Militarized youths in western Côte d'Ivoire: local processes of mobilization, demobilization, and related humanitarian interventions (2002-2007)

Chelpi-den Hamer, M.L.B.
Photograph 3: Market scene, Man

Photograph 4: Rebel taxation on small businesses, Man
The immediate context

The way western Côte d’Ivoire has been presented since 2002 in the local press and in international reports has been somewhat misleading. The region tends to be depicted as a homogeneous area, differences are downplayed, and what is suggested is a certain form of uniqueness: in comparison with what the other regions of Côte d’Ivoire have experienced in the past decade, the situation in the west is supposedly more extreme, more violent, more militarized, and these observations led many analysts to assume that the west was likely to undergo a process of unique societal changes. The ‘Ivoirian Wild West’, which stretches between Danané, Man, Duékoué, and Toulepleu (see Maps 5.1 to 5.4), has become a name commonly used to label the area (BBC News, 2005), and countless reports perpetuate the myth of a region doomed to violence, cultural divide and inter-ethnic tensions (Agence France Presse, 2005; BBC News, 2004a, 2004b). It has in fact become quite a challenge to reverse these perceptions.

But there are many wests within the same boundaries. Not only in terms of territorial sovereignty – between 2002 and 2010, the towns of Danané, Mahapleu, Man, Logoualé were controlled by rebel forces; Duékoué, Guiglo, Blolequin, Toulepleu, Zouan-Hounien were in government-controlled area; and Bangolo, Zou and Diéouzon used to be part of the buffer zone in between¹ – but also because the sub-areas display quite different characteristics in terms of ethnic

¹ The buffer zone here refers to the Zone de Confiance, already described in a previous footnote.
composition, migration dynamics, economic activities and political affinities. The Yacoubas are the autochthonous population in Man and Danané, the Guéré area comprises Guiglo, Blolequin and Toulepleu, and the Wobés live on the outskirts of a rebel stronghold, when they have more traditional affinities with the counter-insurgent movement. It is worth noting that if these autochthonous groups had been mapped in 2007, they would not have shared the same borders as their local administrator. Many people of Wé origin found themselves split by the ex-front line in fact, and I heard many anecdotal examples of individual allegiances that defied conventional keys of interpretation (Yacoubas fighting on the same side as Guérés for instance). This chapter presents the main aspects the conflict took in the western region and the main features of the ethnographic context. The Man and Guiglo areas are particularly detailed at the end of the chapter, since they were chosen as terrain for doing fieldwork.

The general atmosphere:
Chronology of violent events in the west (September 2002-2007)

Starting with a chronology of violent events is key to helping the reader grasp the general ambiance that prevailed in the west through the different phases of conflict. Western residents have been particularly affected by acts of extreme cruelty during the six months of warfare that lasted from November 2002 to May 2003, when belligerent parties were scrambling for territory with the help of particularly brutal allies. Unluckily for them, they have not been spared in the years that followed, when the stage of open warfare was replaced by widespread banditism and by a vicious circle of intercommunity violence, which connected many times to enduring war factions. If bloodshed caused by acts of war only lasted a few months, killings, petty crime, fear and general mistrust have continued over the years, fueled by the regular occurrence of violent events in the western region, which often took the form of inter-ethnic clashes.

Far from being exhaustive, the chronology presented below (Table 5.1) puts to paper a certain number of benchmarks and is used as a way to reflect on the turmoil that reigned in the region since the start of the war in September 2002 (a longer version is presented in Appendix 1 with the detailed sources documenting the events). The chronology is particularly illustrative of the shift from a classical form of warfare composed of attack/defence operations to large-scale inter-ethnic violence; it was already a structural issue before the war, which the 2002-2003 events exacerbated. In Guéré government-controlled territory, violence especially targeted the non-autochthonous populations, Ivorians and foreign nationals alike (Burkinakés, Baoulés, Dioulas, etc.). In the Zone de Confi ance, where no clear authority prevailed during the period under study, the local prerogatives of the non-autochthones were instead strengthened, and they started playing a leading
role in local security matters (see for instance in the chronology the particularly violent clashes between Guérés and Burkinabés in Toa Zéo in 2006 and the involvement of the dozo brotherhood\(^2\) in the process). The chronology shows well that in the rural societies under study, any type of petty crime began to be interpreted as an act of war and was systematically framed along ethnic lines, calling for a ‘group’ response and entering thereby a vicious cycle of retaliation. I come back to these remarks later in the chapter, when reflecting on the diffusion of violence in those rural societies. To clarify the outline below, I use the terms *autochthone*, *allochthone* and *allogene* when needed, using the definitions clarified in an earlier footnote (Chapter 1, footnote 6).

**Table 5.1** Chronology indicative of the atmosphere of violence peculiar to western Côte d’Ivoire (2002-2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 October 2002</td>
<td>As the military front moves West, autochthonous Guéré youths are mobilized by local authorities to protect their villages. Escalating violence against <em>allogene</em> Burkinabés living in the area (especially on the Duékoué-Kouibli axis, villages of Blodi, Iruzon, Diahouin, Toa Zeo, and Kouibli). Burkinabés flee in masse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 November</td>
<td>Rebel forces attack the local firm Sucrivoire in Borotou-Koro, 150 km north of Man, taking 42 tons of sugar, cash and various equipment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Nov.-1 Dec.</td>
<td>Rebel forces take the towns of Man, Danané and Zouan-Hounien on 28 November. Man is recaptured 2 days later by loyalist forces and cleansing operations follow (arbitrary arrests, summary executions, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 December</td>
<td>Moving south along the Liberian border, rebel forces take Toulepleu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7 December</td>
<td>Rebel forces then move east and take the town of Blolequin. Five days later (12 December), loyalist forces retake the town aided by autochthonous militias.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 December</td>
<td>Man is recaptured by rebel forces. Cleansing operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 December</td>
<td>Rebel forces take Bangolo and the villages nearby (Blodi, Iruzon, Toazeo, Sibabli and Kouibli). It is now the turn of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^2\) The dozo designates a group of traditional hunters from north of Côte d’Ivoire, armed with hunting rifles and believed to have mystical powers. Since the early 1990s, they were commonly employed as local security providers throughout the country, in both rural and urban areas. Armed with shotguns, mystic amulets, and wearing traditional clothing, they were widely praised for significantly reducing crime rates and were notably used by political parties to secure their respective rallies. Fearing that the dozo would get out of control, Bédié physically confined their activity in 1998 by prohibiting them by law to exercise their activity in another region than their region of origin (Bassett, 2004). Within the framework of the current war, the dozo phenomenon has been revived and dozos have been increasingly contracted by local authorities to provide local security – especially in the Zone de Confiance and in the rebel-controlled areas. The agreement is generally formalized through a contract signed between the dozo and the local authorities (Human Rights Watch, 2010).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-12 Jan. 2003</td>
<td>Loyalist forces retake Toulepleu. Surroundings are looted and set ablaze.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 January</td>
<td>Ethnic tensions explode in Guéré territory (Bagohouo, Nidrou, Yrouzon, Blodi, Bahé Sébon). Circumstantial alliances occur between <em>allogene</em> Burkinabés and rebel forces to fight autochthonous youths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 February</td>
<td>Attacks on Baoulé farmers (<em>allochthonous</em>) in the area of Guiglo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 March</td>
<td>At least 60 civilians are killed in Bangolo by Liberian mercenaries. The Dioula quarter (<em>allochthonous</em>) is targeted in particular.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-23 March</td>
<td>The village of Dah, 9 km southwest of Bangolo, is attacked at night. It is locally interpreted as an act of retaliation for the Bangolo event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-14 April</td>
<td>Loyalist forces launch a major offensive along the Liberian border between Toulepleu and Danané and recapture Zouan-Hounien (6 April). One week later, rebel forces retake Zouan-Hounien.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 May</td>
<td>Despite the ceasefire (3 May), loyalist forces attack rebel positions and retake the town of Zouan-Hounien for the second time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 May</td>
<td>Impartial forces are deployed in the west to monitor the ceasefire. A buffer zone is instituted, the <em>Zone de Confiance</em> (ZdC), which separates government and rebel territory by a neutral area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 November</td>
<td>Heavy fighting between autochthonous Guérés and <em>allogene</em> Burkinabés in the village of Zou, in the ZdC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 January 2004</td>
<td>Guéré youths raid Kahin (in the ZdC), a village populated in majority by Baoulés (<em>allochthonous</em>) and Burkinabés (<em>allogene</em>). Eight people are killed in the attack.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 February</td>
<td>Three Burkinabé farmers (<em>allogene</em>) are killed in Duékoué.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-27 April</td>
<td>Fighting between autochthonous Guérés and <em>allogene dozos</em> in the villages of Diéouzon and Kouibi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-19 May</td>
<td>A Togolese (<em>allogene</em>) is found dead in Guiglo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 June</td>
<td>A Dioula taxi driver (<em>allochthonous</em>) is found dead in Guiglo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 June 2005</td>
<td>The villages of Petit-Duékoué and Guitrozon are attacked by armed men, leaving 41 dead and 60 wounded, all of autochthonous Guéré origin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 June</td>
<td>Reprisals immediately follow. Three Dioulas and 1 Burkinabé are killed by autochthonous militias in Duékoué. Later, 4 Guérés are attacked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6 Febr. 2006</td>
<td>Unidentified armed men attack the encampment of Peehapa (part of the village of Mona), 17km from Guiglo. Twelve <em>autochthones</em> are killed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 February</td>
<td>In retaliation for the Peehapa killings, Guéré youths from the villages of Mona and Zouan plot to launch an attack targeting the Burkinabé camp in Guiglo. Local authorities intervene and contain the youths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 April</td>
<td>First day of disappearance of a Baoulé farmer (<em>allochthonous</em>), last seen near Petit Guiglo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 May</td>
<td>Guérés accuse Baoulés (allochthonous) and Burkinabés (allogène) of having set fire to several autochthonous plantations in the village of Gohouo Zagna, east of Bangolo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 May</td>
<td>A Burkinabé is reported missing in Gohouo Zagna.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 May</td>
<td>Three autochthonous Guérés are found dumped in a hole, hands tied behind their backs, stabbed to death. Four other Guérés fall into an ambush in the same area but succeed to escape and alert the impartial forces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 May</td>
<td>Armed individuals attack a passenger truck in Saada, 20 km of Guiqlo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 May</td>
<td>Armed men attack two buses between Bangolo and Guéhiély.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 June</td>
<td>2 Burkinabé children aged 3 and 6 (allogène) found dead in Douekpé.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-28 June</td>
<td>French forces discover the corpse of 7 autochtones in two villages near Douekpé. Fifteen are wounded. It is interpreted as an act of retaliation for the murder of the two allogène children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Nov.</td>
<td>Toa Zéo allogène Burkinabé leader calls on the dozo brotherhood to protect his community. The decision is contested and leads to internal clashes (1 dead).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-20 Nov.</td>
<td>Tensions escalated when the dozos move from Toa Zéo to Blodi. Autochthonous militias become involved, leading to 6 deaths, the burning down of an allogène encampment, and the emptying of nearby villages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 December</td>
<td>In Téapleu, an accident between a bus and a motorbike degenerates into ethnic conflict between Yacoubas and Dioulas. Some houses are set alight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 January</td>
<td>Several coffee/cocoa plantations located between Duékoué and Blodi are burnt down, allegedly by autochthones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 January</td>
<td>Six young autochthonous Guéré of the village of Baoubly are declared missing after having gone fishing near a Baoulé encampment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-24 January</td>
<td>Two persons of Baoulé origin (allochthone) are lynched in the village of Baoubli, between Bangolo and Logoualé. A Burkinabé (allogène) is stabbed to death near Baoubli.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 January</td>
<td>A 90-year-old Guéré autochthone is found dead on his plantation, feet bound and beheaded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 May 2007</td>
<td>Allochthonous and allogene dozos kill four thieves in the Zou area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: See Appendix 1 for the detailed sources.
Map 5.1  Types of violent events in western Côte d’Ivoire from 19 September to 31 December 2002

