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# **BLAISE COMPAORÉ IN THE RESOLUTION OF THE IVORIAN CONFLICT: FROM BELLIGERENT TO MEDIATOR-IN-CHIEF**

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AFRICAN PEACEBUILDING NETWORK  
APN WORKING PAPERS: NO. 6

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# BLAISE COMPAORÉ IN THE RESOLUTION OF THE IVORIAN CONFLICT: FROM BELLIGERENT TO MEDIATOR-IN-CHIEF

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MARCH 2016

In the often troubled politics of West Africa, Blaise Compaoré, the former president of Burkina Faso, is a quaint figure, almost of another era. Yet with all he has experienced over a quarter century of the region's upheavals, he is also very much a man of his time, politically astute, and a fine strategist when it comes to preserving his friendships with powerful countries and leaders whose backing has provided immunity of sorts for his alleged crimes. Compaoré has always been equally keen on keeping a clean image as a peacemaker, given the intolerable association of his name and career with a bloody 1983 coup that cost the life of Thomas Sankara, the revolutionary pan-African figure. This paper is not, however, focused on Compaoré's political career, and it is not a diatribe meant to support or amplify common critiques of his political activism or his perceived destructive practices. The popular insurgency of October 2014 that resulted in the resignation of the long-serving president gives a good measure of popular sentiment on Compaoré's model of governance and moral ethics more emphatically than any speculative account on political rule in Burkina Faso.

The aim here, rather, is to examine how, as a mediator, Compaoré builds and deploys a particular kind of "sovereignty," informed by his capacity to tap into different registers of legitimacy, while reinterpreting the terms of

mediation mandates as part of his strategies. This paper is concerned with his role in facilitating dialogue and brokering peace in the Ivorian conflict, and it specifically examines the “Compaoré system” at work in one of West Africa’s most protracted political crises. The question is whether there are ways in which a mediator can and does appropriate the mediation process by giving it a direction it might otherwise not have taken. In our case of interest—the 2002–10 military and political crisis—a consideration of Compaoré’s personal touch with regard to political and legal processes, the nature of agreements, actors’ conduct, and mediation outcomes points to different possibilities of understanding conflict management and resolution patterns in different African contexts. More important for the mediation literature, the ways of an unlikely mediator provide useful methodological and empirical resources for thinking differently about mediation as an applied science. In fact, Compaoré’s mediation career poses an analytical puzzle to perspectives commonly developed in the literature; this puzzle has to do with his counterintuitive and unconventional methods, which deserve proper engagement.

This discussion is articulated around three arguments.<sup>1</sup> First, it contends that the Ivorian crisis mediation offers a quintessential example of the personalization of a conflict resolution process hinged upon the multiple and overlapping sovereignties of key actors and institutions, including that of the chief mediator.

Second, Compaoré has experienced the political history of West Africa from a continuous first-person perspective. His vision of stability across the region thus relies on a certain configuration of power that makes possible his enduring influence on the region’s politics. His approach to the resolution of the Ivorian conflict consequently bears the mark of conservative politics most commonly associated with Houphouët Boigny, his political mentor, and by extension with the muddled political governance model of postcolonial francophone Africa.

Third, the political economy of conflict management in the Ivorian case demonstrates how the prominence of self-interest can be a driver in the shifting constitution of orders and norms in mediation processes.

Finally, the article makes apparent a fourth parameter that is less an argument than an observation. It is Compaoré’s capacity for multilevel interaction that plays out, on the one hand, across the personal and the political, and, on the other, across the personal, the bilateral, the regional,

and the international. I elaborate on this point with regard to Compaoré's status in the Ivorian peace process as, successively, a "personal" and regional mediator.

## **THE PARAMETERS OF THE HOUPHOUET LEGACY**

During the Cold War, Western materiel and ideological interests in francophone Africa were entrusted—logically, some would argue—to the guardianship of France. France in turn relied on one of its staunchest agents in francophone Africa, president Houphouët Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire, who had served as a French parliamentarian and minister before independence. Many saw in Boigny a French superintendent and a regional patriarch, and he did, indeed, rule over West African political life in these capacities. After his death in 1993, Compaoré became an extremely important actor in the "Françafrique" apparatus, as this paper will discuss. Regularly consulted by France on matters pertaining to the West African region at large, he was a linchpin in direct and indirect interventions initiated by France and other Western allies.

