



Statehood in a Stateless Society

Political Order and Societal Memory in Northern Côte d'Ivoire

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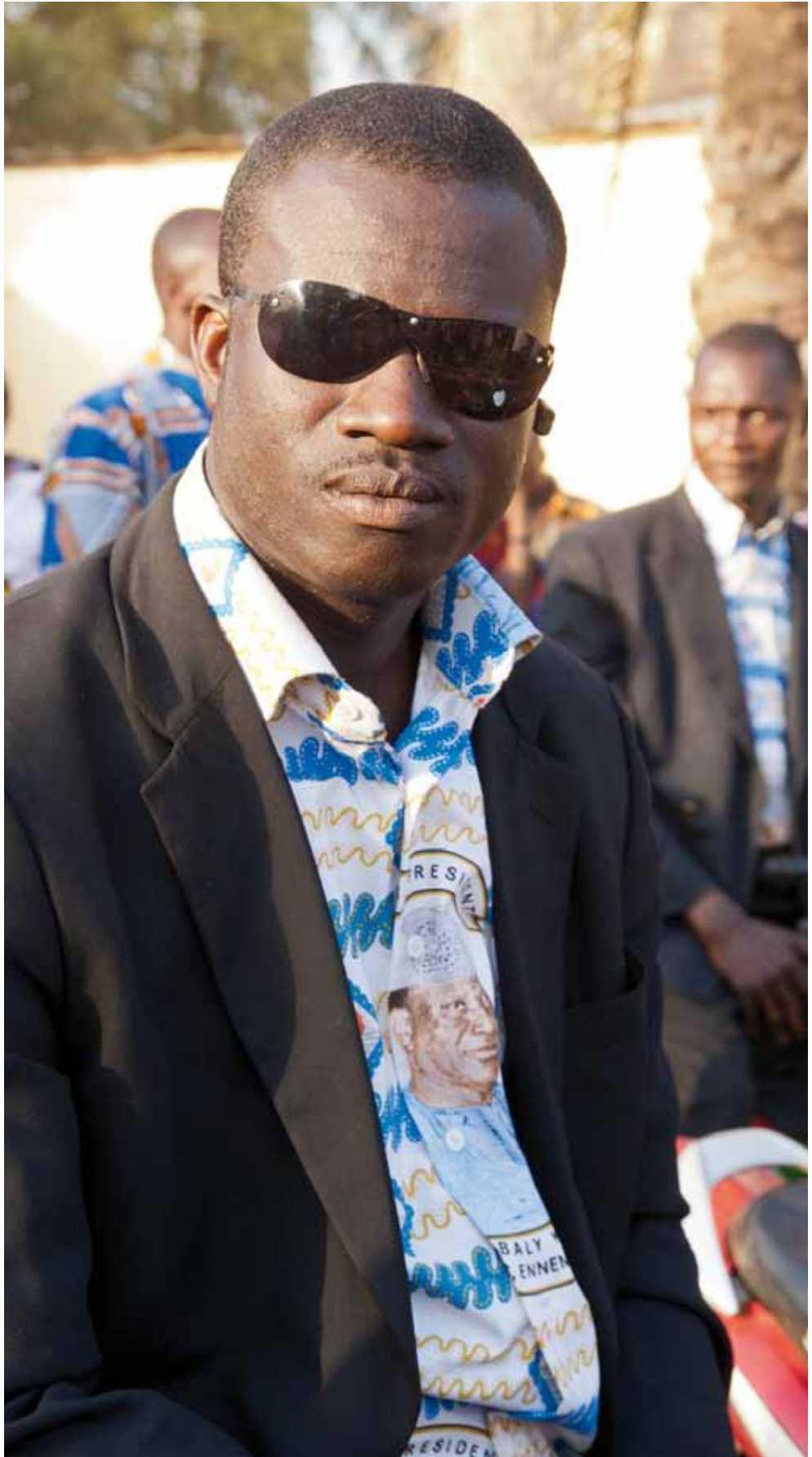
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Frontpage:
The unofficial police of the rebel command in Korhogo had no legal status, but is easy to recognise for the ordinary man as it is always using grey Mercedes with no registration plates but with the script Fansara 110 on the doors. It was the name of the rebel commander's prison and his cell number. In this case, the rebels escorted a coffin of a wealthy merchant.



A private security guard at a funeral of a rich man in Korhogo. He and his peers closely cooperated with the rebels and the dozo, the hunters that controlled the inner parts of the city.

Statehood in a Stateless Society

Political Order and Societal Memory in Northern Côte d'Ivoire

Till Förster, University of Basel

Introduction

With the first publication of “African Political Systems” in 1940 (Fortes/Evans-Pritchard 1940), acephalous societies became a central focus of anthropological research. The often rather big and by no means homogenous societies were a challenge to European thinking and in particular to colonial ideologies that claimed that all societies needed some sort of central government, with the exception of dispersed hordes of hunter-gatherers and perhaps a few, scattered nomadic peoples (Sigrist 1983: 29, 40–42). Acephalous societies were not only a challenge to the colonial administration because it could not rule through intermediaries; they were also a challenge to political philosophy because they refuted the Hobbesian assumption that man would fall back into violence and *bellum omnium contra omnes*, that is “a war of all against all” (Hobbes 1651: chp. 1, sec. 12).¹

The book edited by Meyer Fortes and Edward Evans-Pritchard, which is seen today as the founding document of political anthropology, set the stage for a new research agenda. In the three decades that followed, numerous publications addressed a wide range of questions that were related to the existence and continuity of acephalous societies under the colonial and later the post-colonial state. A first wave of often highly seminal books clarified the basic features of such segmentary societies and represented them as if they were unaffected by the colonial state (in particular Evans-Pritchard 1940; Fortes 1945, 1949; Bohannan 1957; Middleton/Tait 1958). That changed when it became increasingly clear that these societies would not simply disappear once they came under colonial rule. Their representation shifted, too. They were no longer depicted as a system of mere checks and balances that re-produced itself in isolation from the state or simply absorbed the impact of government or development institutions around them. The role of individuals and so-called traditional actors in processes of social and political change became more prominent. The studies first focused on centralised societies (Schapera 1956), but soon adopted a broader approach in the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute and the Manchester School that grew out of it (Gluckman 1955, 1965). The relationship of acephalous societies to the state was conceptualised as one of “articulation” (Werbner 1984), i.e. one that still distinguished between different “political systems” that were mutually incompatible. Stateless societies under state domination were subject to increasing bureaucratic control, and their political system was slowly but unavoidably transformed. Implicitly, this transformation was often depicted as alienation – a transformation that the acephalous societies could perhaps subvert (Scott 1985,

1 A distant echo of this thinking may be found in the widespread assumption that stateless societies are inherently less stable than states. Such presumptions often legitimise interventionist state policies as “neutral” attempts to establish an order that, so the argument goes, will foster development “because every society requires some rules and laws – otherwise they would fall into anarchy” (Ferguson 1994).

1990), but that left little space for self-determination of such societies. The only option was, so it seemed, to exit the state and to settle in remote areas where state domination was weak or almost non-existent (Hirschman 1978; Scott 2009). Other studies focused either on the marginal place of stateless societies under state domination and their possible submersion and integration into the state (Fallers 1963; Southall 1956, 1965, 1991; Stein 1977, 1980); or their role in the formation of states (Claessen and Skalník 1978, 1981; Gledhill et al. 1988).

This article reverses the usual perspective on stateless societies and their relationship to the state. It does not look at how they survive or perish under state domination – or how they underpin it. Instead, it tries to examine what stateless societies appropriate from the state or more precisely, how state domination and governance merge with acephalous political order and social practice where the state is not able to impose it on the local society and when agency lies with the local society. By far less has been published in this strand of thinking.² Though the weakening or fading of state domination is a prominent topic in political anthropology as well as in political science, research has almost exclusively focused on the disappearance of state institutions and at times their eventual re-emergence, but very rarely on how such state-related practices informed the social after the end of the institution and how they altered the social. The focus remained on the state and its fragmentation (Das and Poole 2004).

To look at the interaction of the state and stateless societies from this angle demands a re-conceptualisation of some basic terms of political anthropology. The older, binary opposition of state vs. non-state will not make sense in a setting where some practices that were bound to the state are still performed in absentia of the institution. Historians would possibly frame such phenomena as mere iterations from the past, assuming that the experience of the state generates its own continuation – analogous to how practices of segmentary societies are still performed when they come under state domination. Sometimes, such continuities are labelled as “tradition” – though, this time, tradition would refer to a much more recent period and not to an image of a timeless pre-colonial culture. Whether the past experience of the state is appropriately depicted as a tradition of statehood in a stateless society is, however, debateable. Such presumptions of continuity ignore that the agency of the actors who engage in social practices that were once related to the state is much more than merely a habitual repetition of former acts. Social actors will also judge the new situation. They would certainly recognise that the state is no longer enforcing such practices. Hence, it is much more likely that they attribute an intrinsic value to these practices – one that is independent of the institution and that endows the social with something that goes beyond the institution of the state. What these practices actually contribute to a specific society and how they inform the social is an open question that only empirical enquiry can answer.