Source: Compiled by the author based on a chronology of violent events using GIS, 2010
**Map 5.2 Types of violent events in western Côte d’Ivoire – 1 January 2003 until the Zone de Confiance being set up (23 May 2003)**

Source: Compiled by the author based on a chronology of violent events using GIS, 2010
Map 5.3  Types of violent events in western CI – from the Zone de Confiance being set up (23 May 2003) until December 2005

Source: Compiled by the author based on a chronology of violent events using GIS, 2010
Map 5.4  Types of violent events in western Côte d’Ivoire during the year 2006

Source: Compiled by the author based on a chronology of violent events using GIS, 2010
Temporality of conflict, changing mobilizing contexts

If we surpass the first impression of ‘spiral of violence’ that comes from the reading of such lines, what comes out of the chronology is a useful contextual information that enables to draw different conflict phases and that enables to introduce a certain temporality to the analysis of conflict in the west of the country. The Ivorian war has neither been linear nor continuous, even in the west, even in the worst months of conflict. There have been ups and downs, periods of extremely brutal confrontation, periods of relative pauses, and immediate contexts have been largely shaped by the occurrence of these specific events. Armed factions’ mobilizing discourse and recruitment strategies have changed overtime, especially when the belligerents needed to reinforce their troops with fresh recruits prior to a major attack or counteroffensive, and the witnessing and hearing of certain events have certainly influenced individual interpretations of immediate contexts.

The detailed chronology has been mapped using a geographical information system (GIS) and is visualized by Maps 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4. The maps clearly show the shift from a period of warfare mainly characterized by combat operations that lasted roughly until May 2003 (capture and recapture of towns, moving front line, displacement of populations) to a period of more diffuse violence characterized by violent settling of accounts, systematic retaliation based on ethnic grounds, and acts of pure banditry (that period more or less lasted until the recent events of 2010-2011).

Between September 2002 and May 2003 (Maps 5.1 and 5.2), several phases shaped the period of warfare in the west: when rebel forces recaptured the town of Man in late December 2002, when loyalist forces recaptured the Toulepleu-Blolequin axis in early 2003,1 the period of sharp fighting for control of the road between Danané and Toulepleu in April 2003, the hunting down of Liberians when the Ivorian rebels decided to split from their inconvenient friend (January-May 2003), and the setting-up of the Zone de Confiance in May 2003, which completely changed the local balance of power in certain places and provided the geographical space to allow widespread unpunishable banditism.

If there was a temporality of conflict, there was also a temporality in the processes of mobilization, and reports of military attacks, counter-attacks, purges in ranks, killings of individuals, acts of retaliation, robberies, allegations, rumours,

---

1 With the help of Liberian recruits (mostly recruited from anti-Taylor movements), the government launched a major offensive and regained control of Toulepleu in January 2003. By the end of February, the northern loop of the road between Blolequin and Toulepleu was under the control of Liberian fighters allied to the government and to Guéré militias. The presence of the Ivorian national army was minimal in this area and ended at Blolequin.
have all played their part in radicalizing positions and in shaping immediate contexts on either side of the front line.

• On the counter-insurgent side

Close to the front line, in the government-controlled areas, militarized civilians largely consisted of young *autochtones* of Wè origin (Guérés, Wobés). Prior to the rebel attacks, mobilization first resembled an advanced form of urban/rural vigilantism, more structured and better armed than usual, which aimed at preventing rebel incursions in villages and towns not yet taken by the rebel forces. The capture of Vavoua by the rebellion was an important trigger to set up these self-defence groups on a massive scale, since Vavoua was considered the north-eastern gateway to the western region. People realized that the threat was real and that, in no time, the military front would move westwards and would directly threaten them. At various levels, civilians were therefore encouraged to mobilize into self-defence groups and to set up checkpoints (‘*corridor*’ in Ivoirian French or ‘*barrage*’) in order to protect key entry and exit points at specific locations. The Ivoirian army spokesperson, Jules Yao Yao, made a public statement on television in that regard, on 18 October 2002, encouraging youths to take appropriate measures in self-defence. At a more local level, the city, district or provincial authorities gave the Guéré youths permission to organize, and in many cases, were actually the ones promoting this armed mobilization. This period was pretext to many abuses of power. I come back later to this point when reflecting on the ethnicization of conflict in the west, but there is here the need to mention that the function of added security these *barrages* were supposed to fill quickly derived into a means of extortion and a way to violently assert some sort of autochthonous legitimacy, and control checkpoints started to be used as racketeering locations for systematically nicking money and goods from the non-autochthonous population (*allochtones* and *allogenes* alike), even from those well known to the *barragistes*. This particular phenomenon marked the beginning of a worrying trivialization of violence at the village level: verbal harassment and physical assault had started to become a norm in these societies.

After this checkpoint period came the time to fight. Particularly widespread mobilization occurred in Guiglo in early December, after the rebel forces captured the towns of Toulepleu and Blolequin in Guéré territory. Many autochthonous Guéré youths reported having been extremely shocked by the distress of the displaced people they saw – their ‘parents’ – who were passing through town as they were fleeing combat. With the rebels only a few kilometres away, a

---

recurrent concern was that Guiglo would soon be attacked, and if the insurgents encountered no resistance, Guiglo residents – and especially the autochthonous Guéré – could experience the same distress. At the local level, municipal authorities and community leaders toured the immediate surroundings and called for volunteers to participate in the war effort. Each village was asked to send between 30 and 50 youths and there was no retaliation if fewer volunteered. Counter-insurgent movements were quick to emerge in the west, fostered by local ‘comités de crise’, who had been set up at the start of the war by municipal and district authorities. If one of the genuine mandates of these committees was to alleviate suffering of the local population (a declaration by the comité de crise of Bangolo went as far as to publicly contradict pro-government propaganda in order to obtain basic assistance), they also played a major role in motivating the autochthonous youth to lend a hand to an Ivoirian army that was often described as being struck by high desertion rates (Pana Press, 2003o). Counter-insurgent groups rapidly evolved into organized armed militias and eventually played a major role in pushing the rebels back from Taï, Toulepleu, Blolequin and Bangolo in late 2002. I describe these armed factions in detail in the next chapter.

At the national level, large-scale mobilization was boosted by Minister of Defence Bertin Kadet’s call on national television on 8 December 2002. This came amidst reports that rebel factions were advancing eastwards from the Liberian border. ‘We are calling for mobilization because, with the increase in the number of fronts, we need to increase the size of our defence forces’ (BBC News, 2002). Thousands of young Ivoirians thronged the headquarters of the national armed forces in Abidjan in response to the appeal of the minister. If some were driven by pure patriotism and included Guérés who had moved outside their region of origin, many were also driven by the prospect of getting a permanent job in the army. Three thousand civilians between 20 and 26 years old were incorporated into the national army – they were later labeled the ‘post 19 September’ recruits. Some of them were already in the armed branch of the Young Patriots movement and would later be nicknamed ‘les soldats Blé Goudé’. Not surprisingly, the youth wing of the opposition urged its partisans to use all

---

3 ‘Contrary to a certain press and to what FANCI’s press releases suggest, the department of Bangolo has been continuously controlled by the rebels since 20 December 2002.’ Such a declaration was all the more surprising since its author – the President of the comité de crise of Bangolo – was known for being a member of the FPI, the President’s political party (Notre Voie, 2003a).

4 ‘Ivoirians are showing the desire to go to the front and they should be satisfied’, he said. ‘The people of Ivory Coast will apply all the resources at their disposal to struggle on the side of President Laurent Gbagbo and his government to put an end to these aggressors and liberate our country.’ The declaration came after the discovery of a mass grave in the western village of Monoko-Zohi, following intense fighting between government and rebel troops. The government denied any responsibility, stating that government forces ‘are not in the habit of burying their dead in common graves’ (BBC News, 2002).
republican means to oppose the mobilization call made by the Minister of Defence (Pana Press, 2002d, 2002f).

Of the many youths who had volunteered but had not been selected, some were eventually sent to the front line to strengthen the base of the western militias. During this period of open warfare – which lasted roughly until May 2003 – checks intensified on both sides to discover suspected ‘enemies’. Suspicion could fall on anyone and fake denunciations were commonplace. The mere fact of displaying an amulet could be interpreted as a need for special protection, hence as a feature of a combatant. Amulet holders could be ‘dozos’, one of these traditional hunters present and active in the security arena for decades in Côte d’Ivoire, and recruited by the insurgents at the very start of the war.