Compaoré's political outlook is decidedly regional, and it reflects a concern for preserving regional peace through the promotion of common values among ruling elites through alliances that have to do with both personal affinities and historical contingencies. Thus, despite the contingent political antagonism that has at times pitted against each other such leaders as Compaoré, president Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire, and Henri Konan Bédié, president of the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire—African Democratic Rally (PDCI-RDA), the three can be said to be heirs of the same "houphouëtist" approach that relies on local clients and external support, notably French, to preserve a closely controlled political stability.

The Houphouët legacy informs a paternalist approach to stability, deployed through an unequivocal model of strongman leadership. In its formalized ideology, it is said to have been embodied in a culture of dialogue and peace. In reality, it was a clever model of political engineering that sought to regulate sociopolitical life, not just in Côte d'Ivoire, but also in its immediate neighborhood, and it did so through the support of elite interests and therefore the political status quo. Crucially for Burkina Faso, the implications of the tacit agreement between Mossi traditional authorities on the one hand and the Ivorian political elite and employers on the other enabled a mass migration of Burkinabè workers to southern Côte d'Ivoire as early as

the 1930s and '40s, when a portion of Upper Volta was still an integral part of Côte d'Ivoire. This arrangement endured well into postcolonial times, and in fact when, in 2003, Blaise Compaoré was invited to the Marcoussis talks in the early days of the Ivorian crisis, he made it a point to have the issue of land ownership and land redistribution in northern Côte d'Ivoire included in the agenda and in the final agreement.<sup>2</sup>

The inclusion of a land clause was important to Burkina Faso, not least because of the internal repercussions and spillovers of the Ivorian conflict into Burkinabè politics. The return to Burkina Faso of a considerable number of migrant workers put enormous economic and political pressure on the Burkinabè government, so much so that the resolution of the crisis was as much a Burkinabè as an Ivorian issue. In fact, one Burkinabè minister openly blamed "diaspora" Burkinabè from Côte d'Ivoire for the protests and mutinies that had become quite common in recent years in Burkina Faso. The repercussions of the exclusionary policy of "*ivoirité*" (see below) were to be felt at the level of access to both resources and economic opportunities for West African migrants, particularly Burkinabè laborers, for most of whom the benefits of citizenship were denied in Côte d'Ivoire and restricted back home in Burkina Faso.<sup>3</sup>

Compaoré, like many others who have come to power unconstitutionally through bloody coups d'état, subsequently succeeded in remaking himself into a decent, civil, "democratic" president. The absence of "entrenched protocols of power"<sup>4</sup> in the early stages of a political rule, however, more often than not perpetuates a culture of violence and unaccountability. Despite the tremendous moral capital he has accumulated over the years as a peace broker, Compaoré has not succeeded in shaking off the suspicion that he has not entirely stopped commissioning acts of violence as a method of rule and personal expansion. In recent years, he has relentlessly sought to preserve a status of *mediateur incontournable* in regional conflicts. The accumulated political capital has also been instrumental to his political survival in Burkinabè politics.

A key paradox lies in this for many African analysts: Compaoré's mediations have, by and large, been unsuccessful if one defines success as the capacity to prevent an armed conflict or the resurgence of violence. In the Ivorian case, for instance, the electoral outcome was ultimately enforced through military means after months of standoff, during which violence sponsored by both sides claimed many lives. But one would perhaps need to distinguish the mediation process and outcome from the process of implementation,

for the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement (2007) was hailed at the time as a resounding success. In fact, when Compaoré was able to visit Côte d'Ivoire on June 12, 2014, after seven years, the highly enthusiastic welcome he received from political parties, civil society organizations, and the wider Ivorian population presented a striking contrast to the climate of suspicion that had marked the preceding years. As one Ivorian youth remarked, "For me, the real hero out of this whole crisis is Blaise Compaoré. He is my president."<sup>5</sup>

