

Making green cocoa: Deforestation, the legacy of war, and agrarian capitalism in Côte d'Ivoire

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Abstract

This article examines the legacy of war on environmental policy, contributing to recent literature on the linkages between armed violence, conservation, rural livelihoods and global value chains. It argues that environmental norms reshape agricultural practices, but also the means by which people claim control over land and labour. Using the case of cocoa in Côte d'Ivoire, this paper examines the impact of 'zero-deforestation' policies on the country's last agricultural frontier: its western forestlands, where migration and deforestation have driven the development of the cocoa economy for years. The region is now feeling the effects of global trade policies such as the European Deforestation-Free Regulation (EUDR), competition for the last remaining forests and social fault lines inherited from the war. This article traces the origins of the zero-deforestation policy, its national and local impact and its implications for social struggles over the control of land and labour.

KEYWORDS

cocoa, Côte d'Ivoire, deforestation-free commodities, forest policy, post-conflict transition, rural migration

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1 | INTRODUCTION

On 23 February 2021, the town of Guiglo, in western Côte d'Ivoire, received a visit from two national political figures.¹ Alain-Richard Donwahi, Minister of Forestry and Anne Oulotto, President of the Cavally Region and Minister of Sanitation, were joined by other regional officials and a large audience in the Regional Council chamber. Most of the room was occupied by members of the Wé Alliance, an organisation that claims to represent the 'native'² Wé people and whose leadership is largely made up of former militia members who fought on the side of the government during the country's civil war (2002–2011). Donwahi, Oulotto and the Wé Alliance were there to talk about the Goin Dèbé forest. Goin Dèbé is one of the largest gazetted forests in the west of the country, but it was severely damaged by intensive cocoa farming during the war and its aftermath, and more than 90% of its area is now considered degraded. These cocoa plantations, while largely tolerated by the authorities, are considered illegal. Illegality poses a problem for access to the European market, which is a major destination for cocoa from Côte d'Ivoire. As a result, the Ivorian government has made several attempts to demonstrate its newfound commitment to the environment. With the government claiming that restoring the country's tree cover should be a national priority, forests like Goin Dèbé are now at the centre of intractable conflicts over who owns the forest and who is to blame for its destruction.

Such conflicts are typical of places where objectives like environmental sustainability and tropical forest conservation clash with the historical trajectories of agrarian capitalism. Since colonial times, the geography of human settlement in the southern half of Côte d'Ivoire has been shaped by cocoa farming, with new agricultural frontiers and massive deforestation sustained by successive waves of migration. This model, based on cheap land and labour, fell into a crisis in the 1980s, which played a role in the political turmoil of the 1990s and the 2002–2011 war. During the war, forests were massively grabbed by pro-government and rebel groups alike. Forests served as strategic strongholds for militia groups, borders delimiting the territory of different factions and prizes to be plundered. This forest land rush was particularly contentious in western Côte d'Ivoire, where most of the rural violence was concentrated. Years after the war's end, conflicts over the forests continue to reverberate in the west, with the most recent major outbreak of violence having taken place in 2017.

Today, environmental policies addressing the problem of deforestation are shaped by these wartime legacies. Like many other countries in the Global South, Côte d'Ivoire must comply with new norms requiring its exports to be 'deforestation-free'. This standard was promoted by NGOs and environmental movements throughout the 2010s, before becoming part of the European Deforestation-Free Regulation (EUDR), which restricts access to the European market to 'deforestation-free' commodities. Attempts to make agriculture 'greener' are shaped by the imperative of maintaining the profitability of existing market relations. But in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, which is the world's foremost cocoa producer, greening efforts are also shaped by the intractable links between land struggles, deforestation and armed politics.

This article examines how the legacies of war shape environmental policy. This requires taking a close look at the war's impact on environmental problems, but also analysing how environmental policies can recast pre-war and wartime social conflicts. These questions are addressed using oral and written sources, in addition to GIS (Geographic Information System) data collected by the two authors – together and separately – in Abidjan and the Cavally region during multiple visits between February 2021 and April 2023. We conducted a total of 91 interviews with peasants, local authorities, former militia members, NGO staff, national politicians and aid workers; only some of these interviews are quoted here, but all of them provided us with context and opportunities to triangulate our data. We also used GIS, not only as an additional source of data but also in support of our interviews. To assess the underlying rationale of deforestation and rivalries over forestland, we presented our informants with a series of maps; this integrative interview technique allowed people to situate their narratives in space and time. The article is organised into three sections: first, we

¹Field notes (23 February 2021).

²Côte d'Ivoire features a typical case of land rivalries expressed in terms of native (autochthonous) population and late-comers (*allochtones* or *allogènes*). These terms are strategically used in politics and everyday life to negotiate rights to land access and use. See Chauveau and Dozon (1985), Chauveau (2000) and Boone (2014).

will present our analytical framework; second, we will analyse the relationship between cocoa, deforestation and the political economy of civil war; and third, we will study the impact of environmental policies on pre-existing struggles.

2 | TERRITORIALISATION, ENVIRONMENTAL SUBJECTIVITIES AND THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION

Our analysis operates at the intersection of forests, forest policy and the political economy of agriculture. We will use three theoretical tools: the idea of territorialisation, which helps us trace the different forms of power exercised over forestland; the notion of environmental subjectivities, which shows how policies interact with people's membership in particular social groups; and, lastly, the perspective of social relations of production, which highlights the implications for access to land and the exploitation of labour.

The concept of territorialisation offers a framework for examining state power, competition for forestland and efforts to make Ivorian cocoa greener. It can be defined as a process aimed at 'excluding or including people within particular geographic boundaries, and [...] controlling what people do and their access to natural resources within those boundaries' (Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995, 388). This reflects the fact that, in Côte d'Ivoire as in many other places, forests are internal frontiers where state control over space, people and resources is at stake (Peluso, 1994; on Côte d'Ivoire, see Dieng, 2024). This is particularly true in contexts where armed violence is used to challenge the authority of the state and government elites (Richards, 1996). Forests provide safe havens for rebels and resources for those seeking to finance war; they are also fragile environments themselves threatened by the consequences of war (Duffy, 2016; Lunstrum, 2014; Marijnen et al., 2020).

Territorialisation is not simply the fruit of state power. It is the result of 'contentious co-production' between state agencies, aid bureaucracies and social movements, not to mention armed militias and criminal networks (Devine & Baca, 2020, 916; see also Ybarra, 2012). This idea of co-production also points to the fact that climate policies have changed the scale of forest governance, shifting the value of forests 'from the national to the global scale', and thus bringing new parties in the process (Devine & Baca, 2020, 921). In Côte d'Ivoire, access to forests has been controlled by a variety of actors: state officials in perpetual negotiation with local authorities, militias and rebels during the war and local strongmen with ties to war networks in the years since 2011. The introduction of environmental policies has made these forms of territorialisation more complex: access to forests has become contingent on compliance with 'zero deforestation' policies. But these new trends have not erased the past; territorialisation is still co-produced by people in very different places, be it in Ivorian ministries, in local political movements, or in offices in Brussels.