After the period of open fighting, a time of urban/rural vigilantism recurrent, followed by a time of more ‘hidden’ military operations (opérations de ratissage in the bush, infiltration, spying). This period lasted roughly until 2005 in the west and a bit longer in the Zone de Confiance, a period after which several indicators point to a relative return of normalcy, at least in matters related to warfare. Checkpoints were still in place during this time, with the misconduct we know and following a logic of ‘protection/extortion’ (Banégas, 2010); on both belligerent sides, autochthones and non-autochthones were using war as pretext to expand their respective assets. This is perhaps the most worrying development that took place in Ivoirian rural societies: violence had become so diffuse in some places that it has been quite difficult to disentangle structural forms of ethnic violence from war crimes – and it was probably an impossible task between 2002 and 2006. Agier warns about the emergence of such a culture of violence and against the tendency to transform every social problem into a new front of violence, regardless of the cause. Reflecting on the period known as ‘La Violencia’ in Colombia and its sixteen years of cycles of killing and retaliation, he argues that when a society is marked by an extremely violent history, the collective memory of violence eventually overshadows the causes of major and minor conflicts, especially when all actions are committed in total impunity (Agier, 2004: 236). A possible effect is that violence can come to be regarded as ineluctable in certain contexts, ‘as a plague that can strike at anytime’, ‘as a historical phenomenon beyond individual control’ (ibid). Western Côte d’Ivoire is particularly at risk of internalizing such a culture of violence. Somehow legitimized by the climate of extreme violence that prevailed during the period of open fighting, long-standing inter-community tensions and pre-war clashes have found a new breeding ground and more extreme forms of expression to manifest themselves, especially since checkpoints and their corollary of abuses have become extremely difficult to put to a halt in certain locations (Maps 5.3 and 5.4). To paraphrase Vlassenroot (2006: 65), a bitter effect of those self-defence
groups and counter-insurgent militias is that it reinforces the view that violence is a legitimate strategy of defence while at the same time suggesting that it is a legitimate strategy for creating change. In western Côte d’Ivoire, from certain autochthones’ perspective, resorting to violence can be seen as a legitimate way to rehabilitate too long spoiled autochthonous rights, when dispossessing allo-genes and allochthonous farmers is perceived as a way to take back what belongs to Guérés. But such a focus on local conceptions of rights should not negate the fact that, in certain instances, these acts of dispossession have little to do with ethnic identities. Sometimes, they are only disguised ways for an individual to grab someone else’s resources in an attempt to achieve some kind of upward social mobility. Rather conveniently, western Côte d’Ivoire has provided the contextual background needed to legitimize this. Confiscation of successful agricultural plantations has actually been a real issue in the western region during the period under study (especially in Guéré territory); I come back to this point below when describing how militia leaders eventually had to become involved in these types of land conflict mitigations. The issue of confiscation of the Baoulé’s plantations has in fact been particularly salient in the Guiglo area, exacerbated by the war and the displacements of populations.

• On the insurgent side
Mobilizing contexts also evolved over time in the rebel-controlled areas. During the first weeks of insurgency, the rebellion leadership paid particular attention to minimizing abuse of civilians. In the towns they captured, in the villages they took, rebels made a point of behaving quite cordially towards the population. In Man, right after having taken the town, the rebels hold information meetings with civilians and even distributed food. ‘They broke into a storehouse where loyalist forces had stored their food – they had just been supplied – and they took the tins of sardines and gave them to the people’ (Human Rights Watch, 2003b). Such ‘altruistic’ features in the early stage of a rebellion are not unique to the Ivoirian case, and may even mirror, to some extent, the beginning of the insurgency in neighbouring Sierra Leone. 5 Although rebel forces never claimed to have a specific regional or ethnic affiliation, many early joiners were of northern origin and had experienced some form of discrimination based on their ethnic back-ground. In that sense, they were sharing some common grievances with the population in the north which was particularly receptive to their seizing of power.

---

5 Early rebellion in Sierra Leone could be considered ‘altruistic’ in the sense that young people mobilized to fight for their dreams of responsible government and a strong state. In the later stages, Richards suggests that it turned into a ‘fatalistic’ civil war, where desperation turned into extreme destructiveness (Kaarsholm, 2006).
In many areas, therefore, at the start of insurgency, the rebellion was perceived as some kind of liberation movement. Rebels were praised by the local crowd, and the rebellion leadership was quite keen on fostering such an image.

But the early days of insurgency should not be romanticized. If rebel forces reportedly drafted consenting civilians (including prisoners detained in police stations), forced conscription was also rather common in the areas they controlled, a trivial reason being that the base of the movement had to be manned well enough to be able to pose a serious threat to the loyalist forces. Sometimes, the village chief was asked to give the rebels young men for recruitment. Recruitment strategies resembled then what was happening on the other side, yet with the major difference that it was impossible to refuse – some form of retaliation usually occurring if too few men joined the rebel ranks. But as the war intensified in the west and with the increasing involvement of the Liberian suppletive forces, recruitment methods hardened and rebel forces eventually started to systematically take people by force, without even bothering taking contact with the local chief. An account of a Yacouba villager is particularly telling: ‘The rebels arrived in a jeep and a four-by-four. Some of them were soldiers and others were youths who did not seem to be there by choice. They asked where the customs office and the gendarmerie were. They were after the corps habillés. After ransacking the town hall, they organized a meeting with the population. They told us not to panic, they were there to help, they were not after the people, only after the administration and the corps habillés.’ (Human Rights Watch, 2003b). In Zouan-Hounien, several testimonies collected by Human Rights Watch reported that rebel forces left people in peace in the beginning, but that things worsened when the Liberians entered the town: ‘The rebels came at the end of November. At the beginning they left people alone, then, the Liberians came, and things really worsened for the population. First, they looted the houses of those who had fled, the houses of the government officials; then they started attacking Guérés, then the foreigners. Now, they even attack the Yacoubas. For them, it does not matter if you are a Christian, a Muslim or a cow, they kill you anyway.’ The following description of a Dioula family, attacked in Toulepleu by Liberian elements of the MPIGO fighters, is particularly telling: ‘The rebels said they would not hurt civilians, so we were surprised when they broke our door down and asked for money. My grandmother was coming out of the shower. She was shot dead. My older sister went to get the money, but she was trembling so

6 Although this point has to be nuanced, Liberian backed forces were known to exploit civilians: ‘From Blolequin to Pélé, it is all mercenary checkpoints and bodies, all along the way, new bodies and old bodies, maybe three to four weeks old. They force you to work, to bury the bodies.’ (Human Rights Watch, 2003b)
much that she was slow. They said the money was not enough and they shot her in the chest.’ Those stages are the most worrying, when all popular enthusiasm fades away, when perceived ‘liberators’ turn against the very ones that they are supposed to set free, when control is lost, and when the initial fervour is replaced by the abrupt realization that the paths of war are foremost destructive.

On either side, Liberian suppletive forces committed massive looting and exactions. I do not want to develop much the reasons for the use of such troops in this book – it would be beyond the scope of this study – but in order to give the reader some keys to interpret the western context, I briefly describe what happened then. Liberian mercenaries were known to use extreme forms of physical violence and to show no mercy; much of their loot was sent to Liberia. The promise of Ivoirian richness was perhaps the main driving force for many of those Liberian fighters, after all they were all coming from a devastated country. If they first started stealing from the property of those who had fled the area, they quickly targeted the remaining people, threatening everyone suspected of having assets remaining. The loot included money, food, vehicles and other personal property (Liberians sent hundreds of tons of such items across the border), but also primary resources. The cocoa and coffee harvest for instance (which takes place between October and January) was also ripe for taking. Diamonds and gold were also taken, especially around the Zouan Hounien area, where there were reports of forced labour working in the Ity mines (Human Rights Watch, 2003b). Close to the Liberian border, the towns of Danané and Zouan-Hounien were used as logistic platforms to organize this particular trade.

The slip into large-scale inter-ethnic violence
In the first months that followed the start of the war, several journalists and political figures made allegations that Burkina Faso was backing the insurgents. The displaying of rebel captives of northern origin in the local media (Burkinabés are easily recognizable by the scarification they have on their faces) heightened popular hostility against these groups and had immediate repercussions in the agrarian societies of the interior where most Burkinabés live. Burkinabés became the ideal scapegoats and were systematically attacked after each rebel

---

7 About a third of the population residing in Côte d’Ivoire today is of foreign origin, out of a total population estimated to be 20 million. Burkinabés are the most important foreign community in Côte d’Ivoire and represent more than 55% of the foreign nationals who live in the country (about 2.5 million people). The majority lives in rural areas and usually started to work first as paid labour in plantations owned by Ivoirians. After some time, they settle down and start running their own plantations. Burkinabés have been living in Côte d’Ivoire since the colonial period and many families have been here for more than one generation (Zongo, 2003).
advance. In the rural areas north of Duékoué, in the fall of 2002, groups of young Guéré seized Burkinabé quarters and encampments, armed with machetes, hunting rifles and miscellaneous other weapons. Attacks were particularly brutal in the villages of Blodi, Iruzon, Toa Zéo, Sibabli and Kouibli, in the Bangolo area:

‘When the rebels took Vavoua, people started saying that the Burkinabés were with the rebels. The young Guéré started to attack them. At first, the mayor came and asked the youths to set up checkpoints to defend the village. But not before long, youths started to harass the Burkinabés and to steal from them. This continued until they were organized with weapons. On October 8, they attacked an encampment and killed three young Burkinabés. They burnt everything. We had to leave.’ (Human Rights Watch, 2003b)

The reaction from the Guéré communities to the activism of these youths varied widely per village. In some places, Guéré chiefs did little to quell their militancy, in others, local authorities intervened, including village chiefs and sometimes even the gendarmes, to try preventing an escalation of violence; it was, however, usually to little effect (Human Rights Watch, 2003b). In late October 2002, when the cocoa and coffee crops were ready for harvesting, most of the Burkinabés had been chased out of the area and were sheltering in Duékoué or had returned to their homeland. When the area fell into rebel hands at the end of December, the balance of power switched and the Guéré became the ones on the move (this trait is particularly apparent in the chronology presented earlier).