### **THE COMPAORÉ ENIGMA: FROM DESTABILIZER TO HOMME-PIVOT**

Given the circumstances that surrounded his ascension to power, and given his alleged involvement in destabilization campaigns in Mauritania, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire—even in Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo—Blaise Compaoré's muddled past was such that his name was for a long while associated with political banditry and mercenary politics. In 2000, a UN commission report accused both former Liberian president Charles Taylor and Compaoré of fueling the conflict in Sierra Leone by aiding and abetting rebels, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), in violating embargos on the sale of diamonds and weapons.<sup>6</sup> The report even suggested Burkinabè soldiers might have joined the war alongside RUF members. In March that same year, another UN inquiry revealed Compaoré's involvement in the illegal trafficking of weapons to the rebels of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) in exchange for diamonds. The report specified that "heads of State in Africa helped UNITA to circumvent Security Council sanctions against the provision of petroleum products to UNITA," and the list included Compaoré, in addition to identifying Burkina Faso as the safe haven for these illegal transactions.<sup>7</sup>

In Northern Mali, where Compaoré's mediations were critical in freeing Westerners held hostage by militant groups beginning in 2003, his close relations with Tuareg militants who had resisted previous mediations by Moroccan, Algerian, and Economic Union of West African States (ECOWAS) envoys caused many to suspect there might be more to his success than good mediation skills. In the aftermath of the crisis, Tuareg agents were seen in the hotels of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; the reason for their presence was a matter of much debate among officials but was obviously unknown to the public. At the least, and as a former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights had once pointed out, "Mr. Compaoré, a former soldier,

coup leader and political godfather of Charles Taylor, is not the most reliable man to preach democracy and civilian rule.”<sup>8</sup>

More worryingly, the *Washington Post* revealed in June 2012 that Burkina Faso had been hosting one of a dozen American surveillance sites operated by Special Operations Forces in Africa since 2007, often with the help of local troops and foreign contractors. These small air bases are isolated hideouts in civil airports or military sites that house spy planes designed to monitor “terrorist activity” in the Sahara and the Sahel. The Ouagadougou site is a Joint Special Operations Air Detachment, code-named Creek Sand, based in the military side of the Burkinabè capital’s airport. If this is not news, it further confirms the view that Compaoré was more devoted to serving external interests than those of his people.

In the end, however, Western allies could not shield Compaoré from a forced exit.<sup>9</sup> For nearly three decades, French and Americans were more interested in the apparent “stability” of Burkina Faso and the “authority” that Compaoré inspired—and, therefore, the role he could be made to play as a solid geopolitical ally in the West African region—than in his human rights record or his political ethics. Amid dwindling support for a historical figure deeply marked by an original sin—that is, the coup that resulted in the assassination of Thomas Sankara—many questions remain unanswered, not least of which concern the impact of his trajectory on political structures in West Africa and the value of his legacy as a whole.

## COMPAORÉ’S RISE TO POWER

On August 4, 1983, Thomas Sankara staged a coup with the help of a group of young officers with leftist ideas and a desire to effect a radical break from the confused and hopeless politics that followed the independence of Upper Volta in 1960. Compaoré was among them, and he later became a minister in Sankara’s government. Sankara’s motivation was to put an end to “twenty-three years of neocolonialism” and to build in its stead “a popular democratic state”; a first step was to change the country’s name from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso (the land of upright men) and to put in place a National Revolutionary Council as the executive body of the revolution government.

Initial euphoria for the revolution gave way to skepticism, especially with regard to Sankara’s radical methods. In addition to alienating Western governments with his anti-imperial discourses and policies, Sankara antagonized customary chiefs, whom he considered regressive forces to



eliminate if Burkina Faso were to move forward. The circumstances that led to his assassination with thirteen other people remain a mystery to this day, although the inquiry announced by the post-Compaoré government following many calls from Sankara's family, civil society, and human rights organizations could help shed light on a profoundly dark period of Burkinabè and African history.<sup>10</sup> In 2003, the UN Human Rights Committee blamed Burkina Faso for refusing to initiate a full investigation into Sankara's death so that those responsible for it could be prosecuted. The committee made a series of "observations" after being called upon by Mariam Sankara, Thomas Sankara's widow, and her two sons.<sup>11</sup> All that is known is that Compaoré overthrew Thomas Sankara on October 15, 1987, and the latter lost his life in the process. Speculations abound as to the identity of Compaoré's backers. The names of Charles Taylor; Prince Johnson; that of his mentor, Houphouët; and others have popped up as alleged supporters.<sup>12</sup>