However the specific relationship looks like, it is clear that state and statehood are not simply two sides of the same coin. In order to analyse this relationship, one needs to understand state and statehood as two different concepts that provide two crosscutting perspectives for empirical research: One addressing the institutional side and the other the performative side. The first can build on the extensive body of literature on the state in anthropology and sociology (see Sharma and Gupta 2006 for an overview). The second, however, needs more theoretical reflection because statehood is then not merely a performance of or for the state, it has to be conceptualised as a practice in its own right. In other words: An action-based theorising of statehood must

2 Only very few scholarly works examine how the state and statehood were appropriated by acephalous societies. Most of these publications look more at the persistence of pre-colonial values, authorities and institutions and do not focus on how the presence of statehood had generated new social imaginaries, practices and institutions in these societies (e.g. LeVine 1960; under the heading of “local government” Wunsch 2000).

not reduce it to representational practices that reproduce the state as an institution or at least aim at doing so (Migdal and Schlichte 2005). My paper tries to address this challenge by looking at a particular case, an area under rebel domination in West Africa. I will argue that statehood as a social practice fosters an understanding of politics that is informed by a distinct, reliable relationship of the social actors to each other.

State and Statehood as Complementary Concepts

My conceptualization of state and statehood starts from a very basic observation: Statehood may remain present in the life of the people while a state disappears. They remember and live the particular kind of statehood that they were used to. As social actors, they preserve a memory of what they have done before. From a social phenomenological point of view, there is apparently no reason to change a well-established practice as long as it has not proved to be ineffective or inferior to another practice. The same holds true for the collective imaginary of the social life-world. The image of the state may still inform the social imaginary when the institution is no longer regulating social life. The general argument is about human agency: Actors habitually perpetuate what they have learned in their daily life until there is a need to change such well-established routines.³

But habitual continuities of practices do not simply happen and cannot be taken for granted. Normalised practices, as any other practice, have to be socially reproduced and hence are intrinsically to other aspects of agency, namely judgment of the present situation and imagination of an alternative to the existing practice (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). If one does not want to fall back on a mere assumption of societal inertia, one has to examine why and how practices persist when the institution that they were linked to came to an end. Practices relating to the state may, at least to some extent, continue as routines of social interaction when the state, as an organisation, is no longer present – but such a statement does not answer the question how and why they do so.

Routines are often related to normative convictions and social values. To some degree, they are reproduced together as one (Popitz 2006). This is certainly a valid statement, but it also blurs some important points (Joas 1997: 252–274). Firstly, it does not say anything about the actual relationship of individuality, collectivity and the intersubjectivity that links the two. Secondly, and that is more important in this context, it does not address the basic openness of all experience to interpretation that simultaneously induces a necessity to interpret that experience. From a phenomenological point of view, one hence has to clarify how the actors made sense of the experience of the state and how this has led to a collective interpretation that then may have become part of the social imaginary, i.e. a more or less normative evaluation and expectation of how the people should live together (Taylor 2004: 23).

Provisionally, one may avoid these problems by asserting that the repetitious character of routines reconfirms norms and values while the basic convictions also shape social practice. Actors often identify with interrelated norms, values and practices and sometimes tend to call them their “culture”.⁴ By participating in such habitual,

- 3 The general formulation comes from Alfred Schütz and his seminal work on the social world. He writes that all practices are continued until they meet resistance in the lifeworldly reality (Schutz/Luckmann 1979).
- 4 Charles Taylor's (1989) theory of identity is based on this connection and conceptualises it as a circle where neither the practice nor its normative evaluation is independent of the other. He locates the latter in our habitual understanding of the world, i.e. the practical mastery of everyday life.

routinised practices, actors reconfirm their identity as members of a particular society. Such practices thus integrate or segregate actors in society. Most actors only start to reflect on habitual practices if they meet a contradictory social reality, and this gap may be related to a changing institutional setting. One example suffices to illustrate the gap that may loom between normative assumptions based on the experience of a habitual practice and the institutional setting that one has to cope with. A person coming from a well established Western bureaucratic state is likely to act in other countries on the basis of what she or he knows from experience and assume that the other state works as the one back home.⁵ The person, for instance a tourist or an expatriate development expert, may assume that the police is a governmental institution committed to the public interest – though the policemen in this particular country may be precisely the opposite, namely persons pursuing private interests transforming the police into an institution that helps them to realise private benefits. The deception and outrage of tourists when they learn that they first have to bribe the police before getting them to go after a thief is observable in many tourist destinations. The tourist has a certain image of the state in mind – one that does not match the actual practices. Such gaps between the imaginary, in this case the image of the state, and actual practices often emerge when actors move from one society to the other. But they are by far not limited to such situations. Normative expectations build only partially on the direct experience of the state as an organisation. They grow out of social processes that may and regularly do include a wide scope of essentially different routinised practices of which some are directly related to the institution of the state while others refer more to other institutions and modes of domination. There is almost always a tension between the state as an institutionalised organisation that executes power through the threat and potential use of violence and the habitual practices that shape its understanding among ordinary people. These practices of the dominated and the normative assumptions that go with them are an essential component of “statehood”. In this perspective, statehood is about how ordinary people answer the power of threat. I will briefly elaborate this notion in order to transform it into a scholarly concept.

To understand the state in a particular society means to look at this interaction between state and statehood. The gap between both may be narrow in settings where the state is “strong”, i.e. where it informs many social processes, and it may be a wide gap when the state is “weak” or absent from many social fields. But again, this does not mean that statehood is also weak in the latter settings, as a thorough analysis often shows. According to some political scientists, the north of Côte d’Ivoire is penetrated by more and stronger statehood than, for instance, the Central African Republic or Eastern Cameroon – though the latter two are not torn apart by rebel movements.

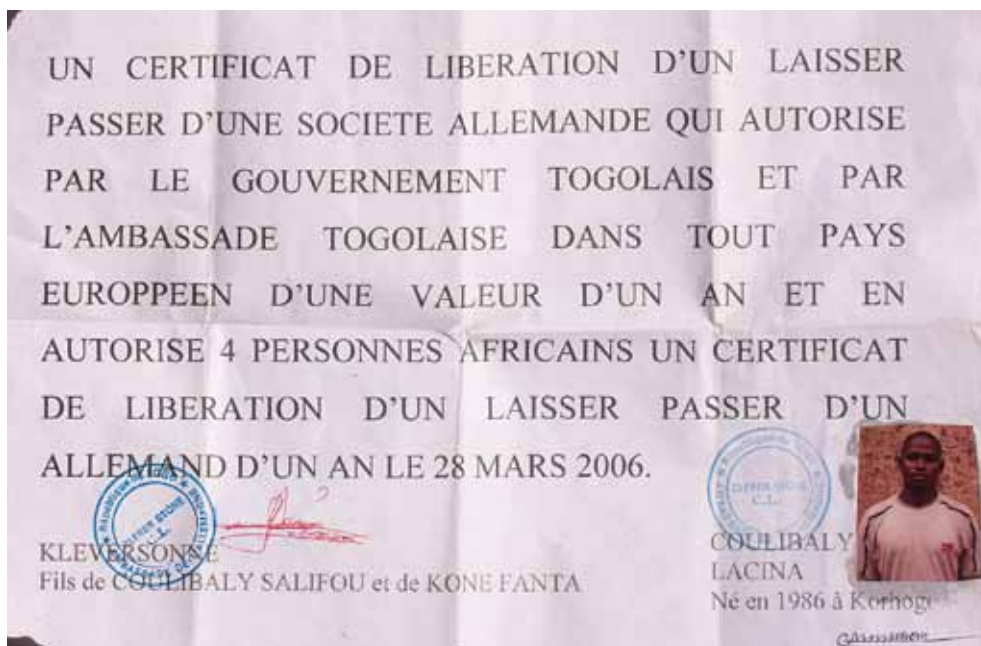
Instead of measuring statehood as some sort of essence that remains in place when the institution disappears, I will analyse it from an action centred perspective. For the purpose of such an analysis, I adopt – or rather adapt – the conceptualisation of the state by Joel Migdal (1988; 2001). In his ‘State in Society’ approach, he defines the state as “... a field of power marked by the use and threat of violence and shaped by (1) *the image of a coherent, controlling organisation in a territory, which is a representation of the people bounded by that territory*, and (2) *the actual practices of its multiple parts.*” (Migdal 2001:15–16, his italics) Migdal identifies three components: first the institutionalised “use and threat of violence”, i.e. the state as an organisation; and second the image and practices that shape it. The latter two elements constitute what I have addressed as the peculiar relationship of practice and imagination, i.e. as statehood. I hence agree with Migdal that statehood is based on the ongoing interaction with its

5 The interdisciplinary research project “States at work” at the University of Mainz focuses on this tension between normative expectations and daily practices (Bierschenk 2010).

image and the social practices that relate to the state. However, I differ from Migdal's conceptualisation insofar as I do not take the image of the state as a persistent and consistent fact. I would instead claim that such images are not necessarily stable but that their stability deserves explanation. The ongoing social interaction that re-produces the images of the state is best conceptualised as imagination – taking imagination as a social process (Klein et al. 1983), not as a product. The reasons for this conceptual shift have been mentioned already but need some additional clarification.