But arbitrary violence did not remain confined to Burkinabés in government-controlled areas. Any individual who belonged to an ethnic group that potentially could be perceived as allied to the rebels was a potential target. In April 2003, Human Rights Watch report the lynching of a Yacouba who had gone to the mayor’s office in Duékoué to obtain a laissez-passer to be able to travel in the area. When someone accused him in the street of being an assailant, a crowd threw themselves on him and beat him with bricks and stones. He was taken to the local hospital, but some individuals dragged him outside and killed him. His body was set alight and left into the hospital courtyard. In such a tense and

---

8 International Crisis Group went so far as to report that violence against Burkinabés and Malians in the Duékoué-Guiglo area had become so systematic, widespread and excessive throughout April 2003 that it resembled deliberate policy. Local militias and village self-defence committees were involved, as well as the gendarmes and the police. Even village elders were used to draw Burkinabés back to their plantations, where they were killed by local youths. The flight of Burkinabés by bus to Burkina Faso reached a dramatically high level in March and April 2003 (International Crisis Group, 2003).
9 Returning to Burkina Faso was already an existing trend and can be traced back to the mid-1990s (Zongo, 2003). The main cause of this reverse migratory flow relates to a growing uncertainty with regard to land transfers due to the increasing contestation of existing arrangements. It is however noteworthy that only a minority of Burkinabés left Côte d’Ivoire, even at the peak of conflict; many stayed in fact relatively nearby, in the western region, probably waiting for a decrease in tension.
suspicious climate, being accused of being an assailant could be a death sentence, and anyone, even Guérés, could be beaten to death.10

In the Zone de Confiance, in Wé territory, the war eventually weakened the position of the Guéré and Wobé, while strengthening the local prerogatives of the non-autochthones. Wê youths were particularly affected by this changing balance of power, and in the villages of Zou and Zeregbo for instance, at the time I was doing fieldwork, they had stopped regulating the local taxation on transport, market stalls and local trade. They were also only playing a marginal role in matters related to local security. Non-autochthones, particularly of Lobi origin and those involved in the dozo brotherhood, had gradually taken over most of these privileges and were playing an increasing role in settling local affairs, adding a new layer to the local mechanisms of conflict resolution. Situations varied a lot, depending on villages and village chiefs. At the time of doing fieldwork, the climate between autochthones and non-autochthones was much more tense in Zeregbo than in Zou for instance: in Zou, the local chief was a contested but respected elder, who was genuinely seeking some kind of social cohesion among the communities he administered by trying to mitigate the interethnic tensions that had been revived by the war; in Zeregbo, communities were openly afraid of each other at the end of 2006, and the chief, who was known to be involved in petty trafficking, was doing little to change these perceptions.

Box 5.1 is particularly telling because it illustrates quite well the confusion between acts of war and petty crime, and how, at the village level, any type of anecdotal incident has come to be systematically framed along ethnic lines, calling for a ‘group’ response and beginning a spiral of retaliation. To an outside observer, there is little in common between the third war of Zou and the first two. To an insider – since immediate consequences are similar (houses are burnt, people are slaughtered, specific quarters are targeted, many people flee) – distinguishing between acts of war and other forms of violence has become meaningless. This is the worrying development we were talking about earlier: violence has become so diffuse in certain locations in the western region that the rationale of violence does not matter anymore and everything becomes pretext for group confrontation.

The Zone de Confiance, where no clear authority prevailed between May 2003 and April 2007, has been the theatre of so many incidents that degenerated into intercommunity conflict that it raises serious doubt whether such a dynamics of revenge can ever be broken in certain areas. The events of Diézouon/Kouibly in

---

10 Human Rights Watch reports that in early March 2003, a Guéré was beaten to death in Duékoué, 25 metres from a gendarmerie post, after another Guéré had accused him of being an assailant.
Box 5.1: The three Zou wars

The first war
Liberian MPIGO forces entered the village on 1 January 2003. The first week was relatively peaceful, but the situation drastically changed in the second week. There were shootings, broken down doors, looting. The Liberians were stealing anything, bikes, motorbikes, coffee/cocoa mills, food, poultry, etc. When they were passing through the village from Bangolo or Logoulalé with their loot, they were obliging youths to carry it to Mahapleu or Danané. The youths were beaten up, they were threatened at gunpoint, so they had to go with them. They were shooting in the feet of those who were resisting too much. Much of the population fled during that period, to escape these sufferings. They left the village and went to the bush, in the encampments. Some fled to the nearby towns. MPIGO was chased out by the MPCI a few weeks later. The MPCI stayed about two weeks in the village, without making any trouble, which restored the confidence of the population. That is when the population came back. The cohabitation with the rebels was so peaceful then that certain cadres from the village, who were living in town, accused the Guéré village chief of having entered into an alliance with the rebels. The chief was publicly accused in a local newspaper.

The second war
MJP troops relayed the MPCI in Zou and started disarming the population. Four Guérés from the nearby village of Phing-Béoua, including the President of Youth, visited the rebels to reclaim their weapons. During the discussions, the Guérés wounded two rebels. Retaliation was immediate and the four Guérés were shot dead. The death of the President of Youth was quite badly received by the Guérés of Phing-Béoua who decided to retaliate the same day. Forty Guérés therefore attacked the 12 rebels who were staying in Zou. The rebels retreated, due to their small number, and called for reinforcements. Reinforcements arrived the evening of the same day from Man and Danané and surrounded the village. The fighting lasted for four hours. More than 23 Guérés were killed, a lot of houses were burnt down in the Guéré quarter, and many people who were trying to escape fell into ambushes. During and after this violent episode, a lot of Guérés left the village. Some returned after the Zone de Confiance was set up in May 2003, reassured by the presence of impartial forces who had established a base in the village to monitor the local security.

The third war
On 20 November 2003, a Young Burkinabé accidentally hit a Guéré girl with his bike. He was stabbed in the neck by a young Guéré of Phing-Béoua and died. Apparently, the two people already knew each other and were involved in some kind of affair with the same girl. Tensions escalated quickly between the Burkinabé and Guéré communities, despite attempts at mediation by the village chief. The Guérés refused to hand over the offender to the Burkinabés and even helped him to escape. Calling for revenge, the Burkinabés started the war. Consequences were quite heavy for the village. There were several dead, dozens of disappearances, people were slaughtered, their throats cut, houses were burnt down. The village emptied of most autochthones after that. Even some allochthones left for more secure places.

Source: IRC, MARP Zou, 2007
April 2004, the killings of Duékoué in June 2005, and the incidents of Toa Zéo in 2006 are all visible benchmarks for each of these events led to massive displacement of people (all events are recorded in the chronology above). Less obvious, yet taking the same worrying ethnic turn, is the series of attacks on individuals that took place in the Zone de Confiance between 2004 and 2007, sparing no one, from 3 year olds to 90 year olds, fishermen, businessmen, farmers (ibid). One even gets the impression that the mere fact of being young has become suspicious in such contexts and worthy of punishment. In Guéré territory, in 2005-2007, any type of petty crime came to be interpreted as an act of war and was systematically framed along ethnic lines, calling for a ‘group’ response and beginning a vicious cycle of retaliation. Any source of tension had become a potential trigger to ethnic violence, regardless of what the initial cause of friction was (a dispute over land or a mere conflict between neighbours).

An example of inter-ethnic rivalry that has been instrumentalized by the war is the long-standing Yacouba/Guéré resentment. In February 2003, the MJP leadership publicly claimed that if the State was going to use Guéré militias to kill Yacoubas and Dioulas, it would organize attacks on Guéré and Bété villages in reprisal (International Crisis Group, 2003). Mid-July 2003, after the end of war had been declared, Guéré militias were still involved in raids against Yacouba villages in the areas of Zouan-Hounien and Bin-Houyé, and it was suggested that the Guéré/Yacouba conflict was mirroring the Khran/Gio feud that had been revived on Ivorian soil by the use of Liberian mercenaries on both sides (ibid). I tend to think that the Khran/Gio strife had little to do with the recrudescence of tensions between Guérés and Yacoubas. From an emic perspective, the mere fact of associating Yacoubas with rebels and Guérés with pro-government militias was probably enough to legitimize a cycle of violence difficult to break. Again, the rationales of violence hardly matter when everything becomes pretext for group confrontation.

An interesting feature of this period of systematic intercommunity violence is that it is relatively loose from the Ivorian conflict. If we exclude the recent events of early 2011, rebels and loyalist forces had stopped fighting each other for many years, the last direct attack probably being the assault on Logoualé, in February 2005, when progovernment militias shot at rebel positions. The bulk of intercommunity violence was largely happening within agrarian societies where people knew each other very well. It usually involved individuals and groups of individuals from the same village, or from a neighbouring one. If enduring war factions lent a hand to certain groups on a number of occasions, war – as background context – has acted more as a catalyst, providing the space with no clear territorial sovereignty which was needed (the Zone de Confiance) to make it possible for such a spiral of violence to ensue.
Another interesting feature of that period of intercommunity violence is that violence has been used as a means to reorganize the local socio-economic spaces and to control mobility within and between those spaces. After all, ethnic groups do not compete for territory in Côte d’Ivoire and spaces are already divided along ethnic lines; the existing divisions are not called into question. But ethnicity has provided an easy grip for weakening the positions of *autochthones* in certain places, and strengthening them in others. As Vlassenroot wrote: ‘Ethnicity continues to be the main instrument to organize disorder: no other theme or issue has remotely similar mobilizing power and reducing the explanation of a current crisis to an ethnic issue is generally sufficient to convince youngsters to join or form an [ethnic] militia’ (Vlassenroot, 2006: 59).

**Multi-ethnic agrarian societies**

Mono-ethnic villages do not exist in Côte d’Ivoire, and the west is no exception. Villages are mixed, composed of *autochthones* who are considered autochthonous on basis of some kind of historical primacy (‘the ones who were here before’), and also composed of foreigners, which eventually designate nationals of a foreign country (allogenies) and Ivoirians from a different region (*allochthones*). There is a whole history and ideology behind the concept of autochthony in Côte d’Ivoire, which I described in detail in the previous chapter. Suffice here to say that the concept of autochthony implicitly calls for excluding strangers from belonging, while at the same time constantly redefining who is a stranger and who is not. At the local level, less and less distinction is made between *allogenies* and *allochthones* in the rural areas, and they are usually labeled and treated the same from an emic perspective.