Another high-profile assassination held up as an example of the brutalities and the repressive character of the Compaoré regime was that of Norbert Zongo. On December 13, 1998, the burned bodies of Zongo and three friends were found in his car about a hundred kilometers from Ouagadougou. Zongo, an investigative journalist and the director of the weekly paper the *Independent*, had been looking into the suspicious death of the driver of Compaoré's brother, François, who also happened to be the mayor of Ouagadougou. Zongo's death sparked tremendous outrage and jolted many into action, primarily in protest against Compaoré's project to change Article 37 of the 1991 constitution so he could add an umpteenth term to his twenty-seven-year-long rule.<sup>13</sup> The civil society movements that emerged from the various protests can be said to be the precursors of the most recent series of protest movements that eventually succeeded in ousting Compaoré on October 30, 2014.

Needless to say, from troublemaker to *monsieur bons-offices*, and from putschist to peacemaker, Compaoré's trajectory has been tumultuous and eventful. Just how a man with such a tortuous record could become a respected senior mediator on the continent is a puzzle to many an observer. In a turbulent West African region marked by shaky "pluralist democracies" at grips with the scourge of military coups and sudden violent changes, his greatest achievement has arguably been his ability to preserve the status of mentor and wise man, just like Houphouët. Just like his mentor, his record as a stabilizer in Burkina Faso—a country that experienced no less than seven coups between 1966 and 1987 and has been relatively peaceful since

then—places him in an ideal position to facilitate dialogues, broker peace agreements, and preach regional stability.

But the path to legitimacy has been an arduous one, and the many “successes” have not entirely erased a long-lived reputation. That Compaoré’s mode of governance has primarily been driven by a concern to preserve the status quo rather than promote democracy or human rights is, therefore, hardly surprising, for a common perception of the man is that of a mischief-maker who has been using his country as a support base for a plethora of rebel groups that have attempted to destabilize the region. According to his detractors, he stirs up trouble only to come back to help resolve it.<sup>14</sup>

## **A PROLIFIC POLITICAL CAREER**

Compaoré’s reputation as a troublemaker extends beyond the confines of West Africa.<sup>15</sup> In fact, it would be plausible to speak of a “before” and an “after” in his prolific career.<sup>16</sup> As a troublemaker, he was associated with Charles Taylor in Liberia and Sierra Leone, with Jonas Savimbi in Angola, with Daouda Malam Wanke in Niger against Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara, with Idriss Debi in Chad, with François Bozizé in the Central African Republic (CAR), and with dissident groups in Guinea opposing the Lansana Conté regime, before becoming a big brother to the leaders of the Forces Nouvelles in Côte d’Ivoire, especially Guillaume Sorro. Given this political past, his career as a mediator seemed like a usurpation of sorts.

This turbulent period was succeeded by a transition period, characterized by Compaoré’s commitment to achieving twin objectives, one personal, and the other political. On the one hand, he sought to reinvent himself as a decent chap well established in the conventions of representative democracy and civil rule. On the other, he sought to turn Burkina Faso into an active and useful player to contend with in the West African diplomatic scene. A first landmark opportunity arose in 1993 during the Togolese political crisis, followed by a series of successful mediations with Tuareg and militant groups in the Sahel during various missions to free hostages.

Despite lingering doubts as to his motivations<sup>17</sup> in undertaking these missions, Compaoré clearly was able to manage a convincing conversion into a peacemaker. When it came to the Ivorian conflict, his interest in the resolution of the crisis—at least his vision of an ideal resolution—reflected an alignment of his own personal interests with those of the Forces Nouvelles. More than on any other mission, his mediation strategies were

mobilized to their fullest in supporting a political outcome that not only worked for Ivorian stakeholders but also confirmed him as a seasoned and well-rounded political mediator.

For Burkina Faso, a landlocked country with very few resources and heavily dependent on foreign aid, the mediation economy developed by Compaoré was a great outlet that generated both political and economic gains and enhanced its diplomatic standing. Internally, the political gains of Compaoré's successful mediation career are less easy to assess. Burkinabè citizens do, however, have a sense of increased respectability for their country, thanks to their president's efforts, and of increased security, since conflicts in neighboring countries inevitably affect Burkina Faso's political and economic stability.<sup>18</sup>