One emergent effect of this latest phase of territorialisation is the creation of 'environmental subjects'; these are 'people who have come to think and act in new ways in relation to the environmental domain being governed, forests' (Agrawal, 2012, 7). But the production of environmental subjects is also about categorising people as either 'eco-guardians' or 'eco-threats', with these categories based on race, ethnicity, class and gender (Ojeda, 2012, 358; see also Li, 2007). In Côte d'Ivoire, current forest policy is being implemented against the backdrop of a long history of ethnic differentiation. These sedimented categories provided the narratives that were used to frame violence and give meaning to territorial struggles during the war. Today, they are being recast through the issue of deforestation: Who owns the forest? Who is responsible for its destruction? Who should save it? In Goin Dédé, local 'autochthonous' organisations such as the Wé Alliance are working to be recognised as 'guardians of the forest', while politicians, state officials and development agencies promote the idea that migrant Burkinabé are the main vector of deforestation. In this way, national and ethnic affiliations are combined with deforestation narratives to depict people as inherently prone to either protect or destroy the forest.

Categorising people as 'eco-threats' or 'eco-guardians' can have a decisive effect on the social relations of production. As a result, access not only to land but also to labour and the fruits of labour, is redefined by environmental policies. By defining the parameters for legitimate forms of agriculture, policies discriminate between environmentally destructive and sustainable agriculture, opening up opportunities for accumulation and creating new forms of

exclusion (Borras et al., 2021; Clay, 2023; Franco & Borras, 2019; Shattuck et al., 2023; Thaler, 2024). This interacts with post-war contexts, which are often organised around the consolidation or transformation of the wartime economic order (Berdal & Zaum, 2017; Grajales, 2021a; Pugh et al., 2008). In Côte d'Ivoire, environmental policies have transformed the resources available to people to claim control over land or to extract value from the labour of others. The portrayal of migrants as an 'ecological threat' has weakened their claims to land, making them particularly vulnerable to the pressing demands of nativist movements to pay for access to the forest. The relationship between land and labour is thus transformed, and old rivalries are brought back to the forefront.

The articulation of these three concepts also raises the question of how we approach war and its effects. Instead of seeing war as a fundamental rupture – the opposite of peace – one should look for overlapping temporalities and long-term trends (Cramer, 2006; Keen, 2000; Richards, 1996). Similarly, understanding transitions out of war is not a matter of describing a sequence of steps that tie together peace-building, peace consolidation and so on, but of unravelling the messy reconfiguration of political networks, the transformation of the availability and significance of the use of force and the attempts of war victors and profiteers to transform the spoils of war into the dividends of peace (Distler et al., 2018; Grajales, 2021b; Jennings & Bøås, 2015). In short, one should try to think about war and peace without seeing them as opposites.

3 | THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF DEFORESTATION

Since colonial times, Ivorian forests have been governed by a combination of state representatives and local power brokers who have regulated the use of forestland. The following pages briefly show how this mode of territorialisation was shaped by the political economy of cocoa. We then move on to analyse the impact of war, which reshaped power struggles over access to forests.

3.1 | Forests and the formation of agrarian capitalism

Throughout the tropical regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America, cocoa production has often been supported by the resources and social conditions provided by the forest. According to agrarian economist François Ruf, this is the main component of the global cocoa boom. Ruf conceptualises the relationship between forests and cocoa as the former providing a 'rent' for the latter, thereby reducing the demand for capital and labour (Ruf, 1995). This 'forest rent' consists of 'more fertile soil, lower weed and pest pressure, and a more favourable microclimate'. (Ruf et al., 2015, 102). Moreover, the 'forest rent' also encompasses the higher social availability of forestland: unenclosed forests imply available land, lower population density and greater difficulties for local power holders to tax newcomers for their use of the land (Ruf, 1995). As a result, the social availability of forestland offers optimal conditions for migrant workers.

Côte d'Ivoire is a paradigmatic example of how the 'forest rent' works. From the early 20th century onward, in the context of a rapidly growing agrarian economy, forest reserves began to be rapidly exploited and destroyed, 'treated almost like deposits of mineral ore' (Chauveau & Léonard, 1996, 184). This extractivist approach to forests is embedded in both the effects of the 'forest rent' and the state's approach to forestland and export crops. Beginning in the 1920s, the country's forested regions provided the environmental and social conditions for the rapid development of cocoa production. As early as the 1930s, colonial authorities were already alarmed by the high rate of deforestation. The creation of gazetted forests was an attempt to balance the need for land with a minimum level of forest protection, mostly driven by the need to secure timber sourcing (Dieng, 2024). By 1960, more than 5 million hectares of forest had been gazetted, while massive deforestation raged in forested areas outside the state's protected forest domain (Ibo, 2000, 21). This ambiguous position was inherited by the Ivorian state, which adopted a mix of ad hoc conservation measures, a very high tolerance for cocoa cultivation inside protected areas and a tendency to use gazetted forests as a land reserve for patronage purposes (Léonard & Ibo, 1994). In the 1970s, official estimates were that around 20% of all

cocoa grown in the country came from gazetted forests (Ibo, 2000, 23). Throughout the history of cocoa production in the country, the social and environmental conditions of the forests have been massively exploited.

While the southern forests provided the land for cocoa plantations, most of the labour was furnished by migrant workers. This created a 'frontier' dynamic, with the state massively encouraging migration to western forest areas from the central and northern regions of the country and from across the border (Chauveau & Dozon, 1985; Chauveau & Léonard, 1996). The influx of migrant labour was supported by local authorities who, until the 1980s, tended to side with migrants over natives (Boone, 2014). It also forged ethnic identities and notions of 'autochthony' and belonging (Babo, 2013; Chauveau, 2017; Dembele, 2003). This process was compounded by colonial-era representations of migrants (both northern and south-eastern) as industrious and hardworking, in contrast to south-westerners who were seen as unwilling to embrace the precepts of agrarian capitalism (Chauveau & Dozon, 1985).

The politicisation of rural migration is a longstanding feature of the Ivorian agrarian political economy. Today, in post-war Côte d'Ivoire, identity and land access are still intrinsically intertwined (Chauveau and Colin 2014; Grajales, 2020; Mitchell, 2022). A short historical detour can provide some useful context. Initially, French colonists saw the country's northern savannahs, as well as neighbouring Burkina Faso (Upper Volta in colonial terms), as labour reserves for the development of infrastructure and the cash crop economy in the south (Cissé, 2013). But there was also a migration of Baoulé peasants from the central regions of the colony, who quickly became the primary driving force behind the rush for land in the west. The independent state followed the same pattern of development, with the most significant feature being that the Baoulé leadership held a dominant position at all levels of power (Boone, 2014). The 1960s and early 1970s were a period of sustained economic growth. In western immigration zones, the state's role was centred on its ability to guarantee migrants' rights to land, in addition to a promise of education and jobs for the children of native families, which limited their demand for land (Chauveau, 2017). A key element of this social contract was the institution of '*tutorat*', or sponsorship, which is based on the twofold idea that access to land stems from a basic right to subsistence and that foreigners (and their descendants) owe trans-generational recognition to those – their *tuteurs*, or sponsors – who facilitated their settlement (Chauveau, 2006, 213–215).

This pattern of governance collapsed in the 1980s under the combined effects of the economic crisis, adverse terms of trade, urban job shortages and the shocks of structural adjustment. Beginning in the late 1970s, the government told unemployed urban youth to 'return to the land'; but in the context of massive cash crop expansion and migration in the preceding years, most of the ones who did so found no land available (Chauveau, 2000; Montaz, 2020). In the 1990s, the government turned against migrants, as opportunistic politicians used the language of nativism and ethnic division to exclude their rivals and quell anger from the youth. In the west, where cocoa was the most productive and land deals were the most recent, this provided the tools for young men to extract payments for land from settlers (Chauveau & Bobo, 2003, 2005). Long before the war, these young men had built a narrative around the idea that, with the backing of the state and under the benign gaze of elders, autochthonous communities had been dispossessed of their land by migrants.