One reason is that images, and in particular cultural and mental images, are subject to the work of *collective* imagination(s). They grow out of multilayered processes in which many actors with different agendas, cultural backgrounds and life-worldly experiences interact – which takes us back to the individuality/collectivity tension (McLean 2007, Hastrup 2007). Because many of these experiences will refer to other institutions as well, they neither form a coherent image nor will they be acceptable to all. There is no such thing as one coherent image of the state in society; there are almost always competing images – though the images put forward by some actors may be dominating. Some actors might even be capable to impose their image of how the state is and how it should look like on others, but they will almost always have to face the resistance of those who are dominated and who hold other views. It is hence much more appropriate to frame this societal imagination as a process and its visible side as an imagery containing many different images.

Migdal had, however, a particular type of imagination in mind. He adopted the term “image” from Edward Shils (e.g. 1975:74) who used it for a particular historical figuration, i.e. one that sees the state as the centre of society. The state in this understanding is an autonomous entity that dominates, integrates and controls all social life through imposing its rules on it. This is far from the reality of many African countries. It will not make much sense to maintain the notion of one coherent image of the state for an analysis of the African reality: The process of imagination generates more than one image. How they look like is a question of empirical research. But this objection does not mean that there is no notion of statehood in these countries if statehood is conceived as heterogeneous as domination and the political order in weak states often are (von Trotha 1996, 2009; Migdal/Schlichte 2005).



Ordinary people often believe in papers that look like official documents. In Korhogo, many paid a fortune to an unknown man from Togo who sold such papers as a false substitute for visas to enter Germany.

Another point is that Migdal attributes agency to the image of the state itself. Though perceived and simultaneously created by the interplay of social actors, it has a life of its own, he claims and thus echoes to some extent the work of James C. Scott (1998). Migdal thus looks at the power of the image of the state: It speaks to the people and integrates them into a wider body of society. This wider body may be a nation, but it could also be a sphere of mutual benefits or a sphere of economic opportunities to which every member of the state should have access. The latter idea is widespread in many African countries and is often addressed in negative terms as greed and grievance.⁶ Such images are indeed very powerful and were a major factor in many civil conflicts. They also fed the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire since the early 1990s.

To conceive images as powerful agents is, however, one-sided. Even the image of the state as an autonomous entity has two sides: One that postulates its independence from the actors' perspectives and one that links it precisely to how the actors see the state – which brings us back to the side of habitual practices: The imagery of the state is composed of many images. It is generated and reproduced in the manifold interactions of social actors and simultaneously, it penetrates their interactions as a reality in its own right. Such imageries will always remain related to normative assumptions about what a society, in general, should do for its members. Coming from segmentary social settings where the principles of reciprocity and amity inform all spheres of life, many actors will expect from the state precisely what they would have expected from their narrower social world, i.e. a just and even (re)distribution of wealth among all members.⁷ If the state as an institution fails to provide access to this wealth, it loses its legitimacy in the eyes of those who feel excluded from the state as the central institution of societal redistribution and hence as a resource of private advantages. The imagery then looks different and incorporates many other, non-state elements.⁸

Imageries always have the above-mentioned double-sided character, but they must be kept apart from what the state as an institution does. They do not depend on what the state actually achieves – though its continuous failure to meet the expectations of its citizens will certainly affect such cultural convictions in the long run.⁹ Precisely because the imageries of the state are not primarily reproduced through its sovereign acts, they can be more persistent than the state as an institution that administrates and exerts its monopoly of force over its citizens. When the state as an institution disappears, its imageries may still exist in the minds of the people. They then need an underpinning, the habitual practices that refer to them and simultaneously reproduce them. Both together are the roots of statehood and constitute what could be called the societal memory of the state.

Both sources of statehood are the subject of this paper: The imagination of the state and the practices that relate to the state as an image and an institution. What I

6 For a general debate about the causes of civil war and the state emerged under this heading, see among others Berdal/Malone 2000; Collier/Hoeffler 2001; Ballantine/Nitzschke 2003; Ballantine/Sherman 2003; Korf 2005, 2006; Murshed/Tadjoeddin 2007.

7 In many African countries, the notion that the state should provide access to individual wealth is much stronger than in the fully developed welfare states of the North. This has been a recurrent topic in African studies since the seminal work of Jean-François Bayart (1993).

8 This is shown in the work of Michael Schatzberg about legitimizing metaphors in public discourse in middle Africa (Schatzberg 2001).

9 The post-colonial social imaginary of the state often incorporates elements of reciprocity and redistribution, while the colonial state was less associated with such a social imaginary because of its foreign character that only slowly merged with local social expectations (Young 1994:219–241).

propose is thus a circular procedure that follows the interaction between all parts in a specific historical situation where the Ivoirian state as an institution exerting the power of threat has virtually disappeared but where its imagination and its practices persist.

The Background

According to most modern definitions, the northern half of Côte d'Ivoire was a region where, between September 2002 and April 2011, the state as an institution had more or less ceased to exist. Since the failed coup of September 19, 2002, the North and the West of the country were controlled by a rebel movement, the *Forces Nouvelles* with its military wing, the *Forces Armées des Forces Nouvelles*, FAFN. The territory held by the rebels was separated by a buffer zone, the so-called *zone de confiance*, from the southern parts, which were controlled by troops loyal to President Laurent Gbagbo. Though they increasingly had to compete with other actors in the field of security, the state's administration and its civil services persisted largely in the South.

In the Centre, North and West the state's armed forces had to yield to the superior force of the rebels and a number of other armed groups. State administration disintegrated quickly. Most institutions ceased to function and were only partially replaced by rebel governance. The area was not only beyond the control of the so-called legitimate authority of the Ivoirian state now reduced to the southern part of the country, it was also perceived by most Southerners and many outside observers as a region where statehood as such had given way to a more or less unregulated anarchy. After the signature of the Ouagadougou peace treaty in March 2007, only very few state institutions were re-established in this part of the country which, in the perspective of many Southerners and also international NGOs, remained a space of illegal racketeering, lawlessness and mere anarchy. The position of the few existing state institutions in the local power fabric remained very weak. When some of them were re-erected after the signature of the Ouagadougou peace treaty, they only sporadically rendered a few services, which no other institution could offer, for instance identity papers.

Though the state had "passed away", as some of my interlocutors put it, many of its formal procedures were still practiced, although now by other actors. Many of them still had the image of a powerful and regulative authority in mind – one that should order political as well as civil life. They were, however, aware that a centralised authority of this kind was unlikely to emerge under the conditions of the rebellion, which they often simply called "the war". But most of them held highly normative assumptions of how a society should be organised and how a new political order should look like. They did not want the former post-colonial state back in, but they maintained many of its central ideas, images and practices. Though the state as an institution had ended in the smoke of the guns of the rebels, statehood still informed the life of the people in the North.

This continuity of statehood in a stateless area is the ethnographic topic of this paper. I will ask two empirical questions: To what degree does statehood penetrate the political order under the rebel movement? And by what means and practices is statehood remembered and (re)produced in such a societal setting? I will look mainly at the practices of the various social actors in two settings. Most of the ethnographic data presented here were collected between 2006 and 2010, but my research builds on a long familiarity with the region. I have conducted fieldwork on other topics in Northern Côte d'Ivoire for more than eight years since 1979.

