

POLS*3000 Final

Political Development in South Africa and Ivory Coast

Ever since the *scramble for Africa* in the late 19th century, wherein Europeans colonized and exploited the people and resources of African countries for their own benefit, the whole continent's development has been greatly hindered. The meshing of colonial influence, traditional African values, and institutionalized racism have caused mass conflict and unstable governments all throughout. Although some development has been slowly occurring since colonialism ended in the mid-20th century, there is still plenty of violence and corruption within African politics and political regimes. In this paper, I will be comparing and contrasting the history and development of two African countries — South Africa and Ivory Coast. Both countries experienced colonization, conflict, and years of political unrest. However, South Africa is now a relatively peaceful and democratic nation whereas Ivory Coast is still struggling with the aftermath of civil war. The political development of South Africa and Ivory Coast have been hindered for very different reasons, and those reasons are wholly responsible for the state of the countries today.

The Republic of South Africa, or just “South Africa” as it is commonly called, is located at the very bottom of the continent of Africa. It consists of almost 53 million people, and is heavily multi-ethnic. A wide range of cultures, languages, and religions are apparent within the country. The constitution recognizes 11 official languages, the highest out of any other country in the

world.¹ South Africa also has the highest white European population out of any other African country. This is due to very early European colonization that occurred in the 17th century, long before the *scramble for Africa* era. Dutch colonial master Jan van Riebeeck founded the first European settlement at Table Mountain in South Africa in 1652, in what would later become Cape Town.² These original European settlers, mostly of Dutch, French, or German descent, are referred to as *Afrikaners*. Due to their long African pedigree, the Afrikaners now consider themselves original Africans.³ They believe to have moved into empty land, and see themselves as hardened frontiersmen that carved out their own existence in a hostile environment.[3] In the late 18th century, Great Britain began to dominate areas of South Africa. In order to escape British domination and to look for better land, the Dutch Afrikaners, also referred to as *Boer*, migrated across South Africa in what is known as *The Great Trek*. From 1835-1838, they moved across the country, causing conflict and establishing republics in land taken over from native African groups. Perhaps the most notable and important conflict was the *Battle of Blood River* in December of 1838. The battle involved 470 Boer pioneers (*Voortrekkers*), and more than 30,000 Zulu warriors. While camped at Umslato's River, the Boers were attacked and outnumbered sixty to one. Due to their advanced firearms and battle strategies, the Boers were able to fend off the Zulu, and after three hours, killed an estimated 3000 Zulu warriors whilst only experiencing three injured men. The Zulu retreated, and the Umslato's River had turned red with blood. Hence, the Battle of Blood River.[3] This battle was significant because the Boer victory was

"South Africa Fast Facts". SouthAfrica.info. April 2007. Retrieved November 12, 2016

² "African History Timeline". West Chester University of Pennsylvania. Retrieved November 12, 2016. <http://courses.wcupa.edu/jones/his311/timeline/t-19saf.htm>

³ Spears, Ian. "Apartheid and the Legacy of White Rule." Lecture, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON, November 8-10, 2016

foreshadowing for white minority rule. The Afrikaners defeated the black South Africans that they were afraid would overwhelm them, and came to think of themselves as people chosen by God. December 16th even became a national public holiday in South Africa to commemorate the Boer victory over the Zulu in the Battle of Blood River. Afrikaners soon became the most powerful and important political and socio-economic force in the country of South Africa, and it was a power that lasted until 1994.[3] Many South Africans argue that whites remain on the top of the hierarchy to this day.

These historical occurrences led to the rise of *apartheid*, which was a political system of racial segregation enforced through legislation by the *National Party* (NP) — South Africa’s governing party from 1948-1994. Apartheid empowered whites, and curtailed the majority population of blacks and other ethnic groups. It classified South Africans into four racial groups — black, white, coloured, and Indian.⁴ Essentially, the country was divided into whites and non-whites. Many discriminatory laws came into effect throughout apartheid, such as the *1949 Immorality Act*, which prohibited sexual contact between whites and non-whites; the *1953 Reservation of Separate Amenities Act*, which enforced social segregation in all public amenities such as transport, cinemas, restaurants, and schools; and the *1954 Natives Resettlement Act*, which gave the state power to forcibly remove Africans to separate townships.[3] From 1960 to 1983, 3.5 million non-white South Africans were forced to leave their homes and live in

⁴ Baldwin-Ragaven, Laurel, London, Lesley, du Gruchy, and Jeanelle “An ambulance of the wrong colour: health professionals, human rights and ethics in South Africa.” *Juta and Company Limited*. (1999): 18. Accessed November 12, 2016.