Côte d’Ivoire counts a large diversity of ethnic groups that are commonly classified into four, based on linguistic criteria: the Akan, which includes the Baoulé and Agni and finds its geographic origin in eastern, southeastern and central Côte d’Ivoire; the Krou, which originates from the southwest of the country and which counts among others the Krumen, the Bété, the Guéré and the Wobé; the Mandé, also called the Mandingué, from the northwest, which consists of the Malinké, the Bambara, the Dioula, and the Yacouba; and the Gour, also called the Voltaïc, which originates from the northeast and includes the Sénoufo and Lobi communities. Some kind of territorial ethnic mapping can be drawn out of such divisions, which highlights the geographical origin of Côte d’Ivoire’s main ethnic groups and shows, for each area, who is considered autochthonous and who is not (Map 5.5).
The terrain chosen for this particular research and roughly bounded by the towns of Danané, Man, Duékoué, and Toulepleu is home to various autochthonous groups. The Guéré homeland extends from Toulepleu east to the Sassandra river, north towards Bangolo, and south to Taï. The area occupied by the Wobé people extends further north, east of the Guéré area, on the Duékoué-Kouibli axis, in the sous-préfectures adjoining the Niédéboua territory. The Guéré, Wobé and Niédéboua are part of the larger ethnic group Wê, and share historical and cultural ties with the ethnic group of the current President (of Bété origin). They are consequently more inclined to adhere to pro-government propaganda.
Administratively, the Wê are located in the Moyen-Cavally region and in the southeastern part of the 18 Montagnes region. The sous-préfectures of Zou, Diéouzon, Zéo, and the departments of Toulepleu, Blolequin, Guiglo, Duékoué, Bangolo (all located in Guéré territory), were particularly affected by the war and have been home to the bulk of the pro-government militias. It is estimated that the Guéré and Wobé respectively represent 3.4% and 1.7% of the Ivorian population (2001 national census). The Yacouba territory extends from Man to Danané, then south along the Liberian border, until north of Toulepleu. It was for the most part occupied by the rebel forces, with the exception of some villages and encampments in the Zone de Confiance. The towns of Zouan-Hounien (pronounced Zonn-Houyé in the local language) and Bin-Houyé are in Yacouba territory. The Yacouba people are estimated to represent 5.9% of the Ivorian population (approx. 250,000 people). They are also called Dan and share cultural affinities with the Liberian Gio. The Toura live in the north of Man, in the region of Biankouma and represent about 1% of the Ivorian population.

Western Côte d’Ivoire has been particularly affected by internal and cross-border migration. If the Ivorian land was at first massively exploited by European entrepreneurs in the south-east and eastern part of the country (colonists started wood, coffee and cocoa plantations), the indigenous plantation economy developed quite quickly in the 1920s and spread to other regions. It involved both autochthonous and non-autochthonous producers. By the early 1950s, indigenous cocoa and coffee plantations had spread so much in western Côte d’Ivoire that the triangle west of Zouan Hounien across the Cavally river and south of Zou had become one of the most productive areas of the country. The colonial administration openly encouraged the migration of Malinké, Sénoufo and Baoulé to the western woodlands. The autochthonous Bété, in particular,

---

11 The 18 Montagnes region counts 6 departments and 41 sous-préfectures, also called communes, which designate rural hubs: the department of Bangolo, with the sous-préfectures of Bléniméouin, Diéouzon, Gohouo-Zagna, Guinglo-Tahouaké, Zéo, and Zou; the department of Biankouma, with the sous-préfectures of Blapleu, Brima, Gbablasso, Gbangbégounié, Gouané, Gouiné, Gourané, Mangouin, Santa, and Yorodougou; the department of Danane, with the sous-préfectures of Daleu, Gbon-Houyé, Gouotro, Kouan-Houlé, Mahapleu, and Séileu; the department of Kouibly, with the sous-préfectures of Nidrou, Poubly, Sémen, Tién-Siably, and Totrodrou; the department of Man, with the sous-préfectures of Douélé, Gbatongouin, Gbôfesso-Sama, Gotongouiné 1, Kiélé, Podiagouiné, Yaypleu, and Zagoué; the department of Zouan-Hounien, with the sous-préfectures of Banneu, Glangleu, Goulaleu, Guiamapleu, Téapleu, and Yelleu.

The Moyen-Cavally region counts 4 departments and 25 communes: the department of Blolequin, with the sous-préfectures of Diboké, Doké, Tinhou, and Zéaglo; the department of Duekoué, with the sous-préfectures of Bagohouo, Diahouin, Dibobly, Diourouzon, Gbapleu, Guéhiébly, and Guézon; the department of Guiglo, with the sous-préfectures of Bédi-Goazon, Kaadé, Kéibly, Nizahon, Petit-Guiglo, Sakré, Zagné, and Zro; the department of Toulepleu, with the sous-préfectures of Bakoubly, Bohobli, Méo, Nézobly, Péné, and Tiébly.

12 I developed this migration dynamics in the previous section and I only repeat a few points here to explain the immediate context.
were severely judged by the colonists and excluded from any form of negotiation. Many people from northern and central Côte d’Ivoire therefore moved west, soon outnumbering the Bété and Guéré *autochthones* in many locations. At Independence, the first Ivorian President continued to promote the same trend by applying a very open immigration policy to the citizens of the neighbouring countries, particularly the Burkinabé. After all, part of Burkina Faso had been administratively linked to Côte d’Ivoire during colonial rule, between 1932 and 1947 (Zongo, 2003). Houphouët-Boigny’s well-known statement ‘*la terre appartient à ceux qui la cultivent*’ (the land belongs to those who put it to use) had value of law and explicitly implied that foreigners and *autochthones* had similar land rights, provided they were growing crops on Ivoirian soil. This was a clear political stand which did not go uncontested at the local level. It was so much at odds with customary practice that promoted inalienability of land rights for the *autochthones* that it fueled a great deal of tension in agrarian societies, while providing the ideal background for a possible slip into inter-ethnic violence.

If western Côte d’Ivoire consists of a mosaic of ethnic groups, the belief that autochthonous rights prevail over the rights of the non-*autochthones* is firmly anchored at the local level. Not so much because *autochthones* cleared the land first, thereby earning specific rights – the majority of the land was actually put in use by imported labour, so such a justification would not really hold in such a context – but because being autochthonous in Côte d’Ivoire is foremost conceived in terms of belonging to the ethnic group of the first settlers in a well-defined territory (*sous-préfectures* tend to mirror such ‘autochthonous’ ethnic divisions). It does not matter if ‘native *autochthones*’ do not exist in Côte d’Ivoire. After all, ‘the whole country has been populated by successive waves of migrants, with no exception for the western parts’ (Schwartz, 1968). But the firm belief still exists that being first entitles someone to more rights than being second or third, and this conception is enough to legitimize clear and explicit autochthonous rights that are eventually used as a basis to regulate social relationships in multi-ethnic agrarian societies. Non-autochthonous rights and obligations are derived from this. It is not rare for non-*autochthones* to be restricted in their actions or to be forbidden to carry out certain tasks and economic activities without authorization. In Zéregbo, for instance – a Guéré village in the *sous-préfecture* of Zou where I did exploratory fieldwork – there were many rules framed along ethnic lines in order to regulate access to some of the local resources. Fishing, for instance, was strongly regulated. The nearby Cavally river was divided among all Guéré family heads. They could use intensive fishing techniques to catch fish (traps, floating baits, small dams), but non-*autochthones* could only go fishing with a line and a hook, and only in certain waters located far from the village. If they wanted to fish nearer by, they had to ask an
autochthone permission, which was generally granted against some kind of payment.

Related to land use, the institution of ‘tutorat’ is particularly present in the western region, both in Wê and Yacouba territory, and is deeply embedded in social relations. Chauveau & Colin (2005) define it as an agrarian institutional device, which regulates first-comers/late-comers relationships and which fits into a moral economy in which one cannot refuse land access to an outsider who needs land as a mean of subsistence for himself and his family. The institution of tutorat regulates therefore, on the one hand, the transfer of land rights between autochthones and non-autochthones, and on the other hand, the incorporation of the non-autochthones in the local community. Merely because of the notion of tutorat, it is in fact not rare for a foreigner to live in an autochthonous neighbourhood, close to his ‘tuteur’; however, the reverse is not common, and in the Wê homeland, a Gûéré would not normally live in a Mossi quarter. A main feature of the institution of tutorat is that migrants are expected to owe their tuteurs perennial gratitude. A bundle of explicit and implicit obligations is fully part of the land transfer agreement, and it is usually expected that migrants share part of the harvest, that they give some kind of financial contribution to mark personal events in their tuteur’s life (funerals, sickness, etc.), or that they simply respond when the tuteur asks for help. The tendency to increase and monetize social obligations in return for access to land has encouraged the idea among migrant settlers that they had engaged in a purchase-sale transaction. But from the autochthonous perspective (and generally also from the viewpoint of many settlers), an economic transaction in no way cancels the moral obligation of gratitude owed to the tuteur. Sometimes, tuteur demands grow out of proportion, at other times migrants do not honour the agreed commitment. What eventually matters, however, is that a multiplicity of arrangements exists at the local level, and that the terms are constantly being negotiated and renegotiated over time by all parties involved. Noteworthily, purchasing an agricultural plot and paying a substantial amount of money for it does not mean that the migrant can waive his obligations. From the autochthonous perspective, the buyer still owes the tuteur, and this belief is shared by many foreigners. In fact, as Kabeer (2005) put it for another context, allogenes and allochthones often have their own views on when it is fair for them to be treated the same as autochthones, and when is it fair for them to be treated differently.

---

13 See the works of Koné et al. (1999) and Koné & Chauveau (1998).
14 Tuteur is an emic term referring to autochthones who have entered a client-patron relationship with a migrant.
15 Mossi is a widely used local term to designate Burkinabé.
If land issues in western Côte d’Ivoire are not directly related to war per se, the current conflict has exacerbated pre-war frictions and has added new sources of tension. Pre-war frictions over land, related to the sale and resale of agricultural plots, incomplete payments, contested boundaries of forests, arrangements not honoured within the framework of tutorat, etc. They could take extremely violent forms, including murder that often went unpunished. The war – and the displacement of population that followed from it – added new sources of tension. In some places, the conflict was used as pretext to settle old disputes and expand individual territories: several non-autochthones, previously involved in a tutorat relationship, took advantage of the confusion and of the flight of the autochthonous population to expand their share of cultivated land. Non-autochthonous newcomers also added to that messy field by settling in places where they were not authorized to do so. In the Zone de Confiance, with the balance of power shifting from autochthones to non-autochthones and the abrupt end to formal judicial authority, the general feeling at the time I was doing fieldwork was that many pre-war issues had been put on hold, in the wait for a reversal of power at the village level, or the restoration of civil courts for the cases that demanded a more formal settlement. I interviewed a Guéré from Zéregbo who had experienced a very brutal altercation with three Yacoubas from the neighbouring village in 2001. During the dispute, his wife was wounded and his newborn killed, accidentally stabbed while on his mother’s back. He went so far as to hire a lawyer to represent him in court, at the tribunal of Man. His case has been on hold since the start of the war, as all judicial administrators have fled the area. In the same Zone de Confiance, in Guéré territory, there has been a revival of ‘illegal’ plantations, ‘illegal’ designating the unauthorized exploitation by ‘strangers’ of plantations owned by autochthones who fled the village during the war and who have not yet returned. Although some form of moral economy still prevails – according to the village chief of Zou, if the tuteur has not yet returned, ‘son étranger’ can use part of his land to plant subsistence crops (rice, maize, cassava) – there are limits to how far such complaisance extends, and non autochthones are strictly prohibited to grow perennial crops, such as coffee or cocoa. ‘S’il le fait, c’est à ses risques et périls’ (interview with the village chief). To give a sense of scale to this phenomenon, it is useful to note that when this interview took place in December 2006, the village of Zou was nearly emptied from its autochthonous population. In addition to the village chief, a respected elder, only eight young men of Guéré origin had returned since the violent events of spring 2003. Everybody else had fled, either in neighboring towns in government-controlled territory, or in Abidjan.

