

Patriotic Rebels: West Africa's Architects of the New Patriotism?

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Introduction

When I was growing up in the hilly suburb of Kishiy-Kimbo, in north western Cameroon, the names of West Africa's patriots taught in our general knowledge and civic education classes were not only revered; they were celebrated. To a large extent, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Sékou Touré of Guinea, Houphouët Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire, Ahmadou Ahidjo of Cameroon, Leopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal and recently Thomas Sankara and Jerry Rawlings are immortalized for their patriotic sacrifices that restored the dignity of their people. These were not necessarily great democrats, but they left their mark as great symbols of national grandeur. Sékou Touré called on his fellow countrymen and women to choose poverty in freedom over affluence in chains. His unrelenting position humiliated the West, especially France that craved for the wealth of Guinea. Nkrumah appealed to Africans to unite and expand their vision for self-rule. He snubbed the myopic identity of fragmented states for a united Africa. Today, Nkrumah stands vindicated. Senghor represented the intellectual capability of the African mind and demonstrated the richness of African poetic life in his leadership. He implored his people to explore the wonders of their minds and intellects. Houphouët declared that a free people are those who feed themselves. The land of Côte d'Ivoire was cultivated to the maximum, making his nation the richest in West Africa. Ahidjo played his game and refused to be maneuvered by France as he turned his back on appeals to recognize the break-away state of Biafra by steering clear of the Nigerian civil war. Though this was a political snare, Ahidjo refused to allow Cameroon to be used as a launching ground for a neighbour's destabilization, sealed its borders to the secessionists and allowed refugees the free corridor.

Sankara passionately requested his fellow compatriots to return to the dignity of their nation. He cultivated their generosity, hard work, honesty, and self-appreciation. Sankara scrapped the colonial name of Upper Volta and declared that his people would be called Burkina Faso (the land of upright people). When Jerry Rawlings took over the leadership of Ghana the nation was in shamble. Ghanaians had lost sight of the vision of Nkrumah. Corruption, mediocrity, and despair imprisoned the soul of the nation. Ghanaians were in queues everyday to buy bread, soap, and other necessities. Rawlings left Ghana a stable and one of the fastest developing states in West Africa. Jerry himself retired in a modest public building. In the heart of equatorial central Africa lived another patriot whose passion for motherland scared the colonialists. The young Patrice Lumumba dreamed a new Congo that would govern itself and turn towards Africa but his dream was thwarted when the Belgians led the international conspiracy and assassinated the young patriot. Down in South Africa is *Mandeba* Nelson Mandela. Although he spent 27 consecutive years in prison his love for freedom and justice, for the dignity of the African soul including those who prosecuted him was never diminished. He emerged not only a patriot but an undisputed saint. And the modest *Mwalimu* Julius Nyerere of Tanzania has remained Africa's political role model.

For these men patriotism was not in doubt. A patriot meant a self-effacing and self-atoning person who stands in the gap between justice and injustice, good and evil. The patriot thinks of the wellbeing of others and for that chose to work against oppression. There is no intention to

violate the dignity of any human person or even nature. The patriot is not bent on self-aggrandizement or self enrichment. His/her joy is the joy of the oppressed and his/her freedom is the freedom of those in shackles especially fellow country men and women. It is nation first before anything else. It is something more than nationalism.

Now-a-day patriotism is assuming a very different meaning and character. The new self-declared patriots in West Africa have presented a rather strange philosophy and argument about patriotism. Their examples and declarations have very little resemblance to the patriots and patriotism the fathers of our nations have defined for us with their lives and examples. The new patriots have no colonial masters to fight. They have no outside threat to ward off. Their enemies are vaguely defined and the legacy of their patriotic aggression includes massive displacement and grotesque killing of their fellow country men, women, children, and the elderly. They leave the institutions of the state in ruins and they subject its wealth to plunder and vandalism. Each time they demonstrate their patriotic acts human misery lay in their wake. It seems the interest of the new patriots is actually to undermine the state and enslave their fellow country men and women. What they say and the names they give themselves make them look like the patriots and political icons of yester-years. What they do, however, totally negates what they claim to be. For the most part they have subjected the minds of young people, who often aspire to the lives of patriots, to total confusion. The compromises we continue to make to these so-called liberators further bamboozle the young minds.