These grievances shaped the logic of armed mobilisation after the outbreak of war in 2002, providing the language that military-political entrepreneurs would use to garner support and demonise their adversaries (Klaus & Mitchell, 2015). On 19 September 2002, an attempted coup led to the partition of the country, with control of the northern half exercised by various rebel groups. They eventually formed a coalition – the Forces Nouvelles. The rebels were hardened by the regime's discrimination against both foreigners and Ivorians from the north. The pro-government forces espoused a nativist agenda emphasising the rights of autochthonous communities, especially in the administration of land (Banégas, 2006; Marshall-Fratani, 2006; McGovern, 2011). In the west, a variety of anti- and pro-government militias emerged in the early months of the war. They targeted civilians along ethnic lines, killing and raping to clear territory of groups seen as untrustworthy and hostile (Chauveau & Bobo, 2003; Human Rights Watch, 2003; Human Rights Watch, 2005; Toukpo, forthcoming). This made the region the country's main hotspot of violence and a source of instability that would remain critical years after the war's end in 2011.

3.2 | Western Côte d'Ivoire: the last agrarian frontier

During the war, as forests became of great value to both pro- and anti-government armed groups, the forms of territorialisation affecting the western forests were transformed. Not only were forests of military significance, but they were also an important source of funding, as both rebels and pro-government militias levied taxes on logging and cocoa cultivation. This occupation did not end with the war; in fact, conflicts to control the forests and the valuable cacao plantations they sheltered became even fiercer. Similar patterns of occupation and exploitation have been observed in several western forests, including Scio, Haut-Sassandra (Barima et al., 2016), Mont Péko National Park (Kra, 2016) and Goin Débé. The latter case will serve as an illustration of these war and post-war conflicts for forestlands.³

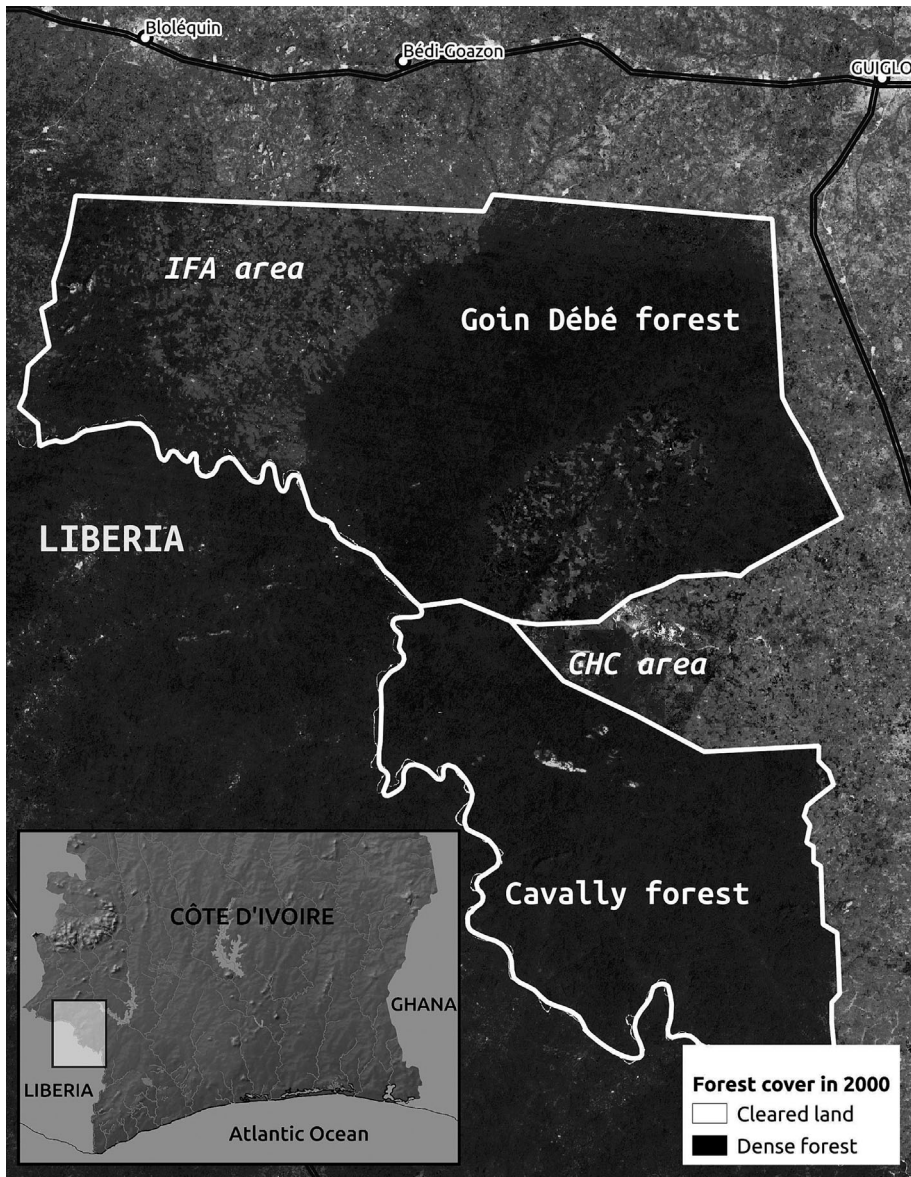
Goin Débé illustrates how deforestation, the development of cocoa farming and state-sponsored migration to the west are closely linked. In 2002, the region's forests had already been largely decimated, with only about 55% of the tree cover remaining unaffected. Although Goin Débé was classified as a gazetted forest in 1954, settler communities have been farming within its borders since at least the early 1970s, benefiting from the tolerance of state officials. Two major hotspots of deforestation bear mentioning, each related to the history of peasant settlement in the area and organised along ethnic lines. In the northern part of the forest, where the French logging company IFA was active (the 'IFA area' in Map 1), company employees brought members of their extended families to farm in cleared areas of the forest. Most of the migrants were Ivorian Baoulé and Burkinabé nationals. In the south-east, portions of the forest were carved out of the gazetted area in 1983 so that a concession could be granted to a rubber company, CHC (the 'CHC area'). The company's employees opened crop fields inside the forest, initially for subsistence farming. They were joined by newcomers from central Côte d'Ivoire, mostly people having been displaced by the construction of the Kossou dam. Most of the forest settlers in this area were Ivorian Baoulé.

After the outbreak of war in 2002 and the withdrawal of the forest rangers, Goin Débé came under the control of pro-government ('patriotic') militias. They were mostly staffed by local men of the Wé ethnic group; most of their leaders were pro-Gbagbo local politicians, and some of their ranks were supplied by Liberian soldiers of fortune. The militias targeted Burkinabé migrants and Ivorian Baoulé settlers, the latter of whom were generally perceived by militia leaders as posing a particular threat because they were Ivorian nationals and had historically enjoyed greater protection from the state. The patriotic militias expelled many settlers and maintained relatively tight control over the forest until 2011. Violence was concentrated in the northern fringes of the forest, which borders some of the villages where the militia groups were strongest and where some of their leaders resided. It was also a strategic area, close to the road linking the regional capital, Guiglo, to two other important towns (Bloléquin and Toulepleu) and to Liberia.

