal of African Studies* and *Civil Wars*.

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