I dare challenge the characters and intentions of the so-called patriots and to argue that by declaring themselves patriots they are set out to defile the sacred space of the African psyche which must be unfailingly protected for posterity. When Africa finally gets her act together she will need the passion and convictions of patriotism and true patriots. If this sacred space is abandoned to vandals and political adventurers, we would have nothing to evoke for the struggle ahead of us. In the strongest terms I distinguish marauders, sycophants, and cynics from patriots, heroes, saints, and redeemers. These must not be confused. For no time is as urgent as now to reawaken the true patriotism that drove West Africa and by extension Africa's independence.

Patriotism of Old

No word could best describe the motivations behind the long years of the nationalist struggle for the liberation of Africa from the throngs of colonialism other than patriotism. The nationalist struggle was bitter, tumultuous, bloody, spiced with conspiracies, incarcerations, betrayals and sacrifices. The supreme goals of the struggle were the defense of father and motherland, attainment of independence, and to jealously protect and preserve it from the hands of colonial hawks or neo-colonialist forces. Driven by the spirit of patriotism the nationalists were prepared to die for mother/fatherland. Their common enemy was the colonizer and his agents. Those who died in the struggle were celebrated as true patriots whose sacrificial blood, it was believed, would cleanse the land of colonial evil and omens. The survivors in West Africa like Nkrumah, Sékou Touré, Houphouët Boigny, Leopold Sédar Senghor, to name just a few, led their countries to independence as heroes. Suffice to state here that patriotism was not only the reserved domain of leaders. The citizenry too played their part, even though leaders took the credit.

The enthusiasm with which the struggle for independence was pursued raised a lot of hopes. The promises were legion and the euphoria was unquenchable. The farsighted ones like Nkrumah warned that the struggle had not ended. His warning is captured in his famous political cradle: 'seek ye the political kingdom and all else will be yours'. But the noises from dancers, drummers, and the newly freed did not allow for listening. And so the patriots and their liberated people basked in the little left behind by the colonizers and the booming world market prices for Africa's export crops and minerals in the early years after political or flag independence.

Sooner than later, the political power of the patriots turned leaders began to be challenged as the state institutions were subjected to corruption and decline. Some like Nkrumah and Sékou Touré were branded as radicals while others like Houphouët and Senghor were viewed as the neo-colonialist stooges in West Africa. Coup d'états mostly organized by soldiers under the pretext of putting things right spread like wild fire from one end of the continent to the other. So-called National Redemption Councils to cleanse and redeem the states from the throngs of corrupt and misguided regimes were popularized. But the soldiers—the likes of Buhari, Babangida, and Abacha of Nigeria, Afrifa, Ankrah, Acheampong, Akuffo (all of Ghana), Samuel Kanyon Doe, became worse than those they overthrew. They became the undisputed founding fathers of '*patriotism of the belly*' being perfected today by their admirers. The virtues of true patriotism disappeared and along with them the patriots. Corruption, dictatorship, political suppression, tribalism, nepotism, favoritism, and all kinds of evil and destructive tendencies quickly crept in with the new self-declared 'patriots'. Ever since, Africa's patriotic drive has never fully expressed itself; and as a result the continent languishes in chains bigger than the ones used by the pre-independence masters under the able leadership of the '*patriots of the belly*' who consistently exploit West Africa's deep longing for a patriotic leadership.

Liberia, the Revolutionary Spring of Patriotic Rebellion

When Charles Taylor unleashed his revolutionary war in 1989 to topple the autocratic regime of Samuel Kanyon Doe under the banner of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), seldom did the world realize he was heralding a new kind of rebellion unknown to West Africa. Samuel K. Doe's People's Redemption Council which he claimed had come to redeem indigenous Liberians from the misrule of the Americo-Liberians had disappointed Liberians. Taylor, himself an Americo-Liberian, capitalized on Doe's terrible misrule to wage his rebellion. He drew support from the disaffected youths whom he recruited and trained in Burkina Faso and other hideouts. President Houphouët-Boigny, eager to revenge the assassination of A. Benedict Tolbert, his son-in-law and son of late President Tolbert, gave Taylor the passage through western Côte d'Ivoire (now the main theatre of the Ivorian crisis that began September 19, 2003) into the Nimba Mountains from where Taylor launched his onslaught. Intervention efforts by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the international community yielded little fruits as the sub-regional leaders agreed to disagree on many issues. ECOMOG, the sub-regional military intervention body that defied the flying bullets and marched unto Monrovia was quasi abandoned to Nigeria and Ghana.