Even though it was fuelled by a fiercely nativist narrative, the patriotic militias' strategy was dictated by conflicting imperatives: on the one hand, gaining control of what they saw as their ethnic homeland, while also, on the other hand, ensuring a sufficient supply of labour for the cocoa plantations.⁴ Paradoxically, militia leaders sponsored the settlement of new migrants, mostly Burkinabé farmers. These newcomers were easier to control than peasants from earlier waves of migration who had been farming in the area for several decades. This fact can nuance some simplistic ethnic interpretations of the war, and shows how violence is simultaneously produced by ideological narratives, political and military considerations and the political economy of agriculture (Chauveau & Richards, 2008; Cramer & Richards, 2011; Grajales & Chauveau, 2022).

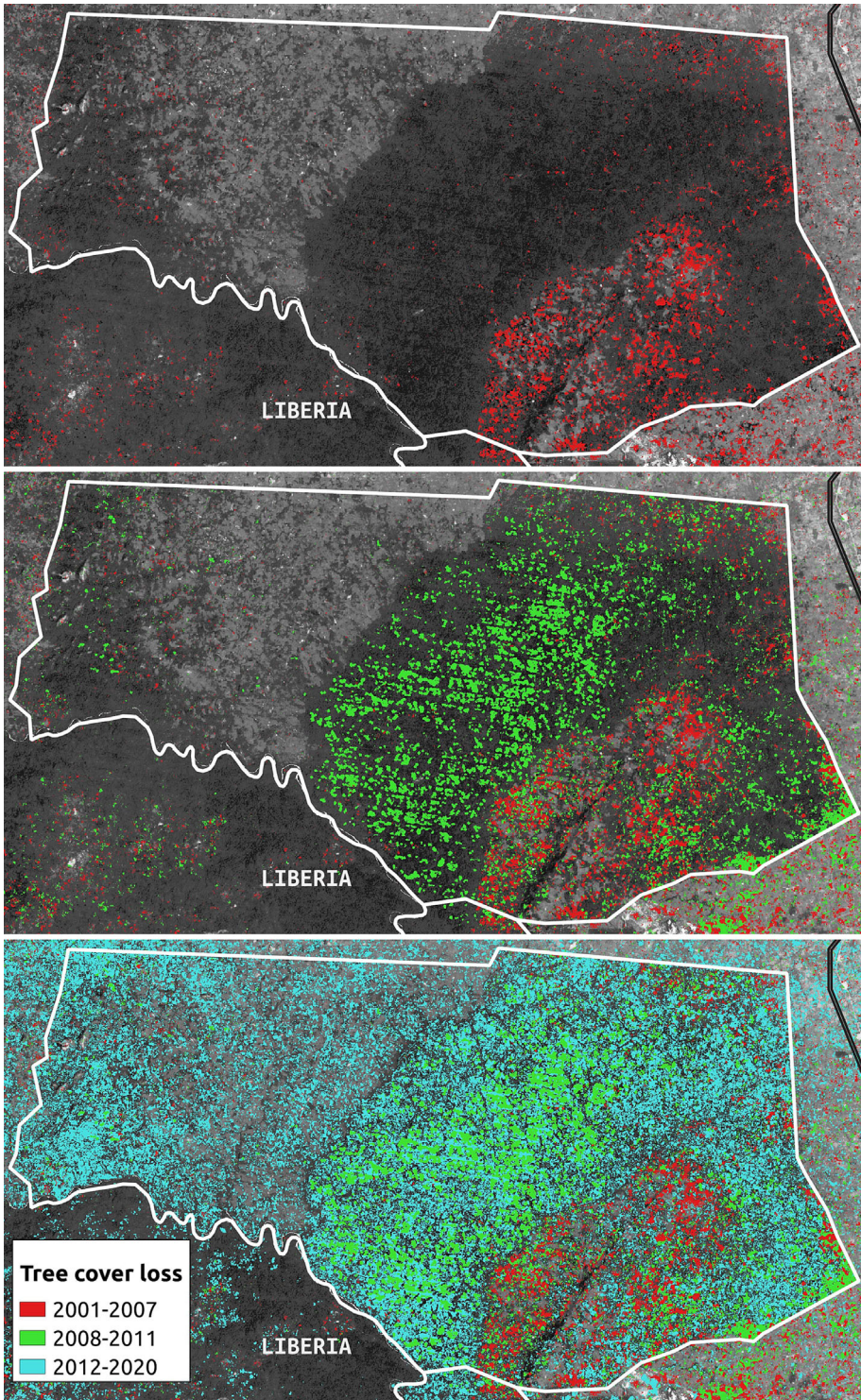
³This case study is primarily based on the results of our field research. We conducted 23 individual and collective interviews in February, March, and August 2021 and January 2022 with peasants from different communities and diverse migratory backgrounds. We met with the leaders and members of the Wé Alliance on four occasions, as well as the leadership of the Burkinabé and Baoulé communities. We visited various settlements in and around the forests and met with people at their homes or in public gathering places. In addition, we interviewed a variety of informants with first-hand knowledge of the events described in this section: the head of Guiglo's social work centre, two former humanitarian aid workers in charge of emergency response in the area, a former rural development expert working in the area, a group of local environmental activists, and the head of the national office for an international NGO deployed in the area. As described in the introduction, oral sources were complemented with GIS data.

⁴A comparable situation is described by Przybyłowski's (2023) work in neighbouring Bangolo province.



MAP 1 Research locations. Source: the authors, created using data from Hansen et al. (2013), [Naturalearthdata.com](https://www.naturalearthdata.com) (public domain) and OpenStreetMap (open database licence – ODbL).

The combined use of satellite data and oral sources from field research gives us a clearer view of this process. Map 2 shows that very few new fields were cleared in the northern IFA area between 2002 and 2007, probably indicating a lack of available labour. In 2007, the signature of the Ouagadougou agreements between the government and the rebels brought about a more stable climate. In 2008, the patriotic militia and local authorities began to encourage a massive influx of new Burkinabé farmers. People were brought in by the busload and freely entered the forest, using logging roads opened by the French logging firm Thanry. The story is different in the CHC area, where militia groups had far less influence. There was little military interest in the zone, the Wé were a minority, and relations between them and the Baoulé were mediated by the PDCI (the former single party, which is still very



MAP 2 Deforestation in Goin Débé. Source: the authors, created using data from Hansen et al. (2013), [Naturalearthdata.com](https://www.naturalearthdata.com) (public domain) and OpenStreetMap (open database Licence - ODbL).

influential). But the war was not without consequences; the withdrawal of the forest rangers paved the way for the massive expansion of existing cocoa farms from the early years of the war. This was aided by the arrival of new settlers brought in through Baoulé migration networks. This increased ethnic homogeneity in the area and facilitated the emergence of local political leaders claiming to represent Baoulé farmers, which would play a key role in the ensuing post-war conflicts.

The end of the war did not bring an end to the conflicts over the forest. It merely realigned the forces at play. In Côte d'Ivoire, as elsewhere, the transition out of war brought competition for the consolidation of post-war economic order, with political and coercive resources being redistributed between different social groups in competition (Berdal & Zaum, 2017; Pugh et al., 2008). The Gbagbo regime was overthrown in 2011 and Alassane Ouattara was sworn in as the new president. As the new regime's troops occupied the west, many militia leaders fled to Liberia or hid in Abidjan. This triggered a new wave of competition for forestland throughout the west (Barima et al., 2016; Kra, 2016; Sangne et al., 2015). In Goin Débé, the post-war period ushered in further waves of violence. Competition for forestland pitted the local Wé leaders, some of whom were former militia chiefs, against the Baoulé, who had expanded their plantations during the war and enjoyed the support of the new regime. Many Burkinabé farmers were caught in the crossfire.