One of the two social settings I focus on is an urban centre, the city of Korhogo which is one of the strongholds of the rebel movement. The city, whose size is estima-

Hunters parading with their ID badges on the occasion of the festivities of the 50th anniversary of independence. The internal organisation of the hunters' association changed through the partnership with the insurgents. It developed a stricter hierarchy and lost some of its segmentary traits.



ted at about 170,000 inhabitants,¹⁰ has a heterogeneous population that came from all corners of the North and from the neighbouring regions of Mali and Burkina Faso. Traders also came from farther away, in particular from the Manding heartland in West and Central Mali and Guinea as well as from Hausaland in Niger and Nigeria. The dominant language is Jula, a simplified version of Manding that serves as a *lingua franca*. The other social setting is a remote area about 90 km from Korhogo, a landscape called Kafigué in the vernacular language of the Senufo, who mainly live there as peasants and first settlers. My data is based on comparative fieldwork in both the urban and the rural setting. Because of the extraordinary heterogeneity of political orders in weak states, I sometimes refer to other places within the rebel held parts of Côte d'Ivoire.

The North of Côte d'Ivoire: Separated but not Isolated

On September 19, 2002, the northern parts of Côte d'Ivoire became there and then a space beyond the control of the government in Abidjan.¹¹ Through the first two or three years of the rebellion, the North of Côte d'Ivoire was firmly separated from the southern half of the country. There was literally no way for the state to exert direct influence in the savannah region and the West. Even indirect influence through informal exchange was limited and almost always subject to the surveillance of international or-

¹⁰ The number is a projection based on the last census of 1996. According to the GeoNames database, Korhogo's current population is 167,000 (see under: <http://www.geonames.org/advanced-search.html?continentCode &country=CI&featureClass=P&q=>), February 15, 2010.

¹¹ On the Ivoirian crisis see in general Akindès 2007, Banégas 2006, Banégas/Losch 2003, Poame 2007.

ganisations such as the UN peacekeeping forces and the many humanitarian NGOs that rushed in when the violent crisis broke out. Though travelling and economic exchange between the two halves of the country and across the *zone de confiance* became feasible again after some five or six months of complete interruption, the obstacles remained so high that many merchants and wholesale traders who were the first to resume travel preferred to establish new trade contacts to neighbouring countries, in particular to coastal countries such as Togo and Guinea with their harbours Lomé and Conakry. Petty traders who could not afford to rent entire trucks for long distance trade travelled to the immediate northern neighbours in Mali and Burkina Faso to sell food and cash crops or they waited for traders from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger to come and buy directly from their entrepôts in cities as Korhogo and Ferkessedougou or in border towns as Ouangolodougou and Tingréla. The former links to the Ivoirian South and to the harbour of Abidjan were increasingly replaced by other, cross-border contacts. When travelling and trade between the northern and southern halves of the country became possible again, many merchants had already established lasting relationships to other partners in neighbouring countries and worldwide. They no longer depended on their former southern partners and on the harbour of Abidjan.

Though the rebellion was not a separatist movement the fighting led to a sudden and lasting *de facto* separation of the rebel held north of the country from the southern and coastal region. The fights of the rebel troops against the armed forces loyal to the government did not take much longer than a few days. The police and gendarmerie were the first institutions to disappear after the failed coup. They did not come back until the present day. The failure of both sides to conquer their respective enemies had consequences that affected civil life: First, the two belligerent parties were kept apart by the assignment of international peace keeping forces in the country and in particular in the middle between the two regions. The strip of land ran through the entire country from East to West. It later became the already mentioned *zone de confiance* where rebels, loyalists and international troops patrolled together with other local forces as self-defence and vigilantes groups. In particular over the first months and years, this zone was difficult to cross.

The reasons why the relations between the two parts of the country remained thorny were obvious: Many rebels were proud of having killed policemen from the South whom they had accused of having harassed them over the past years of *Ivoirité*, the infamous ethno-nationalist ideology first formulated by former president Henri Konan Bédié to prevent his rival Alassane Dramane Ouattara from running for presidency. The ideology was quickly adopted by his successors and led to innumerable harassments for Northerners in everyday life. At least in this part of the country, the police and most other armed bodies of the state were heavily delegitimised when the rebellion started. Cultural belonging to one Ivoirian nation, which had been one of the few lasting legitimacies of the post-colonial state in contrast to colonial domination, had constantly been questioned through the practices of exclusion.

On the other side, many policemen and even ordinary people originating from the South were afraid to travel through rebel held territory because of the innumerable stories about atrocities committed by rebels. They also feared their braveness and what could be called their extraordinary skills in warfare. Already before the rebellion, the famous hunters of the north and the Senufo in general were renowned for their magical charms which protected them against the profane guns of soldiers and policemen. The dissolution of the police and gendarmerie had been a matter of days if not hours. Both bodies suffered heavy losses, and those who were not discovered tried to escape the fighting by all means. Policemen who originated in the South silently returned to their home towns while those who were from the North either integrated into the rebel forces or conducted a quiet civil life. The monopoly of force of the state clearly had ceased to exist. While the rebel troops held an overwhelming power of threat in the beginning, they soon had to cope with other violent actors who were also armed and

had a significant power of threat. The population could choose between the actors and, unsurprisingly, chose those who offered security instead of threat or at least convincingly claimed to do so. After some time, a fairly stable balance emerged: Security was provided by the interplay of different sorts of actors, some of them belonging to the *Forces Armées des Forces Nouvelles*, the military wing of the rebel movement, others to so called traditional institutions as the famous hunters' associations or to private security companies, and still others were quarter or village based self-defence groups. But however this balance looked like, it was clear that none of the actors could claim a monopoly on the legitimate use of force.¹²

The Visibility of Statehood

During rebel domination, statehood remained visible in many spheres of everyday life in Northern Côte d'Ivoire. Many institutions and practices left their traces, and many people still referred to them when they interact with others. Though most former state institutions did no longer work, and though their buildings were often pillaged and burnt down, they remained present as a reference in daily life. Some services that were once rendered by state institutions were then offered by a wide variety of other, non-state institutions. Other services disappeared with the institutions and the civil servants that were once in charge of them. However, in the imagination of many, they still served as a model for governance. At times, this model was normative, and some actors talked of it as "how things should be done". In other cases, the evaluation of what emerged after 2002 came closer to an image of the past as a distant mirror of what the state once had been. This image often built on the visible appearance of the state in society. An examination of statehood as the image of the state opens two perspectives: First, it reveals how these images still inform the practices of the actors after the end of the state as an institution. Second, it shows to what extent the values and norms that were once associated with the state persist in a now stateless society.

I will first address what could be called the persisting visibility of statehood in public life. Korhogo, then a town of a little more than 21,000 inhabitants, had received its present urban street grid mainly in 1965 when the city hosted the yearly independence ceremonies (Labazée 1993: 135; Woods 1994: 473). The two central squares, however, were maintained where the former French colonial administration demonstrated its superior power and where their intermediary ruler, Péléforo Gbon Coulibaly, had his palace (Förster 1997: 141, 229–237; Christopher 1979: 167–169). The first of the two squares lies below the hill where the French had built the official residence of the *commandant de cercle* and which became after independence the first residence of the new prefect. The plaza in front of its impressive gate was appropriately renamed "Independence Square". The flagpole in its centre once carried the French, and later the Ivoirian tricolour. The hoisting of the colours was a ceremonial event to which school classes were invited on public holidays. The rebel authorities continued that ceremonial staging of statehood and even reinforced it. The two buildings on the lower side of the hill, the prefecture and the city hall, were badly damaged during the first few weeks of fighting. The employees either had fled if they originated in the South or they stayed at home because there was no way to work in the offices. The nearby courthouse was ransacked,

12 Not only economic exchange was redirected towards other partners, public life in general was also reoriented and developed into a new social and political order (Förster 2010). The absence of public services was addressed by various means.

and its ruins remained a warning to outsiders what the rebels could do in their blind fury against the discrimination that they had experienced under the old regime. In between the central square and the ruins of the courthouse lay a tribune and a neglected park under acacia trees that were planted in 1964 on the occasion of the independence ceremonies. The tribune was facing a paved road where, in the 1980s and 1990s, soldiers but also dancing choruses had paraded in front of local dignitaries. The whole area was unattended since the beginning of the crisis and in a state of decay when the rebels engaged in governance after the initial period of fighting.

To the surprise of many, the new *commandant de zone*, Kouakou Martin Fofié,¹³ chief commander of area 10 under rebel domination, invited in 2005 the local artists to participate in a kind of public contest to improve and embellish the city. He asked for proposals for the major squares and sites. The restoration of this central square was a central element in his plans. The two administrative buildings were repaired and covered with new, green tiles, the flagpole was provisionally re-erected and a cement foundation for a monument was erected, too. The latter should later carry a sculpture that praised the progress and development of the city under rebel governance.¹⁴ The design of the new monument was painted on the walls of the Cultural Centre a few steps down the main road towards the main market.