With Samuel K. Doe brutally killed and dragged in the streets of Monrovia and after terrorizing the whole country, Liberia's new heroes and patriots converted their Front into a political party after a record round of peace deals and talks. Before this happened, the brutal war had destroyed

Liberia and the NPFL itself split with Prince Yormie Johnson forming his own Independent Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). Other self-proclaimed patriots filled the theatre of senseless war in Liberia. Charles Taylor emerged the hero of the warlords and was given what others have referred to as a sanction vote in the 1997 general elections. It is clear that had any other party won, Taylor would not have relinquished power as some of his armed fighters still controlled large parts of the Liberian territory. Liberians were intimidated by their new patriot to award him legitimacy. In their desperation they declared, "You killed my mom, you killed my pa but I will vote for you." Immediately upon assuming the leadership of his war-ravaged country the new patriot evoked the powers of sovereignty and drove out of Liberia the sub regional force that brokered the peace with their blood and money. A new and apparently more challenging epicenter of violent armed conflict thus emerged in the Mano River Basin.

Interpreting Taylor's election as a reward for armed rebellion and the institutionalization of violence as an instrument of policy, some of Taylor's opponents, most of them *Mandingos* and remnants of the Samuel K. Doe's army, majority of who were the *Krahns*, went into the bush. It was against this background that another movement-the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) was born. And here comes again another luring name. Another movement called Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) appeared in March 2003. Purportedly backed by Côte d'Ivoire this time to punish the same man they aided to unseat Samuel Kanyon Doe. MODEL, believed to be a faction of LURD has also come with a name that believes democracy can be shot with the gun. In their quest for power and visibility, LURD and MODEL embarked on an onslaught that forced Taylor to capitulate. But before this was attained, they had also killed thousands of Liberians, maimed, raped and savagely destroyed property all in the name of 'liberation, democracy and reconciliation'. None of these so-called patriots could convincingly articulate their convictions and critical issues for which they subjected their fellow compatriots to such cataclysm. Instead, each was insisting on the 'most lucrative' government ministries in a 75-day ECOWAS-supported peace talks in Accra, Ghana. They succeeded to evenly distribute seats in the negotiated Transitional Government of National Unity. This was victory once again for '*Kalachnikovcracy*'.

President Charles Taylor who was issued an international warrant of arrest for his role in the Sierra Leonean civil war is now on exile in Calabar in eastern Nigeria. The eviction of 'patriotic' Taylor from the helm of power drives home a significant message to fellow 'patriots' across West Africa.

Sierra Leonean patriots

It is common knowledge that President Siaka Stevens was one of West Africa's most corrupt and self-conceited 'patriots'. Immediately after inauguration as Sierra Leone's third Prime Minister, Siaka Stevens heavily clamped down on opponents in the SLPP arresting, torturing, incarcerating, and forcing others into exile. Stevens changed Sierra Leone into a republic and became its first powerful president. He deepened the politics of exclusion and violent suppression of dissent. Politics of the belly expressed through rampant corruption and a general break down of social values were the political markers of Stevens' 17 years leadership. This 'Patriot of the belly' *par excellence* sold Sierra Leone to Lebanese crooks. The Lebanese reduced ordinary Sierra Leoneans to slavery in their own country. In the 70s and 80s Sierra

Leone was the highest source of remittances to Lebanon while the country remained amongst the poorest of the poor in the World.

As the 'patriotic' comrade advanced in age the issue of successor became eminent. To prevent his Vice President Sorie Koroma succeeding him, Stevens requested him to resign because of ill health. He then presented Major General Joseph S. Momoh as his successor. No one can pin down Momoh's paternal lineage. It is alleged that he was a son of Stevens. In hurriedly organised national elections with J.S. Momoh as the only Presidential candidate, Momoh won 99 percent of the votes cast and he was subsequently inaugurated as President of Sierra Leone on November 25 1985.

President J.S. Momoh unlike his predecessor Siaka Stevens could not keep things together. Poverty, illiteracy, weak state institutions, corruption, ethnic politics and generalized malaise generously willed to Momoh by his god father weighed down the Momoh administration and things got out of hand. His 'New Order' policy at financial, administrative and political reform failed woefully. He was unable to eradicate or rather minimise institutionalised corruption in both the public and private sector. It is said that Momoh once said in Krio ' *Usai den tai Kaw nar dae i dae eat*', meaning 'a cow grazes where it is tethered'. Sierra Leone was found beckoning for a true patriot.