The year 2005 was marked by two important events. The first one related to the creation of a military administration in the west. In an attempt to ‘secure’ the
region following the tragic events of Petit-Duékoué and Guitrozon where 41 autochthones were killed in one night (including children, women and the elderly), the President decided to set up a ‘gouvernorat militaire’ in the Moyen-Cavally region, a disposition that persisted until recently. The second event concerned the upgrade of certain villages, communes and sous-préfectures, which respectively became communes, sous-préfectures and departments. These new administrative territories were established by presidential decree on 2 July 2005 (two years after the end of combat operations) and notably concerned several localities in the west (several sous-préfectures were created in the departments of Kouibly, Zouan Hounien and Bloloquin: Zéaglo, Zagné, Nizahon, etc.). If one reading could be to associate the creation of these departments, sous-préfectures and communes to a hidden agenda linked to electoral purposes (assuming for instance that more sous-préfectures and communes were created in government-controlled territory), it does not seem to be a driving rationale. A better interpretation is perhaps to only note the resumption of the ordinary administrative and political life in the areas close to the former front line from 2005 onwards. In 2005, it was possible to make such administrative changes, a few years before it was unthinkable. This does not exclude that some villages may have been promoted to communes for the strategic role they played during the war (like the villages of Kahadé and Zagné, for instance, the respective bases of the MILOCI and UPRGO, or the village of Doké, home to the mother of a high-ranking FANCI commander). But because other administrative districts were also created in the rebel-controlled zones at the same time, this tempers the argument that it was a ‘reward’ or an electoral deed. After all, in October 2005, 520 communes were created in Côte d’Ivoire (on top of the 198 existing ones), and only 25 were located in the Moyen-Cavally region.

The fieldwork locations and the western humanitarian context

The two settings I focused on are not only different in terms of local territorial sovereignty (Guiglo is located in the government-controlled area, Man is controlled by the rebel forces), but also in terms of size, ethnic composition, economic activities and political affinities. The two locations have been differently marked by the war and by some of the situations that derived from it: mobilizing contexts have been very specific to each setting and the forms that humanitarian interventions took, within specific geographical contexts and when targeting militarized civilians, also differed depending on the location.
Guiglo was never attacked. It is a rural town of about 66,000 people,\textsuperscript{16} capital of the Moyen-Cavally region, located on the Nzo river, at approximately 600 kilometres from Abidjan. The department of Guiglo borders four others, the department of Bloloquin in the west, the department of Bangolo in the north, the department of Duékoué in the east, and the department of Tabou in the south; it counts 8 sous-préfectures (Bédi-Goazon, Kahadé, Kéibly, Nizahon, Petit-Guiglo, Sakré, Zagné, and Zro). The autochthonous population is of Guéré origin. The refugee camp of Nicla borders the town and hosts about 6,000 Liberian refugees who have been living in Côte d’Ivoire since the mid 1990s. At the last municipal and legislative elections in 2001, both the elected mayor, Gaha Barnabé, and the elected department député, Hubert Oulye (later to become minister in the government of reconciliation) were FPI sympathizers.\textsuperscript{17}

Economically, Guiglo is a dynamic market centre where autochthonous and non-autochthonous communities trade rice, livestock and cassava. The town is also a collection depot for cocoa, coffee and timber, before it is taken to the coastal ports for export. It hosts an industrial sawmill, the French owned Thanry company, which employs many people in town. The local informal economy is an important source of income for many people and includes the artisanal production of charcoal, made from the timber industry scrapwood. There is more export industry nearby, the Compagnie Hévéicole du Cavally (CHC), a rubber company located near Zagné, a few kilometres south of Guiglo. The CHC is also a major player in the local economy and employs more than a thousand permanent staff as well as sustaining privileged links with thousands of individual rubber producers.\textsuperscript{18}

• Mobilization contexts

During the war, Guiglo was the centre from where the form of counter-insurgency movements that emerged in reaction to the rebel attacks resembled the most organized forms of paramilitary militias. Although the town was never attacked, Guiglo was on maximum alert in early December, when local residents heard that the towns of Toulepleu and Bloloquin had fallen into rebel hands. Mobilization initially resembled the self-defence movement phenomenon described earlier, derived from an existing type of urban vigilantism, but with the

\textsuperscript{16} http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Villes_de_Cote_d%27Ivoire
\textsuperscript{17} FPI was the Presidential party when Gbagbo was in power.
\textsuperscript{18} CHC provides local farmers with planting material, training and finance to establish their own rubber plantations. Then, ‘cuplump’ (raw rubber) is bought at market prices for processing at the company’s factory. Chapter 9 gives more details on that.
front line only a few kilometres away, these self-defence movements rapidly became more structured and developed closer links with the Ivoirian army (FANCI). The following testimony is particularly telling:¹⁹

‘I joined a self-defence group. In the very beginning, we were not yet with the FANCI. We were posted at the various entries of the town, to secure the place and to prevent the rebels getting in. If we noticed someone suspicious, we would call the FANCI to investigate further. The soldiers were not particularly keen on us. They were saying we were different and that we had a different way of seeing things. At the checkpoints, we were on our own. We had wooden clubs and 12 calibres for those who had a gun. We were given ammo.

At first, the self-defence group had no name. It is when it was decided that we had to lend a hand to the FANCI that we were given a name. We were called AP-Wê, that meant Patriotic Alliance of Wê. We could not really tell people that we were reinforcement militia members. We were wearing green tee-shirts, with the AP-Wê name on it. Because there were many of us and because many of us were from neighbouring villages, we got transferred to Blolequin. Other people came to Guiglo, including some from Abidjan. They created their own alliance, the Front for the Liberation of the Great West. They had grey tee-shirts with the FLGO name on them. They stayed in Guiglo; we left for Blolequin.

Later, Général Maho united the two movements. Because he had not fled [Guiglo], he was trusted and all information was passing through him, even encouragement messages. It was him who motivated the youth to protect the town. So he became our chief and our group merged and became the FLGO. There was also another group in Zagné, and another group in Duékoué. They had come to Guiglo to receive military training and later they went back to their positions. In Blolequin, we had our own military camp. We started fighting with our own guns [hunting guns at first], and then we got access to Kalashs that we were taking from [dead] rebels. Sometimes, we found more sophisticated weapons. Some of the FANCI soldiers also trusted us and gave us arms. They knew we were there to help. It is in Blolequin that we learned how to manipulate weapons: how to assemble and disassemble machine guns, how to unjam guns in the heat of combat (…).’

Militias’ links with the Ivoirian army were reported several times in the local press despite repeated government denials. In early December 2002, an article from the Agence Ivoirienne de Presse reported that the Blolequin municipal authorities had officially announced their support for the Ivoirian army and the mobilization of Wê youths ‘for pushing the rebels out of the Wê homeland’. According to the article, the youth directly received military equipment from one of the mayor’s assistants and local chefs de terre had been mobilized (Agence Ivoirienne De Presse, 2002). The article also stated that in order to prevent further rebel advances and to keep the populations safe, the villages of Doké, Goya, Yoya and Ifa were already guarded by these Wê warriors (Agence Ivoirienne De Presse, 2002).²⁰

As already mentioned, local ‘comités de crise’ emerged relatively quickly in the western region and played an important part in motivating the local youths to

¹⁹ The text has been slightly adapted for better reader comprehension.
²⁰ The article also reported that traditional female shamans (féticheuses) had also joined the Wê youths to prepare them mystically before they attacked rebels’ positions(Agence Ivoirienne De Presse, 2002).
lend a hand to an Ivoirian army struck by high desertion rates (Pana Press, 2003). Several accounts have in fact pointed out that in the very first days of violence, many gendarmes\textsuperscript{21} – who at the time were the local representatives of the Ivoirian army before reinforcements were sent in – fled the area (individual interviews, December 2006).

A particularly large mobilization occurred in Guiglo. Many youths enlisted in the emerging militias, responding to several calls for volunteers from the municipal authorities and from the Ivoirian army. From the testimonies heard, the registration process simply consisted in giving one’s name at the local city hall, or at the FANCI military camp, or at one of the militias’ bases, which was usually the leader’s compound – on several occasions this happened to be a local appointed official. Even if some of these youths had previous experience in rural or urban vigilantism before the war (with some having already been involved in village or neighbourhood watches), they were usually new to warfare and several testimonies show that they underwent some kind of accelerated military training led by experienced soldiers. All travel between Guiglo and Toulepleu was temporarily prohibited by the Ivoirian army and by municipal authorities to avoid information on FANCI positions leaking out (Agence Ivoirienne De Presse, 2002).

- Demobilization contexts

If municipal and district authorities\textsuperscript{22} were very much involved in the mobilization of the youths in the early stages of the counter-insurgency, they were no less involved in ‘demobilization’ matters. Indeed, militia leaders had a vested interest in having these militias persist as long as possible and they particularly excelled in framing a discourse that overemphasized the military power of the pro-government militias by conveying the idea that uncontrolled ‘elements’ of the base were regularly ‘threatening’ to resume violence if they were not properly compensated for their war effort (Nord-Sud, 2009). To a certain extent, pro-government militias have evolved in recent years from an armed group involved in warfare to what is simply an instrument for consolidating the power of local elites. On the part of militia leaders, it is ‘a skillful manipulation of disorder’ (Vlassenroot, 2006: 56). In 2007, these groups seemed more to have stopped

\textsuperscript{21} The gendarmerie is part of the national armed forces of Cote d’Ivoire and is roughly equivalent in size to the army. It fulfils the function of a national police force and is particularly responsible for territorial security in rural areas. In times of national crisis, the gendarmerie can be used to reinforce the army.