Fofié first urged the local businessmen to contribute to his plans through providing transport and building materials for the Cultural Centre, which opened in 2006. Symbols and signs of rebel domination were embedded in his overall plans to rehabilitate the city. The old park of the 1965 independence ceremony was cleared of shrubs and the enormous piles of garbage that had accumulated over the years. Two restaurants – one “African”, the other Moroccan – were constructed under the acacia trees. Two years later in 2008, Fofié erected a monument for the unknown soldier of September 19, 2002 right between the restaurants, the tribune, Independence Square and the former police barracks that now served as headquarters to the rebel forces. The inauguration ceremony brought many dignitaries of the city together and adopted the form that former, similar ceremonies of the state once had. The figure on the pedestal, however, depicted a bronze-coloured rebel soldier with a Kalashnikov in his right hand and a hand grenade in his left.

The ceremony was promoted on photocopied flyers in the city as the sixth anniversary of the “military-political insurgency of September 19, 2002”. The “administrative, political, military authorities” together with the population celebrated this day by bringing bouquets of flowers to the “cemetery of martyrs” on the eve of the inauguration. Interestingly, the new merging of state and rebel authorities was displayed, too. The prefect of Korhogo, who had only recently come back from the South, showed up in his official uniform but also carried a bouquet of flowers to the graves of unknown insurgents. Then the representative of the political wing of the rebel movement, Sidiki Konaté, declared that this was an act that gave hope to the entire country of Côte d’Ivoire. He concluded that the rebel soldiers had not died in vain because “the identification [of personal identities] had started” and because “nearly everybody wanted an ID-Card.”¹⁵

13 Kouakou Fofié was chief security officer of Korhogo between 2002 and 2005. He held more power in the city than the official commanders of the area Messamba Koné and Youssouf Diarrasouba and succeeded them also because of his popularity among the city’s youth.

14 It did not realise until the end of the rebellion in April 2011. The square, however, figures very prominently on the website of the local rebel movement which carries the name of the prison and the number of the cell where Kouakou Fofié was detained until he became a rebel leader: www.fansara110.com, February 16, 2010.

15 Sidiki Konaté on September 19, 2008. Compare http://www.fansara110.com/commemoration_856.htm, February 16, 2010.

The Monument of the Unknown Rebel Soldier was erected on the sixth anniversary of the insurgency. It is surrounded by Ivoirian flags and stands in front of the barracks of the former National Police, which became the headquarter of the rebel troops.



From the cemetery, the group moved to the other end of the city where they inaugurated a power line of two kilometres that served three disadvantaged quarters.

The afternoon, two soccer teams, one representing the military wing of the rebel movement, the other the civil society, faced each other in the stadium of Korhogo. It ended in a one-one tie but the following penalty shootout brought victory to the civil society team. In the night, an ecumenical service was organised in front of the monument, which was still covered by a large canvas. The service, however, was brought to an abrupt end by a thunderstorm. The next morning, rebel leaders delivered several addresses to the public, followed by a parade of rebel soldiers in front of the monument. The place was re-baptised to “Combatants’ Square”. Representatives of the different Christian and Muslim communities of the city then prayed before the statue was solemnly unveiled. The ceremony ended with a statement of commander Fofié who said that hate would no longer tear the beloved fatherland apart. He added that the installation of electricity and light also meant to combat crime and robbery.

Though the ceremony looked like a perfect staging of the new hybrid political order that some journalists in the city expected to come, it was also a subtle demonstration of the powerlessness of the state actors. Their highest-ranking representative, the prefect of Korhogo, was at least allowed to say a few sentences in public. He made use of the occasion to complain more or less overtly about the lack of power sharing in the local arena. The prefect welcomed the collaboration with the rebels but added that the staff of the administration had difficulties to do their work. He did not do himself a service. The statement did more to underline his factual inability to execute his office than to challenge the domination of the rebels.

The interpretation and later collective remembrance of the event, however, evolved along diverse, sometimes contradictory lines.¹⁶ Four months later, in January 2009, the participation of the prefect in the ceremonies had almost fallen into oblivion among ordinary people. Public opinion in popular quarters had it that it was a commemoration organised by the rebels for the rebels. The installation of the power supply line for two quarters where almost the entire population belonged to the lower strata of society was neither attributed to the administration nor to the CIE, the national power company, but to commander Fofié. It was then known as “Fofié’s three poles” because of its distinctive shape which soon served as a landmark. Inhabitants of these popular quarters simply said: “He brought light to the dark quarters.” Some admired plainly his rigueur, his firmness, which, they claimed, had put an end to the laxity and incompetency of the former mayor and the urban council.

The Muslim traders, however, were much more critical. They saw this and other, similar events much more as a kind of annexation of statehood by actors who were not authorised to do so. Their view was certainly related to the fact that they had often fallen victim to arbitrary assaults by the rebels (Förster 2010). Teachers and others who saw themselves more as intellectuals interpreted this as other ceremonial enactments of statehood in a more cynical attitude. They said that such practices merged private and public interests and would contribute again to the persisting marginalization of state actors and “true” governance. The claims of the prefect to exercise power, they said, looked more like a helpless attempt to play a stronger role in the local political fabric than factual policy making. Some of them added that the political staging had not changed much since the times of the “old regime”, i.e. the Houphouët-Boigny administration. It’s the old game in new disguises, they said: Politicians always pretend to do something, but seldom do it. The rebels weren’t much better and performed as badly as the former state.

The fluidity of the competing interpretations became even more obvious when discussants with different backgrounds met. Sudden changes of opinion were frequent, and inconsistencies in the speakers’ statements, too.¹⁷ This fluidity seems to mirror the

16 Public opinion was documented through the observation of spontaneous conversations and discussions in different quarters of the city. I did not participate in these exchanges except when I was directly asked to do so. Most of the conversations took place in so called maquis, i.e. small African restaurants and bars where ordinary people meet to eat, drink and chat. I distinguished four types of maquis according to their usual visitors and position in the urban social space: A – very modest in popular quarters, offers only one standard meal plus beverages, lowest price segment for day labourers; B – has a room with furniture and offers a few standard meals, affordable to workers with permanent jobs; C – one or more rooms with comfortable seats and tables in better off quarters, offers full African menus, for employees with a regular income; D – European, “Lebanese” or international cuisine, either situated in the business centre or in residential quarters, mainly visited by high ranking civil servants, expatriates and by the jeunesse dorée of the rebellion.

17 A scholar is perhaps more receptive to inconsistencies than ordinary people in a West African city. They often did not seem to notice the contradictions that I immediately recorded in my diary.

hybridity of the new political order that was about to emerge as well as the openness and intransparency of the process through which it would take shape. Within the different social milieus, however, it often appeared to be much clearer what this event was about. As a political event, it became a multi-faceted social reality of which each actor could highlight one or the other side. The commemoration ceremony was as much the creation of the actors on stage as of the audience that interpreted it.

When seen from a temporal distance and in its entirety, the commemorative ceremony looked like a subtle play with visual, discursive and performative references to the former state. The actors on stage played with the imageries of statehood that the spectators had in mind, trying to use them as an index of their own position in the emerging power game. To what degree these references were used intentionally and as political strategies is difficult to tell. The prefect was probably not aware how his statement would be understood by ordinary people,¹⁸ but others, among them the rebel leaders, were certainly less naive and very consciously made use of the visible side of statehood to their advantage. There was, however, one stable element: The ceremony was about statehood, and the actors were visibly competing for it. Statehood itself was not negotiable. It remained linked to a fairly strict and reliable imagination of how “a state looks like”.

Parade of rebel soldiers on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of independence from France. The rifles are old, but the rebels proudly demonstrated their discipline and skills in front of an audience that also incorporated representatives of the UN peacekeeping forces.



18 To outsiders such as European ambassadors, the prefect declared that his position was becoming stronger and that it was but a matter of time until the former state institutions would function as before. It is again hard to distinguish between wishful thinking and consciously misleading the audience.

The Asynchrony of Statehood

Another, similar event took place a few months later, when the entire city of Korhogo celebrated the funeral of Kassoum Coulibaly. He had been the descendant of the most powerful intermediary ruler in the colonial state and later a close ally of the founding father of the nation, Félix Houphouët-Boigny. The funeral was divided into two spheres: One that looked like a series of ritual evocations of the great past when the family of the deceased was one of the pillars of the old regime, and another sphere that aimed at a public co-optation of the new leaders of what was sometimes called the second republic, i.e. post-conflict Côte d'Ivoire. The ritual evocations of the past all took place in the courtyard of Kassoum. They were attended by a large crowd of locals and, more important, by high ranking representatives of the old regime, in particular delegates from the family of the first president. In long and captivating speeches, they renewed the "eternal alliance" between the two families that, they said, had brought prosperity and peace to the country. The relatives of the deceased answered by insisting on their claims to the position of the Mayor and Member of Parliament. Indeed, Kassoum and his family had lost many of their privileges under rebel domination.

