

# BOOK REVIEW

**Abou Bamba. *African Miracle, African Mirage: Transnational Politics and the Paradox of Modernization in Ivory Coast*.** Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016. List of Illustrations. Preface and Acknowledgments. Selected List of Abbreviations. Bibliography. Index. xviii + 302 pp. \$34.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-0-8214-2239-7.

*African Miracle, African Mirage: Transnational Politics and the Paradox of Modernization in Ivory Coast*, by Abou Bamba, makes a significant contribution to the study of the relations between the United States and African Francophone countries, especially Ivory Coast, which has long been considered the pillar of France's "pré-carré" in Africa. Bamba challenges the long-held idea that links the state-led modernization of this West African country and its insertion in the global economy only to France.

Bamba's main argument is based on two major paradigms: the role of Americans and the U.S. state, and the triangulation of French, American, and Ivorian agencies and investments in the achievement of Ivory Coast's economic success in the 1960s. While acknowledging the historical influence of Franco-Ivorian relations in building Ivory Coast's modern capitalism, Bamba argues that post-independence Ivorian authorities contested the hegemony of France, instead appealing to the U.S. to become involved in important economic sectors. This stance might surprise scholars and other political readers of Ivorian history, especially considering its leader Houphouët-Boigny's peculiar ties with France and his role in the consolidation of France's influence in francophone Africa.

Analyzing Ivorian economic success, Bamba discusses not only the colloquially named "Ivorian economic miracle," but also the mirage. The mirage in Ivory Coast was economic growth without development, which morphed into decline and crisis in the late 1970s. The book consistently reveals the roles of the three prominent actors (Ivorians and broadly other Africans, France, and the U.S.) in this decline by questioning the theories of modernization of economy as well as the political infrastructure that supported the Ivorian post-independence autocratic regime. It is well known that the miracle during the "thirty glorious years" was achieved under a single-party system that offered a favorable ground for the dependency theory of development. By playing on both sides (France and the U.S.), Ivory Coast's first president Houphouët-Boigny was able to position himself and his country's liberal economy as the shield against the expansion of the

Marxism-communism that was then taking root in the West African region, in countries such as Guinea, Benin, Mali, and Haute-Volta.

Rooted in a historical approach and using of economic data, the author combines archives, field work, and many interviews with scholars, archivists, administrators, planners, and diplomats not only in Ivory Coast but also in France and in the United States. His aim is to demonstrate how both local actors and transnational agents were equal forces in the rise and decline of the Ivorian economic miracle.

Bamba's conclusion eloquently casts a different spotlight on the causes of the rapid economic success of Ivory Coast. He offers new insights into the "miracle" that was previously always attributed to the wise strategy of Houphouët-Boigny: to stay closely tied to France while somehow continuing the colonial political economy, thereby creating opportunities for laborers to find work and access to land in the rainforest areas in the west of the country, for the development of such cash crops as coffee and cocoa.

The book is a noteworthy contribution to the literature on Ivory Coast. However, the analysis is surprisingly restricted to a timeframe that does not refer to the current Ivory Coast. Bamba's work, as a historical piece, could have offered critical insights about the connection of Ivorian modernization policies and plans with the most recent crises that arose in the 1990s and escalated in the 2000s. But the book ends by analyzing the decline of the economy in the late 1970s (chapter seven). Questionably, the author made the choice—as stated in the conclusion—not to dwell on Afro-pessimist bleak images of coup d'états and wars, but instead to limit the analysis to the end of the 1970s.

In the meantime, other studies have suggested that the outgrowths of the "miracle" led to the many crises that shook the country at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Scholars have traced in the economic miracle and the subsequent mirage of late 1970s the ethnic divisions, political crisis, and civil wars that broke out as of 2002. Although the miracle created an illusion of development, encouraged foreign assistance (French and American), and attracted foreign laborers (Malian, Burkinabè, Togolese, and Guineans), it also sowed the seeds of an explosive predicament when the main instruments of this miracle—land rights and citizenship—were questioned. A historical perspective linking this analysis to subsequent developments would have contributed much to our understanding, especially because the same transnational (U.S., France, UN) and Ivorian forces teamed up to end the war of 2010–2011. In any case, the work offers a strong starting point to revisit what the current government is calling the return to "Houphouétism" within the liberal economy, with a tinge of nostalgia for the glorious years of the 1960s.

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**For more reading on this subject, see:**

- Prosperetti, Elisa. 2018. "The Hidden History of the West African Wager: Or, How Comparison with Ghana Made Côte d'Ivoire." *History in Africa* 45: 29–57. doi:10.1017/hia.2018.13.
- Toungara, Jeanne Maddox. 1995. "Generational Tensions in the Parti Démocratique De Côte D'Ivoire." *African Studies Review* 38 (2): 11–38. doi:10.2307/525316.
- Widner, Jennifer A. 1991. "The 1990 Elections in Côte d'Ivoire." *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 20 (1): 31–40. doi:10.1017/S1548450500004182.