On March 23, 1991 the call was answered. Corporal Foday Sankoh with full backing of Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia launched a rebellion from Bomaru and Sienga in the eastern district of Kailahun. The revolutionary Sankoh mobilized Sierra Leonean youths and university dropouts who were incensed by the terrible misrule in their country. They claimed that their war was to liberate the youth and give them a better future. They vowed to stamp corruption out of Sierra Leone and give all Sierra Leoneans full access to the wealth of the nation. That promise was betrayed. Over 27,000 children some as young as six years were trained to kill; 70,000 women, children, and the elderly were publicly humiliated and brutally killed; 20,000 helpless and impoverished women and children and some able body men who depended on subsistence farming to feed their family were amputated; girls as young as 8 were gang-raped. The 'patriots' simply reduced their people and nation to a terror unknown ever in West Africa's history.

Traditional fighter cum hunters-*Kamajors* felt they no longer could sit and see the nation terrorized by the so called liberators of RUF. Patriot Inga Norman mobilized the traditional hunters under the name, Civil Defence Forces (CDFs) and they engaged the RUF. How patriotic these *Kamajor* were is a matter left to posterity. But the UN Special Court in Sierra Leone is not convinced of their patriotic role in the senseless war. The Court has indicted Inga Norman, leader of the CDF and a minister in the present government of Tejan Kabbah for crimes against humanity.

When the country came under rebel siege, Sierra Leonean soldiers earned themselves the name 'sobels' (soldiers by day and rebels by night) as they demonstrated their own form of patriotism. Lebanese and local businessmen hurriedly signed secret deals with rebels to protect their businesses. This may perhaps be described as patriotism of the 'heart' since the saying goes that a businessman's heart is where the money is. Major Johnny Paul Koroma indicted by the Special

Court for war crimes but feared dead was the patriotic soldier who invited RUF to Freetown and jointly unseated the elected government of Tejan Kabbah which as a soldier he was under oath to defend.

Most of Sierra Leone's patriots are either dead or incarcerated but the endemic corruption that characterized Sierra Leone's founding patriots is alive and well. Corruption within both the public and private sectors in Sierra Leone permeates all levels of government and business transactions. Scandals involving the looting of state coffers and development aid are commonplace. A large percentage of Sierra Leone's diamonds are still thought to be traded illegally, depriving the Sierra Leonean government of much needed revenue to support public services. Petty corruption, extortion, and bribe-taking, particularly by police officers or low ranking officials, is rampant. Money has to change hands in order to secure entrance for children into a public school, receive treatment in a public clinic, obtain a permit, authorization, or letter from a ministry, or even file a police report. Corruption has historically bought the support of both the police and the army, making them subject to political interference and undermining their duty to protect. The terrible prize paid to revive the nation and set it on the path of development, accountability, democracy may be dear but the result is woefully negligible. The fear is that the '*patriots of the belly*' are still in charge.

The Ivorian Patriots

In the annals of Ivorian history, President Houphouët-Boigny remained an example of a veritable patriot and the undisputed father of the Ivorian nation. Following the patriotic example of the Father of the Nation, patriotism is often evoked when medals are awarded to those who render meritorious services to the state. So when the Ivorian national football team, for example, was eliminated in the first round of the African Nations Cup 2000 in Ghana, former military junta leader, General Gueï summoned the players *militari manu* and detained them for anti-patriotic behaviour, particularly those who had dared to demand their allowances as condition for pursuing the competition. Those who read the Ivorian print media also know that the pro-*Rassemblement Des Républicains* (RDR) party of Alassane Ouattara's news tabloid is called *Le Patriote*.

On September 19, 2003 a group of soldiers composed mainly of the former militias recruited by General Gueï known as the *zinzins* resisted moves at demobilization and rallied behind fellow disgruntled soldiers in the barracks and attempted coup d'etat that rapidly transformed into an organized rebellion under the aegis of the *Mouvement Patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire* (Patriotic Movement of Côte d'Ivoire-MPCI) against the government of President Laurent Gbagbo.

The MPCI came into the scene as an organized group only when the ECOWAS organized Lomé peace talks were underway. The rebels quickly filled the vacuum of a political framework that was needed to participate in the talks. Illegitimate as it was, it found its leader in the former student activist, Soro Guillaume, who was last known to be Henriette Diabaté's (Secretary General, RDR party and now Minister for Justice in the government of reconciliation) aide. Soro Guillaume like Charles Goudé Blé (another Patriot in his own right) was one of the ring leaders of the 1990s students' riots that opposition politicians like Gbagbo relied on for political visibility. How the divorce between Gbagbo and Soro Guillaume came is a matter of conjecture. Politics is indeed a

game of interests and Soro went where his interests lay, and stand to grow. Today he is Minister of State for Communications.