The other public sphere was addressed in the municipal stadium where Muslim prayers and the official memorial service were staged in front of the soccer tribune and a long row of tents that were mounted for the ceremony. The seats were all attributed to specific groups of official attendants who would then mirror all parts of society and the regional network of alliances that Kassoum had inherited from his father. Honorary armchairs were mounted on a gallery under a special tent on the rear side of the stadium. They were reserved for Laurent Gbagbo, the incumbent President, and Guillaume Soro, his Prime Minister who was still the head of the political wing of the rebellion. The two showed up together shortly before the corpse of Kassoum was brought into the stadium. They marched through a cordon of the presidential guard which was dressed in Roman uniforms with long swords and shiny helmets. The memorial prayer at four in the afternoon was framed by speakers who praised the deceased on behalf of the political dignitaries present. Neither the president nor the prime minister appeared on the podium where the speeches were given. But the absence of the former president Henri Konan Bédié, who was a close ally of Kassoum under the old regime and who was still the chairman of his party, the PDCI/RDA, was carefully noted by many, including a number of journalists. In the next days, they interpreted on his absence in their newspapers as a demonstration that the family of the Coulibalys' had lost the support from the old boys network that once equalled the state.

The two spheres of the funeral were separated by the place and by their visual staging, but also by the way the different actors performed. Both addressed a different period in the history of the post-colonial Ivoirian state, and they did it in a distinct and recognisable way that the audience could easily observe and applaud. Both spheres of the funeral were normative statements about the former and present state. The first showed that statehood under the old regime was still imagined as it was a decade earlier, while the other sphere was a public demonstration of the present power constellation. In this case, the event did not bring the two spheres together but orchestrated a sequence of diverging attitudes towards the post-colonial state. It mirrored different imageries of the state. But unlike the commemoration ceremony, the funeral was not so much about the emerging power sharing of rebels and the president's party – though that became visible in the stadium –, it was much more about the asynchrony of the diverging, but to some extent still co-existing old and new political orders in Northern Côte d'Ivoire. The comments on the absence of Henri Konan Bédié made this clear. Another echo were the discussions in the urban public sphere: While the followers of the Coulibaly family wallowed in the "good old times" and spoke of the Houphouët-Boigny family as if their representatives were still in office, others said that their time

was over and that there was no way back to the former balance of powerful families in the country. But as the former, they clearly recognised this funeral as an attempt to stage the former equation of patrimonial networks with the state. They saw it as a re-enactment of a dated state imagery.

Identity Papers

Besides such formal and highly ritualised events, statehood became visible in many acts and signs that were once a privilege of the state administration. In times of rebel governance, however, no institution could claim such a monopoly. A prominent example was identity papers. In the North and West of the country, official Identity Cards were no longer issued after September 19, 2002. Over the years and one by one, the existing ID cards became invalid, and in 2010, almost no Ivoirian had a valid one. The demand for identity papers, however, persisted – not so much because of rebel policing in their area, but much more because of the international ties and networks to neighbouring countries that many Ivoirians had established to circumvent the blockade between the North and the South of their own country. Another reason was the harassments that Northerners had experienced in the 1990s and until 2002 because of the names that figured on their ID cards. Running into a police roadblock often meant to lose one's ID card – simply because the policemen claimed that the holder was not a “true” Ivoirian if he or she had a name that was considered to be “Malian, Guinean” or “Burkina Be”. The only alternative was often to bribe the policeman.

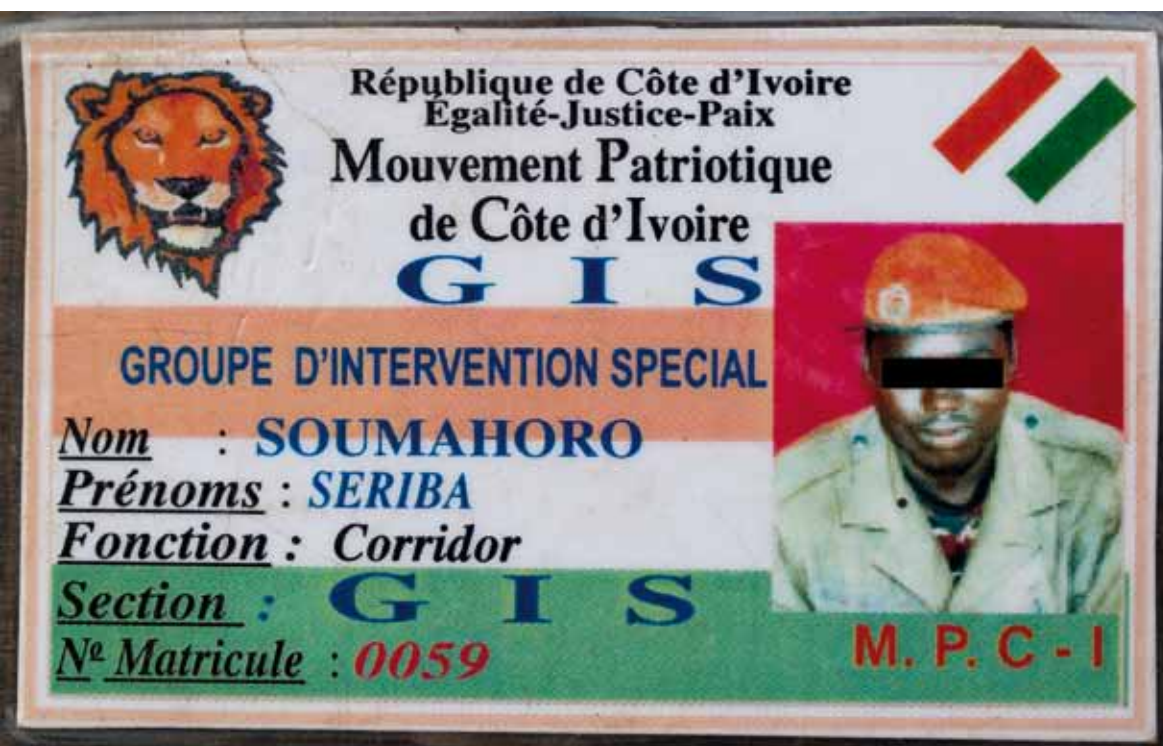
After the end of state domination, other institutions started to issue identity papers of their own. The rebel movement was, of course, among the first to do so. They first looked like a small membership book or simple computer printouts but quickly took the form of plastic badges that stated that the bearer was a member of the rebel movement and what function he had therein. The new cards visibly carried the signs of statehood: The Ivoirian tricolour was reproduced in the upper right or left corner, sometimes accompanied by or in front of the national seal. In the other corner, the *Forces Nouvelles* often printed their own seal which consisted of a “traditional” sword in laurel wreath with the letters F and N between the leaves. The information on the card mirrored what was usually printed on an official ID card: Name and given name of the holder, place and date of birth, father's and mother's name, a registration number, and last but not least, his nationality. The authority that had issued the card was, of course, also mentioned, together with its phone number (usually a cell phone number). What distinguished these cards from the older, ordinary ones were a few additional data as, for instance, the weapon carried, the military unit if the bearer belonged to one, and the number of the zone, i.e. the administrative area under rebel governance where he or she lived.

Though the information printed on the cards often varied, they always carried a passport photo and a stamp that overlapped the photo. As a header, the official name of the country, *République de Côte d'Ivoire*, figured prominently on the cards. Most of them also showed the official motto which was adopted at independence and followed the French model. Here, it read *Union – Discipline – Travail* (Unity, Discipline, Work). Under rebel governance, it was changed to *Egalité – Justice – Paix* (Equality, Justice, Peace) which, many rebels said, came closer to their political goals. As the rebellion was never a separatist movement, it was meant as a new motto that should replace the older one in the entire country, not only in the rebel held parts. The motto appeared on many identity badges, and also on receipts and other papers that were issued by the rebels or one of their institutional branches.