The realignment of local politics in Goin Débé led to unexpected alliances. Knowing that the army would not allow them into the forest, local Wé leaders made a deal with a former Burkinabé rebel leader, Salam Yaméogo. Salam was allowed to bring in his men to work the forest; this accelerated deforestation (see Map 2), but also increased political polarisation. In reaction, the Baoulé leaders used their connections with local law enforcement and had Salam arrested in 2014; the following year, he was convicted and sentenced to 10 years in prison, where he died in 2022. After Salam's arrest, Burkinabé peasants were harassed and intimidated by men working for the Baoulé leadership, forcing many of them to leave the forest.

This only emboldened the Wé to lay claim to the forest. In 2016, former patriotic militia leaders and middlemen created the Wé Alliance, an organisation claiming to represent the interests of the Wé people. While officially presented as a grassroots political organisation, the Wé alliance provided a front for recruiting former militia members and collecting weapons. It also supported the arrival of more Burkinabé farmers, claiming that the forest belonged to the Wé and that they would rather farm it with the labour of foreign migrant workers than see it fall into the hands of their Baoulé foes. In July 2017, the Wé Alliance launched an attack on the Baoulé CHC territory and succeeded in driving most of them out of the forest. The Baoulé counterattack was supported by groups of dozo hunters, who at the time served as the main security providers in the region and were strong supporters of the new regime.⁵ This escalated the crisis, with some 10,000 people being forcibly displaced from the forest and neighbouring villages. The situation was only contained after several weeks of violent hostilities, requiring the deployment of the army and the mediation of several ministers and customary authorities.

The case of Goin Débé illustrates how territorialisation in western Côte d'Ivoire is linked to a wider political economy in which cocoa production depends on the availability of both forestland and migrant labour. The struggle for the forest is inextricably intertwined with the struggle to control the fruits of migrant labour. These are two parallel forms of conflict that permeate the war and its aftermath. They influence how environmental policies are felt by people in western Côte d'Ivoire.

4 | ZERO DEFORESTATION AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF POLICY-MAKING

Despite the deep-rooted nature of the ties between the cocoa economy and forest loss, deforestation has only recently become an important policy issue. Until the late 2010s, discussion of forest degradation was confined to

⁵Dozos are 'traditional' hunters originally from Mande-speaking groups, but now found throughout West Africa and composed of people of various ethnicities. In the 1990s, they commonly served as security providers in Côte d'Ivoire. Many of them supported the rebels during the war. See Hellweg (2011).

development circles and the poorly resourced Ministry of the Environment. Calls for action had been made well before, though; as early as 1988, the World Bank warned that deforestation was reaching critical levels and launched a programme aimed to restore 20% of the country's forest cover (Ibo, 2000, 24). After the war, there were limited attempts to consider deforestation as a consequence of armed conflict. In 2013, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) conducted an environmental assessment and concluded that the war had resulted in massive deforestation (UNEP, 2015).⁶ There were also scattered attempts by the Ministry of Forests and Sodefor (*Société de développement des forêts*)⁷ to reclaim control of the gazetted forests. But in the west, deforestation and the cocoa trade continued unabated. Some of the most profitable areas were under heavy military control and under the surveillance of dozo hunters, who acted as army auxiliaries. Local civilian institutions were also in the hands of former rebels: the prefect (the local representative of the national government) of the Cavally region, which covers Goin Débé and other neighbouring forests, was none other than the former rebel leader Koné Messamba.

Broad mobilisation for 'green cocoa' did away with this status quo. After describing the process that made deforestation such a highly critical policy issue, we will show how a policy response has been articulated under the umbrella of 'zero-deforestation agriculture'. However, a closer look shows that today, old rivalries over forests are being recast in terms of environmental protection and degradation, providing a new framework for the enactment of wartime and post-war grievances.

4.1 | The politicisation of deforestation

In the second half of the 2010s, a number of people in official development agencies and NGO offices sought to promote the idea that Côte d'Ivoire was experiencing a 'deforestation crisis' that required urgent political action. This was not the automatic and inevitable result of the seriousness of the situation (however grim it was). Rather, it was the consequence of a convergence between donors, who promoted an environmental agenda, and the capacity of Ivorian activists to seize the opportunity and push the government further.

Intergovernmental pressure to comply with environmental regulations gradually intensified. The starting point of this story was the implementation of the REDD+ process and the negotiation of a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (or VPA) with the EU. These two processes were launched in 2011 and 2013 respectively. Neither was specifically focused on cocoa. The REDD+ framework addresses deforestation in general, whereas VPAs are trade agreements between the EU and individual timber-producing countries, and which aim to certify the legality of timber exports. But in both cases, the issue of deforestation and forest governance became a matter of multilateral discussion.⁸ In their early years, the VPA and REDD+ processes were handled bureaucratically with a focus on technical aspects and received very little attention from the government. But they had two political effects. First, they created a new stream of data on deforestation. Beginning in 2016, new accurate data on deforestation made it possible to show that the situation was even worse than people believed at the time. In the previous 15 years, the country had lost 95,000 ha of forest annually, one of the highest rates in Africa. A study commissioned by the REDD+ secretariat and the Ivorian government's technical office (BDNET) showed that cocoa was the main driver of deforestation. Second, the VPA and REDD+ processes set the stage for a multi-stakeholder arena and the constitution of new policy networks around the issue of deforestation. Ivorian environmental NGOs were driven to greater professionalisation

⁶While the report was published in 2015, the field mission and the subsequent meetings with government representatives took place in 2013 and 2014. UNEP experts were flown over Goin Débé in order to observe the degradation of the forest. Interview with UNEP's country representative in Abidjan (9 July 2021).

⁷Sodefor is a state company placed under the stewardship of the forest ministry, and is tasked with overseeing forestry activities in gazetted forests. Local Sodefor staff is composed of rangers with a paramilitary training and weaponry.

⁸Interviews with former and current officials involved in the VPA and REDD+ processes: VPA facilitator (5 July 2023 and 13 April 2023), VPA point of contact for the ministry of forestry (13 July 2021 and 13 April 2023), former staff from the REDD+ secretariat (14 July 2021); former consultant for REDD+ (20 July 2021).

by the need to organise broad consultations with actors from 'civil society' paired with the availability of funds for 'capacity building'.⁹

This led to home-grown advocacy campaigns and growing cooperation between international development practitioners and Ivorian NGOs. The VPA and REDD+ also fostered growing contacts between policy experts from different donor agencies. The organisation of multi-donor working groups led to better coordination between key actors such as the European Commission, French and German development agencies and the World Bank. Expert networks succeeded in raising the issue of deforestation to the political decision-making level. In the run-up to COP 21 in 2015, this dynamic succeeded in putting deforestation on the agenda of ambassadors and government meetings.¹⁰

While these shifts were taking place in development circles in Abidjan, grassroots groups were also organising to draw more attention to forest conflicts. For these groups, independent forest monitoring under the VPA offered a valuable opportunity. Independent monitoring is an accountability technique that consists of entrusting an NGO or civil society organisation with the mission of overseeing the activities of forest operators and forest management officials. It can range from simple access to logging and timber processing areas and participation in forest ranger patrols, to more extensive access to companies' accounting records and transport documents. In Côte d'Ivoire, independent monitoring began in 2014 as part of the VPA process. The first mission was assigned in 2015 for the Cavally Forest (which neighbours Goin Débé's southern flank) and covered the years 2016–2018. It was implemented by the World Chimpanzee Foundation in partnership with the local organisation NOFNA ('Our Forest, Our Future').¹¹ These two organisations jointly published highly critical reports questioning the collusions between Sodefor agents and timber companies. While the primary focus of the independent monitoring was on logging, it also provided an opportunity for these organisations to document the involvement of Sodefor officials and *Gendarmerie* (military force with law enforcement duties) officers in the illegal cocoa trade.¹²