Just like Charles Taylor, the MPCl used patriotism as their trump card to win support both nationally and internationally. They claimed their mandate was to restore the Côte d'Ivoire of the Houphouët era, one that was all inclusive. Secondly, they succeeded in justifying the use of violence as an instrument of policy which the international community once again legitimized. An important element worth mentioning is the recruitment of the traditional hunters-*dozos* by the MPCl to reinforce the fetish dimension of the rebellion. These culturally dreaded *dozos* would also be remembered for having enshrined their name in the 'golden books' of Ivorian history of rebellious patriotism as they incessantly threatened to march to Abidjan and evict Gbagbo from power.

The MPCl patriots seem to have achieved their exploits thanks to three main strategies: media and communication strategy, military strategy, and an international image and sympathy strategy. The MPCl strategists were smart to know the role the media and information technology could play in modern warfare. They were media friendly and the French media (led by the group Bourges) in particular helped to propagate their message world wide. Even the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) confirmed the 'extraordinary' discipline never heard of in the history of rebellious movements in Africa. Apart from being projected as being very organized and disciplined movement, their communication and propaganda strategy was enhanced thanks to the use of the *Thuraya* mobile system that could be accessed even underground.

Immediately they set up their headquarters in Bouake, the MPCl transformed a local Ivorian television (RTI) relay station into an independent rebel radio-television station known as *TV Patriote* (Patriotic Television). It was used as a propaganda tool to mobilize local support and sympathy, and its reception area included the southern borders of Burkina Faso and Mali. A rebel website (www.supportmpci.org) was created and anchored in the United States. What has not also been critically analyzed is the coincidence in the creation of this website with that of the Chechen rebel website.

Since less was known about the actual military strength of the MPCl, their military strategy resided in their early victory and seizure of the main ammunition centers on which they capitalized. The psychological media propaganda warfare intimidated and demoralized the ill-equipped and ill-prepared Ivorian armed forces (FANCI). The propaganda and claims that the rebels were sophisticatedly 'armed to the teeth' scared the FANCI and the long awaited battle of Bouaké to flush the rebels out as announced by Lida Kouassi, Minister for Defense never came, and cost him his post. This was compounded by the call by the international community for Gbagbo's embattled regime to negotiate.

Most Ivorian hardliners and supporters of Gbagbo, and even prominent West African opinion leaders believe strongly that the international community betrayed them by harping on this issue of negotiating with the rebellion. ECOWAS was sensitive of setting precedence in the negotiations by giving in to rebel demands but France seems to have missed the point. The Linas- Marcoussis peace agreement has come and gone and the rebels are now in government, walking out and coming in at will. That the sensitive posts of the Ministries of Defence and Interior

were 'accorded' the rebels was interpreted as the greatest betrayal. What is however clear is the fact that the Ivorian crisis helped to embolden armed rebellion. They have attached a plethora of strings and conditions to disarm and the world seem to have quasi legitimized their claims.

The vogue of Ivorian patriotism was amplified when the Marcossis-Kleber Peace Accord was signed in January 2003. Grouped under the banner of the newly formed *Jeunesse Patriotique* (Patriotic Youths) and led by Charles Goudé Blé, the angry and disenchanting supporters of President Gbagbo fortified their solidarity through rampant street protest and violent anti-French demonstrations. They included youths from both the *Front Populaire Ivoirien* (Popular Ivorian Front-FPI party of Laurent Gbagbo and wife) and the *Partie Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire* (Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire-PDCI of Henri Konan Bédié, the deposed president following the 1999 December coup). Outraged, the President's supporters were at a loss to understand that by arrogating patriotism to themselves and attacking the constitutionally constituted power, the MPCCI rebellion were instead rewarded with Ministerial posts and other benefits.