\textsuperscript{22} Municipal and district authorities consist of the Mairie and the Conseil Général. Conseil Généraux were created only a few months before the start of the war so they were relatively new actors in the local arena.
seeking socio-political change and to be aiming at defending their autonomy as a group (the same idea was advanced by Amadiume cited in Ellis & Van Kessel, 2009). But if we except recent pre-electoral and post-electoral events, one could argue that militia leaders were exercising little control over their elements in 2006 and 2007. The likelihood that angry militiamen formed a serious threat to national security was low then: firstly, because the bulk of the heavy weapons had been in storage in arsenals for a few years, and secondly, because – even if tensions were increasingly visible between leaders and the most vocal elements on the base – the bulk of militiamen had returned to civilian activities and had resigned themselves to getting little, if not nothing, out of their participation into warfare. They only had vague hopes of compensation.

When it became clear that a political settlement would prevail over a military one, militia leaders were avid to (re-)take on a role in local politics. This included a function of broker – especially since they were keen on reinserting the militarized civilians under their command – and they notably started extensively liaising with the burgeoning hevea export industry nearby (this point will be further developed in Chapter 8 when reflecting on the humanitarian-military nexus). The same militia leaders have also become increasingly involved in reconciliation matters recently, showing many signs of their willingness to cooperate for restoring a peaceful climate in the west. They have, for instance, become involved in land conflicts mitigations, particularly regarding the issue of confiscated plantations (Maho promised to find a solution for restituting the plantations confiscated by autochthones to Baoulé farmers) (Fraternite Matin, 2009); they have promoted the return of civilians to certain locations (Notre Voie, 2008); they have tried to appease discontented militia recruits (Notre Voie, 2009); and in local security matters, they have tried to address the security concerns of the western residents under their jurisdiction, particularly those of the local traders and transporters, by notably escorting vehicles for a while on sections of roads known to be prone to banditry.

*Man*

Man is an urban hub and a heterogeneous town about three times the size of Guiglo. Its population was estimated to be 160,000 in 2010. It is the capital of the 18 Montagnes region and lies between mountains that include Mount Toura and

---

23 This led to several amusing anecdotes. Diomandé Vassé for instance, a Minister’s advisor known to have supplied the militias in the beginning of the conflict, was taken hostage by FLGO militiamen when they were denied their financial demands (L’inter, 2008b, 2008c).

24 Before the war, FLGO leader Maho Glofêhi was the third assistant of the Mayor of Guiglo, member of the FPI, and a traditional Wê chief. UPRGO leader Octave Yahi was Vice President of the Conseil General in Guiglo.
Mount Tonkoui, the two highest peaks in Côte d’Ivoire. The department of Man borders the department of Danané in the west, the department of Bangolo in the south, the department of Vavoua in the east, and the department of Biankouma in the north. The autochthonous population is of Yacouba origin. At the last municipal and legislative elections in 2001, both the elected mayor, Albert Flindé, and the elected department député, Siki Blon Blaise, were UDPCI sympathizers, the political party of former head of State General Gueï.

Economically, the region of Man is the largest producer of coffee in Côte d’Ivoire and the town hosts the national factory Coffee Manufacturer of Côte d'Ivoire (UNICAFÉ). Man is also home to other export industries and there are several industrial timber companies nearby. There is a dynamic market centre in town, which attracts many people of different origins. Everything is traded, from agricultural products such as rice, cassava, plantain, to a wide range of fabrics, spare parts, and miscellaneous other items. The town is also a collection depot for cocoa and coffee and a logistic centre for their trade.

• The effects of war

The town fell into rebel hands for the first time at the end of November 2002. Two days later, loyalist forces recaptured the town for a few weeks, and on 19 December, Man was once again retaken by the rebellion. For the past eight years, it has remained in rebel-controlled territory. State institutions immediately ceased functioning: the armed forces, the police, the gendarmerie, customs, water and forest services, the judicial system, the administrative prefects, as well as the Conseil Général and the Mairie. The municipality (Mairie) was not closed for long though and resumed work in three domains: the registration of births, issuing certificates, and liaising between the population and rebel forces (they were then referred to as the Forces Nouvelles).

Man was located in Zone 6 in rebel territory. During the period under study, it was headed by zone commander Losseni Fofana (Com’Zone), in place since July 2003 and known locally as ‘Loss’ or ‘Papa Cobra’. He used to be a corporal in the Ivorian army, where most high-ranking elements of the Forces Nouvelles came from (Heitz, 2009a). Since the rebellion had to find ways to reach financial and economic autonomy in the territory they occupied, an economic forum was held in Bouaké on 9 November 2003, where tax collectioning systems were discussed in depth (Pana Press, 2003c, 2003k). A few days earlier,

---

25 The rebel-held part of Côte d’Ivoire is divided into ten zones.
26 There was much internal rivalry in the beginning when competing for positions and resources. It claimed many deaths among the rebels. Loss gradually eliminated his opponents or forced them into exile.
rebel forces had made a public statement against the redeployment of the State administration in the territories they controlled and had started recruiting staff to fulfil administrative positions (Pana Press, 2003h, 2003f). Shortly after the Bouaké forum, they started to systematically levy trade taxes on local businesses, from petty traders to the large export industries of cocoa, coffee and timber. In Man, the new tax system for the big companies began being implemented at the end of April 2004; a colonel from Korhogo had been specially mandated to that end (personal communication with Colonel Moussa, May 2004). In addition to the routine bribes demanded at checkpoints from individuals and transporters, extortion from businesses occurred openly and followed a clear chain of command.

I come back to some of the points mentioned here in Chapter 8, when empirically reflecting on the functioning of these armed groups. But suffice here to say that the Forces Nouvelles’ most lucrative sources of money were the cocoa and timber industries, ransacked at every single level of the chain. On a different scale, elements of the Forces Nouvelles could be observed collecting fees at the local market and at various shops in town, carrying receipt books.27 Small business owners usually handed over the money on a weekly basis:

‘The rebels come every Tuesday. One group comes to collect the 500 CFA francs (USD 1) a week and then is a second group that comes to check your documents on another day. If you don’t pay, or if your documents are not in order, they can confiscate your equipment and take it to their military camp. There, you have to pay 5,000 CFA francs to get it back.’

(Human Rights Watch, 2010)

Despite partial redeployment of the State administration (the Prefecture of Man was handed over to the civilian authorities in June 2007), the Com’Zone continued to exercise almost complete control over economic, security, and judicial affairs within his zone until the recent events.

In 2005, the Ivoirian State and the Forces Nouvelles reach an agreement authorizing the Forces Nouvelles to fulfil the function of police and gendarmerie in the territory they controlled. On 21 April 2006, the Préfet de Police of Man announced a large-scale recruitment campaign for police officers, and anyone under 30 years old was invited to apply, provided he or she had a minimum educational level (CM2/6th grade). Low-ranking rebels were particularly responsive to this call, and it is a topic that came up on several occasions during individual interviews. On 15 December 2006, 600 Forces Nouvelles police and gendarme officers were officially released from training to be deployed in rebel-held territory (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2006e). This auxiliary police force was trained in collaboration with

---

27 Noteworthily, the municipality successfully negotiated a share of the market taxation (Heitz, 2009b).
UNPOL, the UN Police, and received the blessing of the highest authorities (from Prime Minister Banny to the Ministry of Justice). In rebel-controlled territory, prisons, gendarmeries and police stations re-opened for the handling of civilian disputes.

The western humanitarian context

With the exception of Médecins sans Frontières (the Belgian, Dutch and French sections started their operations in the west in early 2003 while there were still combat operations in the area), most humanitarian agencies started operating in the west in the latter half of 2003, when the period of open combat had ceased. The first initiatives fostered focused on health care, water, basic sanitation and food security. Protection and programmes of reinsertion for ex-combatants came much later on the humanitarian agenda, with the latter appearing to be more boosted by political progress than by a genuine desire to understand the complex issue of temporarily militarized civilians. Reinsertion programming has mainly been framed in terms of technicalities, with indicators focusing on the number of project beneficiaries per activity and per site, the price details of the equipment provided, attendance lists, etc. Such an operating framework was intrinsically flawed by the lack of recognition of the project dynamics, an aspect I particularly explore in Chapter 9, when analyzing two standard instruments of post-conflict interventions targeting ex-combatants.

Simply because post-conflict interventions operate geographically near to the heart of conflict, they are quite likely to become entangled in social networks that play some part in structuring the conflict itself. Western Côte d’Ivoire has not been an exception. It is therefore worth to explore the extent to which humanitarianism has interacted with the war apparatus and whether it has been manipulated (or not) by the local warlords. I examine these two questions by reflecting on certain remarks made during the interviews I conducted and by recalling my own practitioner experience in Côte d’Ivoire in 2003-2004.

---

28 MSF-Belgique was running the hospital in Man, MSF-Netherlands the hospital in Danané, and MSF-France the hospital in Guiglo. All sections started running mobile clinics when the security situation allowed movement outside the towns.

29 They included Médecins Sans Frontières (the French, Dutch and Belgian sections), Médecins du Monde, OXFAM, the International Rescue Committee, Save the Children (the English and Swedish sections), Solidarités, Handicap International, CARE US and AFRICARE. A few INGOs came later, notably the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the German NGO GTZ-International Service (GTZ-IS), the latter provided support to militarized civilians.
• The humanitarian/military nexus from the insurgent perspective …

As I dug into my professional files, I came across several anecdotes that depicted the relative lenience of the rebel forces towards humanitarian workers. This report of an INGO field coordinator in Man is particularly telling:

‘Last week, we could see movements of troops with heavy weapons in town going north, on the Guinean border. The French forces Licornes advised us not to travel there at the moment. The area is not secured. (…) Two Forces Nouvelles officers visited our office: the Chargé de Communication and the Responsable des Affaires Sociales. It was the first time they came along. The objective of their visit was to tell me that everything was under control but that the Forces Nouvelles had decided to tighten the current checkpoints. They were thus apologizing in advance for the potential car and truck hassles. Indeed, our cars are now checked and searched almost all times and ID cards are asked from all the passengers.’ (extracts from an INGO situational report, Man, 9-27 May 2004)

On the insurgent side (at least in the Man area), international humanitarian agencies have remained relatively free from control and despite punctual interdiction from times to times, could circulate nearly everywhere in rebel territory if they were in possession of a valid laissez-passer and ‘ordre de mission’. The laissez-passer was a document issued by the Forces Nouvelles covering a particular zone (Man was for instance in Zone 6); it was usually necessary to obtain a laissez-passer from the rebel État-Major of Bouaké first to show that the agency had received approval from the highest in command. The ordre de mission was an internal document of the agency that was usually signed by the project manager. Humanitarian staff were also usually provided with an agency ID card, so they could present it at checkpoints, in case of identity checks.