While these events were unfolding in Côte d'Ivoire, major changes were taking place in global cocoa markets. Since the early 2000s, various international NGOs have conducted campaigns on tropical value chains. This has led to voluntary commitments from companies seeking to control their brand image while avoiding binding standards (Carodenuto, 2019; Kroeger et al., 2017). Another level was reached in March 2017 with the launch of the Cocoa Forest Initiative (CFI), a global private partnership initiative for the adoption of voluntary standards and measures to fight deforestation, sponsored by the Prince of Wales and the World Cocoa Foundation. The turning point for Côte d'Ivoire came between late 2017 and 2018. In September 2017, Mighty Earth, a US-based environmental advocacy group, published a report demonstrating the close relationship between cocoa farming and deforestation in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana (Higonnet et al., 2017). The report's findings were widely publicised and were instrumental in bringing environmental concerns to the forefront of the cocoa business. Until 2017, cocoa-related deforestation had been forced to share the spotlight with other social issues, most notably child labour. The Mighty Earth report decisively shifted the balance in favour of environmental issues, and as a result, the Cocoa Forest Initiative was redesigned to demonstrate increased government and industry commitment to tackling deforestation.¹³

Another major change was the European Union's binding regulation on deforestation-free value chains (EPRS, 2022; Kumeh & Ramcilovic-Suominen, 2023; Verhaeghe & Ramcilovic-Suominen, 2024; Zhunusova et al., 2022). In July 2019, the European Commission published a communication announcing its intention to ban access to the EU market for commodities grown or raised on land affected by deforestation. Negotiations took place

⁹This is based on our interviews with most Ivorian NGOs active in the sector: Interviews with the leadership of OIREN (16 July 2021 and 14 April 2023), IDEF (7 July 2021 and 14 April 2023), Inades (19 April 2021), Nofna (20, 25, and 28 January 2021), and Solidaridad West Africa (17 April 2023). In addition to this, we held interviews with two foreign NGOs that supported this professionalisation process: Wild Chimpanzee Foundation (5 July 2021, 31 January 2022, and 17 April 2023), and FERN (27 February 2023).

¹⁰We met with staff members of all donors involved in the process: Interviews at AFD (29 July 2021), GIZ (12 July 2021 and 19 April 2023), FAO (15 July 2021 and 15 April 2023), European Union (5 July 2021 and 21 April 2023), UNDP (12 July 2021, 15 July 2021, and 18 April 2023), and the World Bank (31 January 2022 and 24 April 2023).

¹¹See sources listed in footnote 9.

¹²These independent monitoring reports are available online: <https://www.wildchimps.org/reports/reports.html>

¹³Source: our interviews with NGO staff members and leadership, which are listed in note 9.

until 2022 and the text entered into force in June 2023. The regulation covers seven commodities – cocoa, coffee, rubber, cattle, timber, palm oil and soy – and their derivatives. To be allowed on the EU market, commodities and products covered by the regulation must be legally produced on land that has not been deforested after 31 December 2020. Importers will therefore have to conduct due diligence and will risk penalties for non-compliance.

As a result of these various forms of pressure, the Ivorian government began to take the issue of deforestation much more seriously in the late 2010s.¹⁴ This can be seen in the officials tasked with overseeing the issue. Initially, discussions with donors were led by bureaucrats, but in 2017, a trusted presidential advisor was brought in to take over. In early 2018, the government sponsored a cabinet meeting on deforestation. This led to the adoption of a policy paper, an implementation strategy and a new bill on forestry. Through these gestures, the government reaffirmed its commitment not only to halting deforestation but also to restoring 20% of the country's forest cover by 2030. This shift was accompanied by parallels between issues of conservation and security, a common move in many African nations (Duffy et al., 2019). This newfound focus on security in Côte d'Ivoire was reinforced by the appointment of former Minister of Defence Alain-Richard Donwahi as Minister of Forestry, who brought along a coterie of security experts from his entourage (Bontoux, 2023). From then on, Ivorian officials began framing matters in terms of a 'deforestation crisis' and called on donors and the industry to support the country's efforts. The common thread running through all this rhetoric was the need to reconcile Côte d'Ivoire's cocoa export economy with its new environmental goals.

4.2 | Zero-deforestation agriculture

The answer to these policy-making challenges lies in a series of policies and techniques, brought together under the umbrella of zero-deforestation agriculture, an approach that encompasses both farming techniques and value chain reform and monitoring. What these measures have in common is the need to enforce a new set of environmental rules without upsetting the existing political economy. In other words, they aim to transform forests from territories of exploitation to territories of conservation without substantially changing the modes of production.

An important aspect of zero-deforestation agriculture is the promotion of agroforestry (Ollinaho & Kröger, 2021). Foreign donors, cocoa companies, certification bodies and the powerful parastatal Cocoa and Coffee Council (CCC) are unanimous in promoting the intercropping of forest and cocoa trees. While research and agricultural practices involving agroforestry have a long history in Côte d'Ivoire, its current development stems from the promise of making forest protection and rehabilitation compatible with the cocoa business (Di Roberto et al., 2023; Dieng, 2024; Dieng & Karsenty, 2023). The World Bank, the European Union, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the German Development Agency (GIZ), the French Development Agency (AFD) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) all promote agroforestry as the only way for Côte d'Ivoire to achieve its ambitious environmental goals. Through various policy initiatives, UNDP, FAO and the World Bank have supported the distribution of forest plants to farmers and their training in agroforestry techniques. The popularity of agroforestry is based on its ambiguity. Donors have promoted the idea that agroforestry can generate income not only for farmers but also for businesses and the state through carbon trading. This can encourage further investment, creating a virtuous circle of environmental restoration. Government officials take a different position, espousing a productivist approach to agroforestry.¹⁵ According to Di Roberto et al. (2023), who collected numerous interviews with government professionals, their position on agroforestry corresponds to the objective of adapting cocoa production to

¹⁴Interviews with two close advisors to the Minister of Forestry (on 14 July 2021 and 20 April 2023), two former high-level consultants (9 July 2021 and 20 July 2021), and two jurists involved in the legislative overhaul (6 July 2021 and 9 July 2021). The sudden change in the government's attitude was also confirmed by our interviews with donor staff.

¹⁵Donor interviews are listed in note 10. On agroforestry, we also interviewed two advisors to the Minister of Forestry (on 14 July 2021 and 20 April 2023), a Sodefor deputy-director (8 July 2021), and Sodefor regional and local staff members (19 and 20 January 2022, cities of Man and Guiglo). We also met with the CIFOR-ICRAF country director (20 April 2023), who had been involved in a large number of agroforestry projects in the country.

sustainability standards and the effects of climate change. Cocoa companies maintain a similar stance, with agroforestry enabling them to meet their sustainability criteria while promoting a climate-friendly image.