Accusing France of betrayal, the Abidjan patriots staged violent demonstrations in front of the French Embassy, and stone throwing youths besieged the French military headquarters at Port Bouët (Abidjan), destroyed French Schools and burnt symbols of French authority including their flag. Chanting anti-French slogans, the pro-Gbagbo patriots in English called on President Bush to be their new colonial 'god father' at a moment Franco-American relations were strained over the Iraqi war controversy. The Women Patriots on their part staged a series of sit-in strikes in front of the French embassy to protest what they saw as the French conspiracy against the Gbagbo regime. The patriots of Abidjan vowed to take up arms if the rebels became part of the government of national reconciliation. 'If becoming Minister means one should take up arms, then we are ready to do same', they threatened.

A turning point in the Abidjan patriotic demonstrations was the famous Saturday February 1, 2003 gathering that mobilized a mammoth crowd of more than a million people. It was significant in that it saved Gbagbo's image and sent the message that the Abidjan protest marches were not a minority group of pro-Gbagbo ethnic fanatics as French media maintained. While most French media organs evaluated the turn out in tens of thousands, the local press gave an estimate of between one and two million human souls. War of numbers it was. Gbagbo was rescued thanks to street power, the source of his own legitimacy since 2002. Another significant element in the February 2003 protest rally was the participation of other African settlers in solidarity with the Ivorian hosts as well as French nationals who refused to be evacuated to France. To them, Côte d'Ivoire was their home as most of them had married Ivorian wives and husbands. This might also have been a strategy to buy protection from the rampaging and anti-settler patriots.

After this mammoth rally, a rift developed between the FPI and PDCI youths and started widening. The difference was that between moderation and extremism. Soon, Goudé Blé, the fire eater and orator led the extremist faction that did not want any concession with the rebels led by his rival student leader Soro Guillaume. Splinters of patriotic movements sprouted in and around Abidjan made up of flag wearing uncontrolled fanatics that became a source of instability and ironically the source of Gbagbo's legitimacy and survival.

While the MPCCI patriots are already reaping the dividends of their patriotism with the ministerial posts, some of the pro-government patriots who traveled to defend the government cause as far as France were also rewarded. Goudé Blé for instance dines with the presidential couple and is vested with powers that senior administrative authorities do not even have.

Soro Guillaume and Goudé Blé and their collaborators are undoubtedly the prime heroes of the Ivorian revolutionary war of patriotism. Others would rather call them the villains. But what is most destructive in this war of patriotism is that the youths have been misled. They do not know where patriotism lies. As all sides arrogate to themselves the monopoly of patriotism, the state has been undermined and the future of Ivorian patriotism is bleak. Houphouët-Boigny must be weeping in his grave.

Guinean Patriotism and the burden of history

Guinean patriotism is a historical phenomenon. Since the years of Sékou Touré, Guinea has defied all predictions and effectively mobilized to counter the foreign threat, whether perceived or real. They did it when the French attempted to destabilize Sékou Touré's regime after the NO vote of independence against the French wish. 'We would rather be independent in poverty than be rich in bondage', Guinea told De Gaulle's France. During the attempted Portuguese invasion of the country from Guinea Bissau in the 70s, the country was mobilized under the banner of patriotism and warded off the enemy. The latest patriotic move was in September 2000 when hitherto unknown rebels in collaboration with the RUF and Charles Taylor (as Guinea claims) invaded the forest region bordering Liberia and Sierra Leone. The Guineans once more demonstrated their patriotism and mobilized against the enemy. Former soldiers of the Sékou Touré era, the youth volunteers, women, and the entire country joined the army in the war front and defeated the enemies. Musical caravans moved from street to street and echoed one message: no to any rebellion. The *Fullah* dominated business class in a show of patriotism mobilized tons of food supplies and collectively delivered them at the war front.

How this patriotism would survive in the post Conté (Lansana Conté is ailing out due to a terminal disease) era is left to posterity. Rumours that the President had died in February 2003 resulted in serious looting of the public finances by ministers and senior administrative figures. Military tracts are already circulating inviting the military to take over should there be a sudden vacuum in Guinea.

Exporting Patriotism, the Burkina Connection

Burkina Faso is home to Thomas Sankar, one of Africa's great nationalist and patriot. He paid the ultimate price for his patriotism in the hands of a comrade in uniform, Blaise Compaoré. Blaise Compaoré may not have the same credentials as Sankara but he has written his own name in the annals of West African history. Compaoré is said to be the godfather of West Africa's new patriots—Charles Taylor, Foday Sankoh, Soros, Sam Bokarie, Johnny Paul Koroma, etc. The role Compaoré is playing in sustaining the rebellion in neighboring Cote d'Ivoire is hailed in Burkina Faso as a patriotic act while those in Cote d'Ivoire refer to it as criminal.