segregated neighbourhoods.⁵ Furthermore, non-whites could not even vote. Non-whites were essentially sub-human in the eyes of the government. Some liberal-minded Afrikaners resisted apartheid, but on the whole, they tended to support it.[3] English speaking whites were more liberal-minded, however they had the financial means to live a privileged life as compared to non-english Afrikaners. As can be seen, at this point, South African politics and society were heavily dominated by whites. Whites only made up 15% of the population, yet controlled all levels of political power and 54% of the country's personal income.[3] It wasn't until the presidential victory of Nelson Mandela that this power structure theoretically shifted. Mandela was one of many South African anti-apartheid revolutionaries. Others include Stephen Biko, Desmond Tutu, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, and Joe Slovo. Each played important roles in the disintegration of apartheid, however Mandela was the most notable because he was the country's first black head of state, and the first elected in a fully democratic election. After spending 27 years incarcerated on *Robben Island*, his release was announced by the last Afrikaner president, F.W. De Klerk on February 2, 1990. Many believe that Mandela's release was intended to reform apartheid, however it resulted in the death of apartheid.[3]. Mandela assumed presidency of the *African National Congress* (ANC), and was elected as president of South Africa from 1994-1999. Throughout his presidency, he abolished apartheid completely. South Africa theoretically became an equitable, democratic nation. However, the end of apartheid has not brought prosperity to all South Africans. Political economist John Saul is critical of it. He says "the relatively peaceful consolidation of a functioning liberal-democratic system must be deemed a considerable achievement. Nonetheless, we must also ask ourselves just what are the most

⁵ Michigan State University. "South Africa – Overcoming Apartheid". *African Studies Center of Michigan State University*. Accessed November 12, 2016. <http://www.overcomingapartheid.msu.edu/multimedia.php?id=65-259-6>

appropriate criteria for evaluating this dramatic process of change.”⁶ He believes that although non-whites can now vote, there is still an enormous disparity between the rich and the poor, the black and the white. Economic inequality still exists, which was the real problem all along. He doesn’t believe Mandela to have been a great conciliator, as Mandela and the ANC were seduced by capitalism and sold out their principles. The end of apartheid was not time to compromise with the enemy, it was time to realize socialism in South Africa. Many blacks in South Africa feel disdain for Mandela as well. For example, a South African student explains that “Mandela is used as an instrument to help us turn to the other cheek... He forgave his oppressor. So now, we too are expected to forgive our oppressors.”[3]. Although not perfect, South Africa has made substantial progress towards effective government and democratization, and is consequently one of the most liveable countries in Africa. However, in its case, it can be argued that the implementation of democracy didn’t really change anything in terms of socioeconomics. The economic disparities between whites and non-whites still exist.

Ivory Coast on the other hand has been involved in relatively recent struggles for power. The country consists of around 24 million people, and is located in the western part of the continent. Unlike South Africa, the population is nearly 100% black, yet religious affiliations are split between Christianity and Islam.⁷ Islam was first introduced by North African traders in the early Roman times, and spread throughout the northern part of the country. Christianity came into play throughout European colonization, and dominated the southern, coastal part of the

⁶ Saul, John S. "Cry for the Beloved Country: The Post-Apartheid Denouement." *Review of African Political Economy* 28, no. 89 (2001): 430. <http://www.jstor.org.subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/stable/4006620>.

⁷ <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projection-table/2010/percent/all/>

country — thus dividing the country. The European colonists of Ivory Coast were French, and their colonial policy was based on the idea of French superiority. This meant assimilation and association of French language, institutions, laws, and customs. Many educated Ivoirians believed that they would achieve equality through assimilation, but eventually realized that the discrimination and political inequality would only end with independence.⁸ Félix Houphouët-Boigny would become Ivory Coast's father of independence. He ran a one-party government, and formal democratic elections were not held until his death in 1993. His initial approach towards independence called for interdependence between Africans and the French because he believed political independence without economic independence was worthless.⁹ Ivory Coast went on to be an autonomous republic within the French community as well as French West Africa's most prosperous country through becoming a major exporter of cocoa, coffee, pineapples, and palm oil.¹⁰ Under Houphouët-Boigny's administration, the country was in relatively good standing. However, Houphouët-Boigny's one-party rule was not favourable amongst his political opposition. Laurent Gbagbo founded a social democratic political party called the *Front Populaire Ivoirien* (FPI) in 1982, and had to flee the country as a result since he had angered Houphouët-Boigny.¹¹ The foundation of the FPI was foreshadowing of the political disintegration to come. The people of Ivory Coast began to blame Houphouët-Boigny for the

⁸ "Ivory Coast – Repression and Conquest". Library of Congress Country Studies. Library of Congress (1988). Accessed November 13, 2016. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+ci0017\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+ci0017))

⁹ "Biographies des députés de la IV République: Félix Houphouët-Boigny". National Assembly of France. Accessed November 13, 2016.