Zero-deforestation agriculture also encompasses reforming and monitoring the cocoa value chain. This is primarily in response to the EU's deforestation-free regulation. At the time of our last interviews, European development aid was supplying funding for a number of measures: the registration of all producers, their mandatory membership in certified cooperatives, the identification of their crops on a national map of cocoa farms and the implementation of a traceability system. This is related to two aspects of the European regulation: first, importers must prove that all post-2020 cocoa production is free from deforestation. Second, they must also prove that cocoa is legally sourced in compliance with environmental legislation in the country of origin. This poses a serious problem for cocoa sourced from gazetted forests, which is expressly prohibited by law. While it is very difficult to accurately assess the origin of cocoa, most experts estimate that cocoa from gazetted forests accounts for between 30 and 40% of Ivorian production.

One answer to this legal and commercial conundrum is the concept of 'agroforests', which is distinct from the broader idea of agroforestry. Agroforests are heavily degraded forests with significant human settlements that are deemed to be managed in a way that balances forest restoration, local political stability and human rights. The transformation of a gazetted forest into an agroforest (which requires a government decree) means that at least some farming can continue. Peasants are allowed to keep their plots in the forest on the condition that they sign a contract with the state setting out their environmental responsibilities – namely, that they should intercrop with forest trees in their fields, refrain from clearing additional forestland or expanding their crops and pay an annual fee to the state. Some parts of the forest are set aside for conservation purposes, which means that those farmers are required to move.

Agroforests can be seen as the latest addition to forest territorialisation in Côte d'Ivoire (Dieng, 2024). The idea was conceived in 2017 when the threat to the Ivorian cocoa sector became tangible. They are now at the heart of the government's strategy to 'legalise' cocoa from gazetted forests. The introduction of this new measure required a complete overhaul of the Forestry Code. At the end of 2017, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Forestry commissioned a group of environmental lawyers to draft the legislation. The task force was coordinated by a senior director in the Ministry of Forestry and overseen by a cabinet-level advisor. The new code was drafted in a matter of months and, after legal consultations, was passed by Parliament in July 2019.¹⁶

Even before the new forestry legislation was enacted, the government began promoting agroforests with donors and cocoa companies. The government has offered cocoa companies and other agribusinesses the opportunity to sign concession agreements, which would allow them to oversee farming within the agroforests and legally purchase the cocoa grown there. The World Bank has expressed strong support for this approach. In January 2018, the Bank approved the Forest Investment Project (FIP), a US\$15 million initiative to support the Ivorian government's forest restoration strategy.¹⁷ The Ivorian FIP is part of the Strategic Climate Fund's (SCF) Forest Investment Programme, an initiative that operated in 23 countries by 2024. In Côte d'Ivoire, the flagship component of the project is the creation of agroforests in degraded areas. Initially, three gazetted forests in the west and south-west were selected: Goin Débé, Rapides Grah and Haute Dodo. In 2022, a second phase of the FIP was approved by the Bank's Board of Directors. This represented a significant upgrade, with a US\$148 million loan.

4.3 | Forest management in a post-war landscape

In 2018, the World Bank selected Goin Débé to be part of the FIP. The forest was to become one of the country's first 'agroforests'. The implementation of these plans began in 2021 with the drafting of a forest management plan by a World Bank contractor. At the same time, the government offered to make CHC, the rubber company that had

¹⁶Similar sources to those listed in note 14.

¹⁷The FIP comprises a US\$5.56 million and a US\$9.44 million loan; Interviews with World Bank officials (31 January 2022; 24 April 2023) and reports by the World Bank (2018, 2021, 2022b, 2022a, 2023).

been operating in the area for decades, a commercial partner in the implementation of the agroforest project. But these plans triggered a complex interplay of environmental norms and attempts to claim control over land and labour, effectively derailing the World Bank's vision. We argue that the story of this failure, and the conflicts surrounding it, illustrate the transformations of social struggles over land and labour in Côte d'Ivoire.

Things had begun to get off track by the 2021 general elections. During the political meeting described in our introduction, government representatives promised to set aside 20,000 ha where cocoa farming would be legal and people would be protected from eviction. This land would be assigned in priority to ethnic Wé. The announcement was made by a local political baroness: Anne Oulotto, who was then a cabinet Minister and President of the Cavally Regional Council. She was joined at the podium by the Minister of Forestry, who was there to show that the entire government was united behind Oulotto and her local allies. Of course, their statements must be interpreted in the context of the ongoing political campaign: the government was facing an uphill battle in Cavally, a traditional stronghold for opposition parties.

In later statements, Oulotto took a nationalist stance, claiming that the government's plans for Goin Débé included the evacuation of all foreign migrants so that the forest could be reserved for Ivorian citizens. The priority would be given to ethnic Wé, but the rights of Ivorian migrants would also be recognised. Once again, this was a reflection of local politics: Oulotto is an ethnic Wé and has made considerable efforts to position herself as a power broker between her community and the government. As Wé political leaders had nurtured a strong antagonism towards President Ouattara and his party since before the war, this mediating position was both a key resource and a difficult ordeal.

By mid-2022, the situation was becoming too sensitive for the World Bank, who could not possibly support population displacement based on national and ethnic criteria. As a result, the Bank's officials in Abidjan decided to halt their support for the project in Goin Débé and focus their efforts on other western forests.¹⁸ Today, with the implementation of the zero-deforestation cocoa policy in Goin Débé no longer supported by donors, the viability of the government's plans is uncertain; in the words of one interviewee, a political advisor to the Minister of Forestry: 'In Goin Débé, the government's priority is to maintain stability. So it is a political approach, not an environmental one. Compared to other forests, it is a separate approach.'¹⁹

The failed attempts to implement agroforest policy in Goin Débé not only illustrate the World Bank's awkward position but also highlight how new forest policies are affecting the formation of environmental subjects, defining people as either eco-threats or eco-guardians. The question of who is responsible for the destruction of Goin Débé reconfigures ethno-political identities shaped by decades of turmoil. With deforestation an increasingly political issue since the late 2010s, government officials and local politicians have invested considerable effort into creating a narrative promoting the idea that deforestation is chiefly the result of Burkinabé migration, an oversimplification of the history of migration to the West underpinned by deliberate efforts to conceal the fact that the evidence does not always add up.

The identification of Burkinabé farmers as eco-threats is abundantly illustrated by our findings on how the forest census was conducted in Goin Débé between 2018 and 2019. This project was part of the Cocoa Forest Initiative and was funded by the Dutch NGO IDH to the tune of US\$400,000. The census was carried out by the Ivorian government's technical office (BDNET) and Sodefor. While one of the most important and politically sensitive issues at the time was – and still is today – the ethnic composition of the forest population, the final census report does not provide any information on the nationality, ethnicity or even place of birth of the forest dwellers. Furthermore, the appendices to the report list the questions that the project's enumerators asked their respondents: none of these sensitive questions is included in the list. In the course of our research, we found that this did not reflect the way the interviews were conducted in the field. In July 2021, we interviewed one of the supervisors of the survey, who confirmed our suspicions: not only had nationality and ethnicity been recorded in the Goin Débé survey, but the results

¹⁸Interview with World Bank officials (31 January 2022, Abidjan).