For Compaoré himself, the mediation endeavors were more than a mere image management strategy, as might be the case for other high-profile mediators, such as Pierre Buyoya, the former Burundian president, or for Uganda president Yoweri Museveni, a self-styled ally of the West in the East African region.<sup>19</sup> Because of his bloody past and the deep sense of loss, unfulfilled dreams, and annihilated potential brought about by the killing of Sankara, for which Compaoré was seen as responsible, he has had to undergo an unarticulated yet profound process of redemptive transformation. Similarly to Museveni and Buyoya, Compaoré shares in a common tendency to participate in rent-capturing political exercises vis-à-vis donors and external allies. However, his has also always been a moral investment in a postpolitical future. It is a highly risky investment for him, but one that could have been made less risky and less costly, it was then thought, if he could just manage to accumulate more virtue by consolidating democracy in Burkina Faso and on the mediation front.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE IVORIAN CONFLICT**

The conflict in Côte d'Ivoire started one September night in 2002, as a mutiny turned into a failed military coup and rebellion. Rebels demanded the immediate enforcement of their citizenship rights as fully fledged Ivorians, not as "Djulas," or "northerners," and to partake in the national project as citizens and share in its resources on equal terms with other social groups. In a country de facto divided into north and south, a five-year stalemate ensued that debilitated its human, institutional, agricultural, and other resources.

During the period between 2002 and 2007, many mediators were called in, from the former Ghanaian president John Kufuor to the former Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade to regional and international institutions, including ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), and the UN. With South African president Thabo Mbeki under heavy fire from members of the Ivorian opposition for his alleged partiality in managing the conflict,<sup>20</sup> Compaoré stepped in as mediator.

A bone of contention throughout the crisis had been the efforts of Alassane Ouattara to run for the presidency, a candidacy made unconstitutional by Article 35 of the Ivorian constitution under former president Henri Konan Bédié. Houphouët's model of "patrimonial management of social diversity"<sup>21</sup> had produced political stability, engineered and artificially maintained through clientelist politics. The institutionalization of "*ivoirité*" under Bédié, however, was a catalytic moment in the confrontational politics that characterized the post-Houphouët period. *Ivoirité* was a revisionist conception of indigenous citizenship promoted by Bédié and his supporters. The ideology provided a strategic and rhetorical argument against the candidacy of Ouattara, then depicted as "the Bukinabè" who had presidential ambitions over Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>22</sup> Article 35 stipulated that a candidate to the Ivorian presidency had to be born in the Côte d'Ivoire from Ivorian parents and should not have renounced his or her Ivorian citizenship. Rather than amending Article 35, the incumbent president, Laurent Gbagbo, was allowed instead to use Article 48 to carry out reforms stipulated by the Pretoria Agreements (2005) but adamantly opposed by an Ivorian parliament intent on resisting what it perceived as "neocolonial" interventions.

Under these circumstances, Thabo Mbeki's "emerging doctrine of a proactive and assertive African policy underwritten by the determination to reverse the spectre of civil wars"<sup>23</sup> found a useful laboratory in the Ivorian conflict. However, South Africa's underdeveloped geopolitical and geostrategic understanding of African conflicts worked against Mbeki's capacity to win the trust of all stakeholders. Moreover, a key component of Mbeki's active diplomacy was to take unilateral actions to fulfill what he perceived as South Africa's role as both continental leader and interlocutor on issues of security and economic development. Inevitably, his methods were deemed too "personalized" to be viable.

Ironically, Compaoré was no less personal in his approach to the Ivorian conflict. In fact, it can be argued that his personal knowledge and stakes

in the outcome of the crisis were determining factors not only in Gbagbo's "invitation" for his mediation of direct talks but also in shaping the form and content of the Ouagadougou political agreements. The only difference was that where Mbeki was seen as overtly sympathetic to Gbagbo's account of the crisis, Compaoré was seen as strongly favoring, if not actively in support of, the Ivorian rebellion. Mbeki's neocolonial rhetoric, his afro-centeredness, his legalistic approach to conflict resolution, his sympathy toward Gbagbo and hence aversion to old French-Ivorian politics, and South Africa's perceived economic interests in penetrating the West African market<sup>24</sup> were among elements that ended up muddying his engagement in the process.