The Sacred Patriotic Union of Burkina Faso strongly joined the international opinion to demonize and denounce the xenophobic attitude of the government of Laurent Gbagbo, proclaiming their unalloyed support for Compaoré and sympathy towards their kinsmen and fellow compatriots molested in Côte d'Ivoire. When the French government convened Compaoré and other West African leaders to the Linas-Marcoussis and Kleber Peace Talks, he scored a significant political goal when thousands of Burkinas lined up the streets of Ougadougou to cheer their hero as he traveled to "put an end to the Gbagbo 'nonsense'". In an interview with the French paper *Liberation*, Compaoré likened Gbagbo to Milosovic and advocated that the Ivorian President stand trial for genocide. Meanwhile, some opposition figures in Burkina Faso criticized Compaoré for the outrageous statement, accusing the President of ignoring his own misdeeds at home and at sub-regional level.

A critical factor in the attitude of the Burkinas vis a vis the Ivorian crisis is that their fellow compatriots returning from Côte d'Ivoire were not welcome home either. These 'diaspos' as they are called received the same alien tag and were treated as foreigners in their own land. Less than 300,000 out of the more than 3 million Burkinas actually returned from Côte d'Ivoire partly because few of them had contacts or investments at home, and partly because they were not wanted. Indeed the returnees constitute a political threat for the government of Burkina Faso. The government would prefer them stay in Côte d'Ivoire than come and swell the ranks of the unemployed and disaffected. The highly frustrated returnees or 'diaspos' would easily join the opposition as thousands of them were denied political freedoms and liberties in the first place before they migrated. It could be said that Blaise Compaoré used the opportunity and trumpeted the plight of his citizens in Côte d'Ivoire to score underserved political goals. And the Sacred Patriotic Union was there to accompany him. As the sub-regional connectivity of conflicts unearths, the question to ask is: would Blaise be free if Charles is arraigned? Internal cracks within the Burkina polity have started to emerge with allegations of coups d'états and accusations directed towards Togo and Côte d'Ivoire. Whether this can be seen as signs of yet another justified rebellion remains a puzzle that will not be long to unravel.

The Nigerian patriotic proposal

During the heat of the political debate surrounding the candidacy of President Obasanjo for re-election, the legalities and the illegalities of who should do what and how that usually characterize Nigerian elections, a group of eminent Nigerians calling themselves *The Patriots* made their views known. They suggested the formation of an interim government to handle the critical issues but their suggestion was ignored. The call for an interim government was again amplified following the controversy over the presidential elections in which the losing candidates, General Muhammadu Buhari and Chief Emeka Ojukwu, and some political parties challenged the re-election of President Obasanjo on grounds of massive fraud. The declared losers accused the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of conniving with the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in favour of incumbent Obasanjo. They called for mass action of the Gandhi type to prevent the inauguration ceremony.

Led by the renowned law titan, Chief Rotimi Williams, *The Patriots* called for a stop to moves to inaugurate the President-elect and advocated the setting up of an Interim Government of National Unity to be headed by Chief Obasanjo himself. The main task for one year interim government

would be the convening and organization of a national conference for the restructuring of the Nigerian polity under a new constitution to be adopted by a constituent assembly and approved at a referendum. Their argument was based on the premise of the threats posed to the peace, stability and order of the nation by the declaration of the results in favour of the PDP. This was further justified by the fact that the Conference of Nigerian Political Parties (CNPP) and some international observer bodies led by the European Union (EU) and concurred by the Catholic Church had reported massive rigging and other electoral malpractices. *The patriots* suggested that going ahead with the inauguration would be tantamount to an attempt "...to subvert the democratic form of government instituted by the constitution and entrench election rigging as a permanent feature of Nigerian polity". *The patriots* doubted the ability of the tribunals to cope with the massive rigging at the gubernatorial or presidential elections.

The reaction to this move was mixed. While others saw it as a genuine way to avert a crisis especially in a violent prone country like Nigeria, others (especially the ruling party officials) dismissed the suggestion, castigating the initiative as ridiculous, unconstitutional, biased, ill-motivated and totally unacceptable. The patriots were silenced by a colorful ceremony during which time Obasanjo was inaugurated for the second and final term.