It has to be kept in mind that very few actors in the rebel held area actually asked for such papers. Identity cards were necessary when travelling across the country or when one was doing business with partners and firms who were based outside their territory. One needed them to receive money at the Western Union counter or if one wanted to register a car,¹⁹ but no rebel at a roadblock would ever ask for an identity card. Having an identity card was, however, one of the essential signs of citizenship, and the statement of Sidiki Konaté that every Ivoirian should have one did not come from nothing. The ID card was absolutely central to the notion of statehood because of the discriminating practice of the former administration. The production of identity papers by so many non-state actors was to some extent an attempt to replace the former administration by introducing a “better” governance practice, i.e. one that guarantees the provision of identity papers to every Ivoirian.

Despite the obvious end of state administration, statehood remained visible to almost every Ivoirian living in the rebel held areas. An easy explanation would point out that the rebel movement never was a separatist movement and that the continuity of statehood could be understood as a claim to domination within the old framework of state administration. Statehood then seems to be a mere rhetoric of re-enactment (cf. Connerton 1989:65). Many if not most actors merely seem to repeat what they have seen or experienced elsewhere or before, for instance when they interacted with the former administration of the post-colonial state. But statehood as bare re-enactment of something that existed before cannot explain why statehood is maintained in some areas and why it is given up in others.

The reason for this lies in the particularities of collective imagination. Imageries are constantly re-created through performance. They do not exist per se but necessarily



Instead of regular identity cards, the young rebels received ID badges with the new slogan of the rebellion: Egalité-Justice-Paix instead of Union - Discipline-Travail.

19 The automobile registration office was then one of the first state institutions to resume its functions in the rebel held North and West. The institutions of the insurgents did not offer such services, and thus allowed the state administration to re-establish the registration office with restricted functions.

build on social and cultural modes of re-production of which only few are as visible as the ones described so far. Many are embedded in countless everyday practices. At roadblocks, words are uttered in the language of the state. At ceremonies, speeches are delivered in the same rhetoric of official language as before. From the village level through the small subdivisions to events at the headquarters of the rebellion, the same re-enactment of statehood seems to penetrate the new political order.

The Performance of Statehood

Under post-colonial domination, statehood as imagery shaped the social relations between state and non-state actors. The neo-patrimonial ties between patrons and clients built on how both actors imagined the state to work. Statehood thus penetrated many social interactions. It was sticky. The practices that were informed by the imagery of the state extended well beyond the sphere of direct exchanges between state and non-state actors. Hierarchies in private firms were often organised along the same neo-patrimonial lines. The practices on which these relations were founded until the beginning of the crisis did not come to a sudden end when the rebels established their rule.

A subtle but persistent remembrance of statehood is thus embedded in performative acts. Precisely because of its hidden subtlety, it is probably much more pervasive than its directly observable, visual side. Such performative acts penetrate many daily practices of which the more visible are connected to the demonstration and at times the execution of the power of threat. Some of these practices but by far not all were linked to the exertion of domination by the state when it still was a powerful institution in the life of the people. Others were less obviously related to domination, but focused more on the reciprocity that is also part of neo-patrimonial social orders.

A small example suffices to illustrate the more obvious performances of statehood. Since 2002, roadblocks are mainly run by young rebels. Many of them are still teenagers and do not occupy high ranks in the new hierarchy of the rebel movement. They would have to rely on the support of their families if they could not make a living from the control of travellers who are expected to give them a small amount of money for, as it is often called, the “maintenance of the roads” or simply “for our security forces”. The sums are more or less standardised and not very high. There are some roadblocks authorised by the rebel leader of zone 10, commander Fofié. At such roadblocks, drivers and passengers can expect to get a receipt for what they have to pay. The receipt is issued by the *Forces Armées des Forces Nouvelles* and the amount is not negotiable.²⁰ The former, more informal practice of collecting bribes has become, under rebel governance, a formal act that is best described as administrative. It is deeply inscribed into the bodily practice of those who participate in it.

The exchange with the young rebels is not much different from the former one with the armed representatives of the state. It follows a fairly stable pattern that everybody knows who has ever travelled in Côte d’Ivoire. The spacing of such encounters along the roads remained very much as it has been since colonial times. Though it can be outright frightening to face a young man with dark glasses and a gun sitting in the shadow of a Mango tree besides the road, most drivers approach him very much the same way as they did before with policemen, custom officers and other men in uniforms. It

20 The location of quasi official roadblocks was published by commander Fofié through SRTV radio, the radio station close to the rebellion. Formal rebel governance is examined in Förster, forthcoming.

is important to show that one is aware of their position, i.e. that they incorporate the superior power of threat. Approaching a young rebel in a subservient way reminds performers as well as spectators of a set of rules for defining “proper” relationships with rulers and their representatives. It is also a situation in which one must control one’s body and its expressions and submit it to an order of interaction that has its roots deep in the colonial and post-colonial history of statehood. It is, in the sense of Erving Goffman, a remedial interchange (Goffman 1971), but one that is more informed by bodily practices than by the exchange of words (Crossley 1995).

Many details of the former colonial and post-colonial rules of “behaviour” would still be valid. The drivers or more often their apprentices were (and still are) expected to jump out of the vehicle before the car would come to a complete stop. They then had to run to show up immediately in front of the officers with the documents of the car and the driving licence in hand, preferably before the car would get there. There was also a particular way of handing over the papers to the policemen. Most drivers had a kind of pouch with transparent plastic pages into which they had put the documents. When unfolding the pouch, the usual bribe became visible to those who were opening the envelope, but it remained hidden to those who were not standing nearby. Since the money – most often a small banknote of 500 frs. CFA (1.20 US\$) – could fall out of the envelope, it was also important to carry it horizontally until the officer opened it.

Other roadblocks are more or less informally run by young rebels, at times without the approval of the chief rebel command in Korhogo. At these roadblocks, it is up to the driver to sort out the amount to pay. As with the former police and gendarmerie, many drivers and travellers try to avoid the small “fees” that they are expected to pay. It depends on the skills of bargaining and of establishing a relationship of *connaissance personnelle*, i.e. personal acquaintance if and how much somebody is likely to pay.

Today, the young rebels are no longer interested in car documents or in driving licences. But they still want “to see something to eat”, as the usual expression goes. The driver or his apprentice are still expected to jump out of the approaching car and to run to the men sitting on their benches and stools under the trees. Though the rebels are no

Année 200....

FAFN Ensemble, Entretien
PEAGE La route

VALIDITE 24 N° 1072 * ALLER 400 F

Poste de: C.A.B.

Catégorie Véhicule: N.P.

N° d'immatriculation: 103

Heure:

Korhogo, le 18-01-2009

Signature de l'agent

Initiale de l'agent

The rebels issued receipts that they distributed to drivers and travellers at roadblocks. The amount collected was fixed by the rebel command of zone ten. The numbers allowed to trace the rebel agent who had issued the receipt. They were more formal than the former police, which took bribes but never provided written documents.

An old Ivorian identity card. After years under rebel domination, almost nobody had a valid identity card. The gap was filled by numerous groups and organisations that issued similar cards and distributed them among their members.



longer checking documents, they still want to know who is passing, where the persons in the cars come from and where they go to. To some extent, the former official papers are replaced by other, new ones – as, for instance, the identity documents already described above. The usual bribe that was once paid more or less regularly to the policemen along the road has in many places been transformed into a habitual road toll.

More interesting, though, is the way rebels and “subjects” interact at roadblocks. They both still speak the same language of domination and subordination, which is, to a large extent, the former language of statehood. The driver or his apprentice try to answer all questions well before they are asked, and if they could not anticipate what the other side wants, they do everything to make them believe that they are courteous if not subservient. Even more remarkable is the bodily performance. The young rebels often adopt the same postures as the former police. When a driver approaches, they are still hanging around in their chairs and do not deign to look at him or what they hold in their hands. It comes close to an obvious demonstration of superiority, wilful ignorance and conspicuous boredom.

When their attention is caught, they stand up and often adopt the same postures as the former police: upright, swollen chest, annoyed face, ranting tone in their voice. It is a performance that demonstrates their superior power of threat which is met by appropriate responses of the ordinary people: Gestures of helplessness that denounce the arbitrariness of superior violence and simultaneously classifies it as unjust. On the other side, the man in uniform reacts by showing disgust in front of someone who knows that they are in the wrong. Such practices remind performers on both sides of a practice of domination that has become what social anthropologists tend to call a tradition.

In more neutral terms, the practices remind the actors of statehood as an organising principle of society. Statehood cannot fade as quickly as an institution. It sometimes depends on the grace of the performance if the actors will be better off or if they will

be “sentenced” to more harassment and bribes or “fees”. The performance of statehood in that sense is more than just re-enactment of a distant institutionalised practice in the past. It is constantly re-created by the participating actors who may also change it if they see a need to do so. Another type of encounter shows how creative both parties can be.