¹⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica. "Dia Houphouët" Last modified March 16, 2007. Accessed November 13, 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Felix-Houphouet-Boigny>

¹¹ McGovern, Mike. "Making War in Côte d'Ivoire." The University of Chicago Press (2011): 16. Accessed November 15, 2016. ISBN 0226514609.

economic downturn due to the drop in international prices of coffee and cocoa.¹² This economic recession caused a sharp decline in living conditions for the middle class and the poor.¹³ Tensions rose, and eventually the Ivorian army mutinied and protesters began demonstrating in the streets of Abidjan, accusing Houphouët-Boigny of being a thief.¹⁴ On October 28th of 1990, a presidential election was held, as the civil unrest forced Houphouët-Boigny to legalize opposition parties. His opponent was none other than Laurent Gbagbo, founder of the FPI. Gbagbo had returned from exile in 1988 after being forgiven by Houphouët-Boigny, who stated that “the tree did not get angry at the bird.”¹⁵ Due to the recent controversies around Houphouët-Boigny, it was not likely that he would win the election. However, he was implausibly re-elected with 81.7 percent of the vote.¹⁶ Rigging elections is common in many autocratic regimes to give the illusion that there is a democracy, and it is quite apparent that it was the case in Houphouët-Boigny’s re-election. However, Houphouët-Boigny became increasingly ill, and subsequently died in 1993. His successor, Henri Bédié, was appointed and then re-elected in the next “election” in 1995. Throughout his tenure, Bédié jailed hundreds of opposition supporters and divided the country’s multiple ethnic groups. The initiation of strained relationships between the various ethnic groups led to civil wars in the coming years. Due to his unfavourable actions, a group of military officers staged a coup against Bédié and put General Robert Guéi in power in

¹² Thomas, Yves (1995). "Pays du monde: Côte-d'Ivoire: 1970–1979". *Mémoires du XXe siècle: Dictionnaire de France*. Paris: Société générale d'édition et de diffusion (1995): Accessed November 15, 2016. ISBN 2-84248-041-4. OCLC 41524503.

¹³ "Côte-d'Ivoire". *Grand Larousse encyclopédique*. Paris: Librairie Larousse (2005).

¹⁴ Pesnot, Patrick and Billoud, Michele. (9 April 2005). Houphouët-Boigny Part 1 (radio broadcast).

¹⁵ Kpatindé, Francis. "Celui que l'on n'attendait plus". *Jeune Afrique* (2000): Accessed November 17, 2016.

¹⁶ Crook, Richard C. "Winning Coalitions and Ethno-Regional Politics: The Failure of the Opposition in the 1990 and 1995 Elections in Côte d'Ivoire". *African Affairs*. Oxford University Press. 96 (1997): 383. Accessed November 17, 2016. doi:10.1093/oxfordjournals.afraf.a007826.

1999. Guéï was eventually replaced by Laurent Gbagbo in 2000 through a relatively peaceful election. The events leading up to the election were however not peaceful, as public uprisings resulted in multiple deaths. Evidently, the concept of democracy came as quite a shock to the people of Ivory Coast. It was a completely new concept that turned their political system upside down and divided the country. Gbagbo's administration further divided the country when the Supreme Court disqualified opposition leader Alassane Ouattara due to his Burkinabé nationality — a nationality shared by much of northern Ivory Coast. This angered Ouattara's supporters, and caused a violent civil war between the north and south of the country that lasted over four years. After a tentative peace agreement, another election was held in 2010, this time with victory going to Gbagbo's rival, Alassane Ouattara. However, Gbagbo's Constitutional Council reported that Gbagbo had actually won with 51% of the vote, and thus Gbagbo remained president and refused to leave.¹⁷ This sparked a second civil war known as the 2010-2011 Ivorian Crisis. In the end, the UN and French forces took military action against Gbagbo¹⁸, and Ouattara assumed presidency. However, the country was severely damaged and it will be a challenge for Ouattara to rebuild the economy and reunite Ivorians.¹⁹ Things have improved for the country, but the wounds from the civil wars are still fresh. The people of the north and south of Ivory Coast have been divided since colonialism, and further divided by the political regimes of Houphouët-Boigny's successors. Ivory Coast had been subject to Houphouët-Boigny's personal rule for

¹⁷ BBC News. "Thousands flee Ivory Coast for Liberia amid poll crisis". December 26, 2010. Accessed November 17, 2016. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12079552>

¹⁸ Lynch, Colum, Branigin, and William. "Ivory Coast strongman arrested after French forces intervene". Washington Post, April 11, 2011. Accessed November 17, 2016. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/ivory-coast-strongman-arrested-after-french-forces-intervene/2011/04/11/AFOBacKD_story.html

¹⁹ Griffiths, Thalia. "The war is over — but Ouattara's struggle has barely begun". The Guardian, April 11, 2011. Accessed November 17, 2016. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/apr/11/ivory-coast-gbagbo-ouattara-economic-crisis>

decades and had thus gotten used to it as their way of life. Their economy was even flourishing. The installation of democracy did not go smoothly, and perhaps the country would be better off had democracy never even been introduced in the first place.

As can be seen, historical events happened in South Africa that led to the division of races and ethnic groups. For many years, the government was ruled by a white minority that benefitted whites and discriminated against non-whites. It has only been 22 years since the implementation of equality, which is relatively short in the grand scheme of time, and already improvements have been made. However, economic discrimination is still apparent between the races. Ivory Coast on the other hand suffered from the sudden implementation of democracy after years of Félix Houphouët-Boigny's personal rule. They were better off during Houphouët-Boigny's rule, and the implementation of democracy led to massive civil unrest and conflict. This instance shows that democracy is not always the best option for countries, and supports the ideologies of scholars of the critical perspective towards colonialism/western interference, who claim that African countries are more likely to develop sustainably if left alone.