Not everything ran smoothly of course, and in the absence of local commanders checkpoint staff could become quite heavy-handed. Sometimes, they would not be willing to let vehicles pass for fear of fighting in the area, on other occasions they would insist on getting a lift or receiving some petty cash, but these problems were usually solved quite easily after lengthy talks with them, without having to resort to giving in to their demands. Then, after a while, when the humanitarian agency was better known in the area, these kinds of problems tended to diminish.

Can we thus speak of a capture of humanitarian resources by the insurgent side? If routine bribes were probably sometimes paid by transporters on humanitarian freight at particularly heavy checkpoints, this was far from being the norm and the tax-free character of aid was usually recognized in rebel territory. In Côte d’Ivoire, we were far from the sophisticated system of capture described by Lavergne & Weissman (2003) in Sudan. There, the insurgents had developed a real savoir-faire in this respect, a humanitarian wing had been created within the SPLA to control the distribution of aid (the SRRA) and a significant part of resources were diverted to the rebel army and to the local elites through several
means (from the looting of WFP warehouses to an indirect system of taxation of humanitarian agencies). If humanitarianism in southern Sudan played a key role in the political economy of conflict, its role was much more modest in western Côte d’Ivoire. The Forces Nouvelles created a sort of humanitarian wing within the movement (it took several names: from the Bureau des Affaires Sociales in the beginning, to division Chargée des Affaires humanitaires in more recent years), but such structures had little say in what international agencies did on the ground. When agencies were asked for their daily route (under the pretext of ‘needing to know for providing protection’), there was no sanction when the information was not supplied and in the same vein, when the Forces Nouvelles suggested a potential local development partner to INGOs (known to be pro-rebel), there were no coercive measures when the suggestion was not followed. If any, financial and in-kind flows were minimal in Man between humanitarian agencies and the Forces Nouvelles, at least nothing comparable with what the companies exporting timber, coffee and cocoa were subject to (personal communication, April 2004).

• … from the counter-insurgent perspective

Hassling humanitarian workers was much more common on the counter-insurgent side and examples of humiliation and excessive harassment were frequently reported by INGOs working around Ben Houyé and Zouan Hounien:

‘J. was obliged to do push-ups at a particularly heavy checkpoint last week, the one set at the exit of Zouan Hounien on the road to Ity. The same problem happened with WFP drivers. It was at the same place.’ (extracts from an INGO situational report, Man, 14 February 2004)

‘Our car with our local staff was stopped for more than one hour at a FANCI checkpoint at the entry of Bin Houyé (coming from Zouan Hounien). Two reasons were given: one was that the local staff didn’t present the proper authorization (but I know they presented the same documentation we have been presenting for the past three months) and the second reason was that one of our staff is called Dely Desiré and one well-known rebel commander in Man is called Dely Gaspar. So FANCI accused our staff of being part of a rebel family.’ (extracts from an INGO situational report, Man, 8-19 November 2003)

‘Last Friday, our staff was again stopped by the FANCI at the exit of Bin Houyé. One soldier aggressively asked why IRC staff were all Yacouba. And then he started to check their identity cards. One didn’t have his ID card so the car had to go back to his place to pick it up. Fortunately, his house was not too far away. The soldier let them go afterwards.’ (extracts from an INGO situational report, Man, 5 March 2004)

But despite heavy harassment at checkpoints (under the pretext of checking travel documents, car insurance or ID), international humanitarian agencies were also rather free on the government side and could circulate everywhere without having to report to any official body. In late 2003, early 2004, most INGOs signed an official agreement with the Ivoirian State (un accord d’établissements) which included several advantageous agreements for the INGOs such as the
exemption from VAT on purchases, the exemption from custom taxes on imports, the exemption from taxes on funds sent from abroad, and favourable treatment by the immigration services when entering and/or exiting the country. These dispositions were in general implemented and were not issues. Some INGOs also signed agreements with specific ministries, in relation to their activities.

Has some sort of capture of humanitarian resources thus occurred on the government side? The tax-free character of international aid was usually also recognized in the government-controlled territory and trucks labeled ‘humanitarian’ and transporting humanitarian freight could usually avoid paying the routine fines. Although the World Food Programme warehouse was looted in Guiglo in January 2006, along with other INGOs stocks and equipment, this was more due to a crowd effect and the unexpected local mass reaction after the Bangladeshi UN peacekeepers opened fire on particularly strident demonstrators (shooting and killing several of them). Even though this tragic event was politically exploited by the local authorities, the loot probably went to the angry crowd, and what actually came out strikingly of the contexts under study, is that if some sort of capture was happening on either belligerent side, it was not at the level of physical humanitarian resources.

In contrast, local aid mechanisms were probably more prone to physical capture. As already mentioned, in the early stages of the counter-insurgency, Guéré cadres were raising financial contributions in their respective towns in support of the war effort and of the displaced populations. But it is quite possible that part of the help targeting the displaced was diverted to sustain the counter-insurgent groups, especially during the encampment period, where pro-government militias were confined in a military setting and were given free food.

‘On 4 May 2004, a FANCI truck arrived in Bangolo with rice and other food for the IDPs of the area. This food apparently was a gift from the Guéré community of Abidjan. Some Guéré politicians accompanied the truck. These politicians first met representatives of the IDPs, and this was followed by a very disorganized and messy food distribution.’ (extracts from an INGO situational report, Man, 9 May 2004)

• The ‘Zone de Confiance’: military, political or humanitarian product?
On top of that humanitarian apparatus, international diplomacy was keen on monitoring the ceasefire and movements of armed groups in the west of the country, and impartial forces were also mandated to play a role in supporting humanitarian operations there by establishing the necessary security conditions in the areas of intervention.

Perhaps the most tangible example of a military, political and humanitarian embroilment in western Côte d’Ivoire was the set-up of the Zone de Confiance, an artificial area created completely from scratch by the impartial forces, which
was used for both military and humanitarian ends. The *Zone de Confiance* designated a geographical area that separated rebel-held from government-held territory between May 2003 and April 2007. It was supposed to be neutral and belligerent and weapon free (the ceasefire was monitored in it by the impartial forces; French forces and ECOWAs at first, and then the ONUCI contingents), in sum, it was supposed to be one of these ‘spaces of exception’, an expression coined by Agier and Bouchet-Saulnier which I already alluded to in the theoretical considerations. In the four years of its existence, the *Zone de Confiance* in fact was a huge misnomer to designate a space of widespread banditism and where crimes went unpunished. No clear authority prevailed there and the visible proliferation of armed groups had the effect of reconfiguring many spaces, to the point of entirely changing the local balance of power in certain areas.

There is some ground to argue that the set up of such a Zone was necessary to reestablish basic living conditions in certain areas and to create favourable conditions for humanitarian interventions. After all, in many locations checkpoints were ended after the impartial forces asked the local youths to stop. And when the French forces and the ECOWAS started setting temporary bases in remote rural settings in the summer of 2003, people slowly started to leave the bush where they had been hiding, and started to repopulate the villages. But it is noteworthy that because of this new setting, with such unclear local laws, impartial forces were drawn more and more into local processes of conflict resolution, which therefore became quite controversial. Several examples in the chronology recounted below point to that trend.

If counting the dead is part of standard ceasefire monitoring, becoming involved in structural tensions is more questionable, even if the genuine aim is to mitigate violent conflicts. By playing an increasing role in settling local affairs, especially with regards to local security matters, impartial forces have involuntarily added a new layer to the local mechanisms of conflict resolution and one might wonder whether it is for better or worse. Such questions fully echo what we stressed earlier, when reflecting on interventionism: the fact that an overdose of interventions runs the risk of drying up important social mechanisms that already exist at the local level (i.e. the social interactions that regulate responsibilities, rights and reciprocal obligations and that generally arrange social life on a much more stable basis than imported solutions). In the western context, if both Licornes and ONUCI have endorsed the hat of the best legal facilitators in the *Zone de Confiance*, there is the need to reflect on who will replace them when they leave, once their mandate expires.
Table 5.2  Series of events showing the increased implication of the impartial forces in local mechanisms of conflict resolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17 and 19 April 2006</td>
<td>ONUCI facilitates reconciliation meetings between Guéré and Baoulé communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 May 2006</td>
<td>Four Guérés fall into an ambush in Gohoua-Zagna but succeed in escaping and alert the impartial forces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-28 June 2006</td>
<td>French forces discover 7 dead and 15 wounded in the villages of Blédi and Goho2, next to Douékpé. The attack is locally perceived as a reaction to the murder of the two Burkinabé children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2006</td>
<td>French forces publicly state that, since February 2006, inter-ethnic conflicts have cost the lives of 25 people and wounded 46 in the area east of Bangolo (axis Baibly/Gohouo). Acts of banditism have cost the lives of 16 and wounded 11 on the Bangolo/Duékoué axis and the Daloa/Vavoua road.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 December 2006</td>
<td>Impartial forces arrest the <em>dozos</em> of Toa Zéo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 January 2007</td>
<td>Six young Guérés of the village of Baoubly (between Duékoué and Bangolo) are declared missing after having gone fishing near the Baoulé encampment of Koffikro. Impartial forces conduct the investigations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-26 September 2007</td>
<td>A farmer of Pinhou (<em>sous-préfecture</em> of Zou) is accused by his peers of being a thief and having stolen poultry. He is severely beaten and dies. Impartial forces arrest four suspected criminals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: see Appendix 1 for detailed sources.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has placed contentious movements into perspective by exploring the extent to which the mobilizing and demobilizing contexts of Guiglo and Man were shaped by their immediate environments. It presented the main aspects of the conflict in the western region, the micro-ethnographic contexts of the two localities under study, and it has reflected on the question of dosage when examining the western humanitarian context. As a necessary complement to the preceding chapter, this section eventually strengthens the grounds to avoid overestimating the importance of historicity in processes of mobilization compared to more contingent and circumstantial factors. It has particularly stressed the importance of the local territorial sovereignty dimension on matters related to recruitment, a thread I pick up in Chapter 7, when reflecting on the motives that drew young civilians into armed factions.