If there are hunters waiting at the roadblocks, the interaction often takes another turn. Hunters belong to a powerful association and have many duties in the city as well as in rural areas (in general Hellweg 2006, Bassett 2004). Their association goes back, they say, to the old medieval empire of Mali which they remember in their legends. In the early 13th century, the founder of the empire, Sunjata Keita, had called his fellow hunters together to liberate his country from a foreign oppressor (Cissé 1991, Thoyer 1995: 12). Since almost eight centuries, they were powerful mediators between the wilderness and the world of humans. As wanderers between two worlds, they had access to the secret knowledge of the other world. Becoming a hunter meant initiation into that secret knowledge of the wilderness. As an association, they were organised on a segmentary, largely acephalous basis with very few hierarchical elements which in addition did not follow the usual pattern of Manding society. As an association, the *dozoya*, the hunters’ associations, hence were a counterbalance to the hereditary hierarchy of the empire, and they kept this position under colonial and post-colonial rule (Arseniev 2007: 354–355).

This century old tradition with its claims to secret knowledge obliges them to fulfil certain ritual prescriptions and to adopt a kind of code of conduct in all interactions with other, ordinary people. They insist that a hunter will not lie because he has taken an oath on the hunters’ shrine in the wilderness. The public opinion is unanimous: If he violates his oath, the protective magic will turn against him and kill the hunter. A hunter neither takes bribes nor will he allow an evil person to pass. A roadblock that is run by hunters is different from those run by the rebels or, in former times, by the police.

One of the differences is that a hunter does not display his superiority by sitting on a chair in the shade of a tree and ignoring drivers and travelers until they show up in front of him. It is much more likely that he will approach the vehicle and have a look before anybody gets out. The bodily attitudes are different, too. The drivers do not approach him in a submissive posture, they would also prefer to communicate in a local language. Many of the hunters try to find out if the other has some relationship to their association or if he is a hunter himself. There are some keywords referring to the secret knowledge of the wilderness that only a hunter will recognise as such and answer accordingly.

But there are also changing attitudes which are linked to the transformation of the political order. There is, for instance, the appeal to cultural belonging. The use of a vernacular language instead of the French with a Southerner’s accent that the former police practiced is often a claim to a shared culture – one that links both sides at the roadblock. Another can be the reference to a local dress code. Wearing a Senufo “Seven-Lanes”²¹ cotton shirt means that one belongs to the peasant majority that was so heavily harassed by the state’s police that it later became a major pillar supporting the rebellion. Some travellers put on such cloth exclusively when they travel.

The hunters associations also adopted practices of statehood that were not part of their repertoire. In the city of Man in the West, where the *dozoya* do not have the same long history as in the North, they insist on receiving official visitors in their office, which is a crumbling building in the middle of town. The president of the local hunter

21 The shirt is sewn of seven narrow strips spun and woven by hand. Such wide and sleeveless shirts were the typical cloth of those who were working the fields.

association then sits behind a desk which is covered with papers and writing materials. A poster of hunters in West Africa is tacked to the wall, right next to a photo of the former president of Côte d'Ivoire. The room resembles very much a local office of the former state administration or now a branch office of the rebel movement.

Among the youth, new elements come in – elements that are, on the one hand, linked to the rebellion as a social and political movement. On the other hand, gestures and styles of global youth culture merge with the body language of mere threat. Rap fashion with reversed baseball caps and staccato movements of hands and arms are becoming daily practice. Such gestures do not only “speak” to the other, they also demonstrate to bystanders what goes on and who is who when different actors meet, for instance at roadblocks. They are as much performative acts to spectators as they are to those who are expected “to help” the young rebels at the side of the road.

The procedures at roadblocks are not prescribed – but inscribed in the bodies of those who engage in these interactions. They refer to some sort of prototype of practice that is closely associated with the past experience of the state. They have become habitual, apparently automatic movements that build on the long history of statehood. As a distinct type of practice, they are understood by most participants in such remedial interchanges. As performances, they build on the bodily and cognitive memory of a communal repertoire which has become part of culture.

However, today's practices are not mere imitations of the former colonial and post-colonial state; they are much more in-corporations of prior, now prototypical practices of domination that are based on an older experience of power. It has its roots in the pre-colonial kingdoms of Kong and Samori Touré, but was then heavily transformed by colonial domination and subsequently again transformed and perpetuated by the post-colonial state. Such practices remain efficient. The body is still given the appropriate posture and the language is still adopting the same tone. It is an elementary encoding of statehood in the bodies of the actors who continue to perform statehood as an incorporating practice.

Conclusion: Statehood in its Own Right

As an institution, the state had penetrated everyday life in northern and western Côte d'Ivoire for over a century. Though its monopoly of force had always been precarious, the state has had its impact on all spheres of daily life. The colonial state thoroughly restructured political space, and the post-colonial state slowly but steadily transformed the existing institutional framework, too. The state was not an ephemeral phenomenon. The crisis that shook the country since the end of the 1990s did not lead back to a plain “Africanisation” of politics nor did it simply end statehood in the rebel-held parts of the country. While the state as an institution has more or less ceased to exist in the parts of Côte d'Ivoire under rebel domination, it is still present in the minds of the actors, both ordinary people and rebels. What is generated in this historical situation is a novel kind of political order – one that incorporates elements of statehood as well as other elements. A conventional interpretation would juxtapose these elements as coming from two distinct historical sources, namely the pre-colonial and the colonial heritage. In an action-based understanding of politics, however, such a conceptualisation does not make much sense as the actors neither distinguish between different practices nor would they privilege one or the other source. They have long since merged into one contemporary understanding of politics and political practice. The argument that the weakness of many African states gives rise to an older, more African political order (Bayart 1993, Chabal/Daloz 1999) has but a limited explanatory value.

Even in that more conventional, binary understanding, statehood does not necessarily need the state as an organisation to persist. It orders everyday life, informs rebel governance and serves as a reference in public opinion. Through re-enactments and performative acts, statehood re-appears in the public consciousness of social actors. Statehood is hence produced and re-produced in these practices, but it is not merely an image of the past that no longer meets actual practices of domination. It constantly adapts to the changing circumstances and situations. Statehood has a history of its own – a history that is not simply a mirror of the institution of the state.

Statehood as the normative imaginary of how a state should work thus penetrates everyday practices – it is not a separated realm of life that can be cast into a distinct institutional setting.²² But precisely because it is a practice, merging with other practices, it endows these practices with the normativity that were formerly exclusive to the state. This process is driven by the articulation of the actors who engage in it. They do not do so by discursive means – though that may happen when there is a necessity to make one's intentions consciously known to others –; it is more their practices that affect the understanding of what statehood is about. It is a political process that transforms the social as a net of relationships of social actors.

This said, another theoretical question arises: Are these practices possible without the performers' cognitive memory of a communal repertoire of gestures and postures in a framed exchange? The answer depends on how human practices are conceptualised. If practice is thought of as directed by a preconceived plan or image that the actor must have in mind, such a communal repertoire would be necessary. It would have to take the form of cognitive memory, i.e. it would be part of culture. An alternative perspective, however, could start from the insight that the ethnographic data presented here suggests: Bodily practices are self-reproductive. It is not necessary to reflect on them. They are re-produced as such, i.e. through the performance itself, which also immunises them to cognitive criticism. The persistence of statehood is not based on a cognitive act of memory; it is embedded in the daily practices themselves.

At times, such practices may surface consciously, but only when they contradict the obvious lifeworldly reality. Then, the actors may comment on their own practices and their experience. In the case of Northern Côte d'Ivoire, some journalists commented on rebel governance and in particular its formal elements in that way: "They are building a state." Or: "They are heading towards a state."²³ However, such comments were rare. The reason is again the embedded nature of practices in the bodily memory of the performers. They remain based on routines of the body and thus to a large degree immune to sudden change through cognitive reflection.

If this is true, it means that the study of statehood must address much more than just its relationship of an image to the state as an institution. Statehood is then best understood as a practice that generates a social imaginary of how the actors should articulate in a political space that grants specific rights and duties to all actors. As such, statehood is not a mere complement to the state as an institution nor is it solely its image, as Midgal suggested. Statehood certainly generates images, but it does so as a practice; it is not an image in itself. Statehood is a peculiar kind of practice, as the example from Northern Côte d'Ivoire has shown – a practice that produces a particular imaginary of the political and the social and that endows it with a power that goes beyond the individual imagination.

22 Neither would the distinction between statehood as political system and the state as bureaucratic organisation make sense here, as could be deduced from the debates of the 1980s (see Easton 1981, Almond 1988 and Mitchell 1991 on this debate).

23 Pers. communications, January 2009. Quotation from recording # 09.01.48

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