¹⁹Interview (20 April 2023, Abidjan).

showed that two-thirds of respondents were ethnic Baoulé (and therefore Ivorian), and only about 25% were Burkinabé. When confronted with these results, a Sodefor deputy director refused to confirm our figures, telling us that the information had not been published because it was considered too sensitive.²⁰

The formation of environmental subjectivities has important implications for the control of land and labour. As shown above, the cocoa frontier was based on the dual availability of *both* factors of production. The war and post-war conflicts in Goin Débé were about not just who owned the forest, but also about who controlled the labour of migrant workers, especially the most recent and vulnerable among them. For ethno-political activists such as the leaders of the Wé Alliance, Burkinabé farmers are not as undesirable as some of their most violently nativist discourses suggest. What is at stake with the enforcement of differential rights over the forest is not only the control of land but also how the fruits of labour are shared. A closer look at the current position of the different ethno-national groups in conflict illustrates this.

The announcement of an agroforest for Goin Débé recognised the rights of the Wé to their ethnic homeland. This constituted a further step in the government's longer-term strategy of co-opting the leaders of those ethnic communities that were strong supporters of the Gbagbo regime. In public meetings, government officials have acknowledged that the Wé have customary rights over the forest and that any conservation policy must take this into account. This has been well understood by the Wé political organisations. In addition to their discourse on ethnic identities and land rights, the Wé Alliance has now adopted an environmental discourse, attempting to recast their image as guardians of the forest and to establish a spiritual, rather than economic, link with the forest; as one of the leaders of the Wé Alliance put it during a public meeting: 'we, as the autochthonous people of this land, have both the right and the duty to protect the forest. The migrants destroyed the forest; we will restore it.'²¹ In addition to this discourse, they have lobbied for a favourable role in the implementation of the agroforest policy. Members of the Wé Alliance have even been hired as guides by the contractor in charge of the management plan, and in 2021, they set up a plant nursery with the help of Sodefor rangers.

From the government's standpoint, it is undesirable for this recognition of Wé land rights to antagonise the Baoulé settlers, who are an important constituency. They are well organised and have strong patronage links with the PDCI, which remains an influential party in Parliament. As such, their rights to the land are interpreted in legal rather than ethnic terms. They are Ivorian citizens and cannot be denied the fruits of their labour on the basis of ethnic criteria. As such, the legitimacy of the claims of these two groups is recognised by the state, but in different terms: ethnic belonging for the Wé, legal citizenship for the Baoulé.

The downside is that the Burkinabé have no recognised right to the forest. In public speeches and private meetings, government officials, as well as representatives of NGOs and foreign donors, have a consistent discourse: Burkinabé migration is the main cause of deforestation in the West. Burkinabé migrants are publicly referred to as 'forest eaters' (*bouffeurs de forêt*). Of course, this flies in the face of the history of Burkinabé migration, the power relations that have shaped it (especially since the war) and the responsibility of other groups in the destruction of the forest. As shown above, Burkinabé migration in Goin Débé is intimately intertwined with the history of cocoa farming in the area, which goes back half a century. More recent waves of migration are also involved in competition between social groups and military-political entrepreneurs to assert their control over the forest.

Today, the precarious position of the Burkinabé is not solely a reflection of their vulnerable access to land. While official rhetoric often reiterates the idea that they should be evicted, forcible evictions of forest dwellers have been very rare in Côte d'Ivoire's recent history, and are certainly incompatible with foreign donor guidelines. Rather, the immediate problem for these farmers is that their very weak claim to land puts them in a distinctly difficult position to claim the fruits of their labour. In January 2022, when the region was in the middle of the cocoa harvest season, we met with two members of the Wé Alliance leadership. It was early evening, and they had been busy all day collecting the fees that Burkinabé farmers must pay to the organisation if they want to remain undisturbed in the forest.

²⁰Interview with the head of IDH's Abidjan office (7 July 2021), a Sodefor deputy-director (8 July 2021), and one of the supervisors for the survey (8 July 2021).

²¹Observation of a public meeting (29 January 2022, Kaadé).

Other migrants, particularly the Baoulé, have refused to pay these fees, knowing that their position is much stronger. In the words of one of our interviewees on that day: ‘We told the Burkinabé that they had to pay. The Baoulé refuse to pay because they think they have a right to be there. But the Burkinabé are willing to pay. They recognise our authority.’²² The Burkinabé farmers interviewed admit that they feel their position is precarious; they agree to pay the fee in the hope that it will help them demonstrate their legitimate claim to the land.²³ The Wé alliance legitimises this ‘taxation’ not only in terms of ethnic rights, but also in terms of environmental protection:

We have customary rights over the forest. But the fact that they recognise our authority is also good for the environment. Our aim is to provide every Burkinabé farmer with a contact person who is a member of the Wé Alliance, who will collect the fees, but who will also be able to monitor the plantation and ensure that they do not clear more forest.²⁴

This last quote illustrates how environmental subjectivities and relations of production are intertwined. As the Wé Alliance strives to be recognised as the dutiful guardian of the forest, it uses the representation of migrant Burkinabé farmers as eco-threats to extract a portion of the fruits of their labour. At the core of this relationship between production and power is an environmental question: that of who is to blame for deforestation and who can become a positive force for forest restoration.

5 | CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the ways in which environmental norms on deforestation interact with long-term cycles of conflict over land. In Côte d'Ivoire, migration, capitalist development and state formation are inextricably linked to the process of forest occupation and exploitation. The country's post-colonial economic growth – the so-called ‘Ivorian miracle’ – was based on the simultaneous availability of forestland and migrant labour. But the former eventually became scarce and the latter was seen as undesirable, feeding into the crisis of agrarian capitalism and contributing to broader polarisation of the political space around nativist and ethnic narratives. Since the end of the war, Ivorian elites have sought to project the image of an ‘emerging’ country, decisively turning the page on instability and embracing globalisation. But in the age of green capitalism, this requires the adoption of new environmental norms. This is, in a sense, the historical backdrop against which Ivorian agriculture is now being ‘greened’.

We have shown how this process is rooted in the progressive transformation of forest territorialisation. This helps us to see how the forms of power that produce forests as territories to be protected or exploited have changed in relation to new environmental norms. Historically, gazetted forests were occupied by migrant peasants with the blessing of state authorities. During the war, militia groups extended their authority into many of these forests and promoted cocoa cultivation as a means of generating income in their areas. Post-conflict instability has been prolonged in many of these areas, where struggles to shape a post-war economic order have been particularly fierce. Matters were further made complex by the introduction of zero-deforestation norms, which reconfigured the possible uses of forestland. Importantly, however, neither of these new forms of authority has fully replaced the previous ones. Territorialisation is co-produced by state bureaucrats and politicians, former militias and donors.

The introduction of new forms of territorialisation by zero-deforestation agriculture has led to the notable effect of producing environmental subjectivities that categorise people as eco-guardians or eco-threats. The article has explored the process that produces these subjectivities. Blaming foreign migrants for deforestation is, of course, a way of concealing the deep historical and political implications of environmental degradation. But it is also a way of reframing old struggles over land and territorial authority in new, more acceptable terms. In other words,

²²Member of the Wé Alliance leadership (22 January 2022, Guiglo).

²³Interview with a group of Burkinabé farmers (27 January 2022, Bloléquin).

²⁴Observation of a public meeting (29 January 2022, Kaadé).

environmental subjectivities are not only produced from above; they are also the result of people's strategies for advancing their claims and their interests. Furthermore, environmental subjectivities help transform the social relations of production. The reassertion of land rights by 'autochthonous' movements and authorities has the significant effect of strengthening the capacity of ethno-national movements to extract benefits from migrant labour. This creates new arrangements for access to and use of forestlands, where compliance with environmental norms and membership in certain groups transforms the conditions of production. Ultimately, the field of environmental policy emerges as a central site for the transformation and contentious co-production of relations of power, extraction and accumulation.

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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