Football patriotism in Cameroon

Cameroon has its own peculiar way of being patriotic. Former President Ahmadou Ahidjo's high handed rule institutionalized political victimization and silenced opposition and political debate. Criticism of the regime was often tagged anti-patriotic. Cameroonians were forced to be 'patriotic' by toeing the line and submitting to the whims and caprices of the regime. Paul Biya, Ahidjo's successor did not alter the status quo despite his 'new deal' policy. A government subsidized tabloid known as *Le Patriote* sees itself as the model of press patriotism par excellence. Government ministers and diehard supporters of President Paul Biya's regime use this tabloid to denigrate those who dare to voice indignation at the bad state of governance in the country today. The outspoken Catholic prelate, Christian Cardinal Tumi of the Douala Arch Diocese in the nation's economic capital became the 'most unpatriotic citizen of the time' when he, in an interview to *Jeune Afrique Economie* magazine, denounced the extra-judicial killings of suspected criminals by the security forces. The Minister of Territorial Administration (Interior) in an official reaction abusively condemned the prelate and accused him of grave anti-patriotism, alleging that the man of God was nursing presidential ambitions, something equated to a serious offence.

Nevertheless, nothing puts the Cameroon nation in state of oneness and patriotic solidarity than their darling national football squad-the *Indomitable Lions*. When the team is playing and winning as they have done many times, the whole nation is mobilized and all else is forgotten. Even burial ceremonies, marriages and other festivities are postponed because of football frenzy. Football in Cameroon has become the opium of the people and the one umbrella of patriotism that rallies Cameroonians together. But if a player dares ask his outstanding allowance before playing, that according to the government minister is very unpatriotic. One of theirs, Marc Vivien Foe recently demonstrated this patriotism as he dropped dead in a World Confederation semi-final match in Paris against Columbia. Would football patriotism hold the nation together in the face of an increasingly deteriorating political setting where ethnic and tribal patriotism is on the rise? The answer is blowing in the wind.

Conclusion

The notion of patriotism has been put to test in West Africa. People and groups in West Africa now seek to redefine patriotism by their own standards. We must however be able to differentiate between patriotism and political sycophancy, and draw the line between patriotism, greed, egoism, quest for power, and adventurism. Some of the self-declared patriots are surrogates of political, economic, and perhaps external multilateral interests. Moreover, ethnic patriotism has been instituted, and its political tool of exclusion, which lingers on the 'loyal than thou attitude' seem to be on the rise in West Africa. This is due to the aggravating state collapse as non state actors are assuming state functions as the ailing states cannot even afford basic necessities such as portable water, electricity, food, health, schools and roads for its citizenry. West Africa currently hosts eleven out of the fifteen least developed countries in the world.

The patriotic warlords are thus drawing and recruiting from a pool of disaffected youths who are highly disappointed with the political leadership that keeps on telling them to be patient because 'they are leaders of tomorrow'. Tomorrow seems to have neither a beginning nor an end, as elders continue to recycle their ages, and amass wealth and political positions. The public services have closed its doors, maintaining an embargo on employment with the support and even recommendations of the Bretton Woods Institutions. The youths who had a misguided education are the greatest victims and most of them have started revolting. Those who have lost hope now take all types of risks. Some are defying the scorching sun, traversing the Sahara in the hope of finding refuge and solace in Europe. Italian, Spanish and rest of Mediterranean coast guards are having sleepless nights hunting for invading Africans in the high seas who are not scared by the deaths of the compatriots in the drowning smuggling boats. The ladies are prominent in this European bound adventure as graduate prostitution is seemingly the only lucrative self-employment left for them. As Europe closes its doors to these desperate West African job seekers, the only alternative is radicalization of attitude against their governments whom they blame for all their woes. The youth factor is certainly the time bomb of Africa as no concrete and sustainable programs have been conceived to address their plight, at national and at international level.

Dictatorial regimes have continued to hold sway and the use of arms is becoming more and more attractive and rewarding. The problem is not so much the creation of patriotic movements as is the danger of institutionalizing rebellions as evident in the various contemporary peace negotiations. It is becoming clear that the bullet has taken over from the ballot as a means to achieving political change. Rebellious patriotism may just be beginning unless the root causes of conflicts are addressed, bad governance tackled, monopoly of power checked, political and economic exclusion and deprivation resolved and the youth unemployment and disaffection faced squarely. It will take true patriots to return West Africa to a more dignified path. For now rebellious patriotism seems to hold sway as the budding democracy is being butchered in the face of a helpless world where the use of force and violence is becoming the *modus operandi* of policy.

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