For both mediators however, partial successes were always the result of an exercise in persuasion subject equally to the volatile nature of partisan politics in conflict situations and to the mediator's personal relations with key stakeholders. In that sense, Zartman is right to point to the importance of persuasion as the overarching strategy for African mediators, especially when their interlocutors in a facilitation situation are peer heads of state. According to Zartman, "the African mediator's primary weapon is persuasion"; he writes,

[persuasion] reinforces the personal nature of the task and reflects the need for the perception of a mutually hurting stalemate. The mediator's main leverage lies in his ability to help his brothers out of the bind into which their conflict has led them.<sup>25</sup>

Although research on direct mediatory exchanges between heads of state has been too sparse to permit a detailed analysis, available evidence indicates they tend to be an exercise in pure persuasion.<sup>26</sup>

The Pretoria Agreements were pivotal in two fundamental senses. First, they sidelined—in fact, "suspended"—the Ivorian constitution to enable all disqualified candidates to take part in the election, thus placing divergent interpretations of the constitution at the heart of the political struggle. Second—and this was going to be a highly determining factor in the postelectoral negotiations—the elections were to be certified by the United Nations. But if the Pretoria talks were crucial in that they provided an opportunity for an "African solution to an African problem," the Ouagadougou talks were seen as even more important, in that they provided a platform for a West African solution to a West African problem.<sup>27</sup>

This conviction was particularly strong in the view of Compaoré's permanent representative in Côte d'Ivoire, Boureima Badini, who contends that

[my] mission was made easy by the fact that I was accepted. If I can draw a parallel with a UN representative who does not have the same culture, the same vision of things, he would probably have been less successful. As far as I'm concerned, I knew, I lived [the Ivorian protagonists'] experience, I shared meals with them, I shared their experience. I was impartial and positive in my mission, in order to build trust.<sup>28</sup>

To a certain degree, the choice and mandate of the permanent representative of the office of the facilitator conveyed the extent of Compaoré's commitment; he knew the facilitator was in it for the longest haul. Badini's job was to build a trust relationship with all disputants and stakeholders, a mission that entailed coming to grips with the endemic causes of the conflict and acquiring a sufficient understanding of the cultural and political dispositions of the protagonists. This data-mining and knowledge-building process was crucial not only to developing an appropriate mechanism of concerted consultation but also for the subsequent implementation phase of the agreement.

The nomination by Compaoré of a team entirely devoted to the nitty-gritty of the negotiation is one of the key strategies of the "Compaoré system," whose deployment in Côte d'Ivoire was supported by an institutional apparatus and a network of "resource individuals"—in other words, people who would report back directly to the mediator. In addition to the high-profile and close collaborators in this "system," who are involved at most strategic junctures in the process, a second level of *hommes-de-main* make up a local structure in the country of intervention; these are often recruited within long-term friendships in the army and the administration.<sup>29</sup>

In Côte d'Ivoire, the office of the facilitator sat on the Comité d'Evaluation et d'Accompagnement (CEA), which was tasked with monitoring the implementation process. This office was, in a way, the articulation of a convergence of external interests and internal dynamics. It reported back to the facilitator as well as the key stakeholders, and it was frequently consulted by foreign representatives as well as UN agencies. Thus, as an operations office, its task was to secure adherence beyond persuasion; it could "appropriate" and reinterpret its mandate according to the vagaries of Ivorian politics. Its mission was a delicate one, given the highly polarized

nature of local politics. As can be expected under such circumstances, the office got entangled in recriminatory politics, and it was often the target of violence, particularly when the results of the elections were not to the liking of all actors.<sup>30</sup> However, Compaoré's ability to carefully navigate the labyrinth of identity politics, lend an ear to constant charges of bad faith from both parties, and allow time for the peace process to consolidate did, eventually, pay off.

Thus, when all resources seemed to have been exhausted at the subregional, continental, and international levels, the choice of Compaoré as the facilitator of "direct talks" appeared as the very last resort for rehabilitating a broken peace process. For Gbagbo and his allies, to invite Compaoré as mediator expressed a need "to go back to the roots of the conflict."<sup>31</sup> Such a move was also dictated by a need to acknowledge Gbagbo's "second war of independence"<sup>32</sup> and his well-honed rhetorical characterization of the Ivorian rebellion as a "foreign attack" on Ivorian sovereignty.<sup>33</sup> The hostility between the two countries built up throughout the years leading to the 2007 *détente*. It culminated in a formal complaint by Burkina Faso to the AU's Peace and Security Council on account of an Ivorian violation of its air space.<sup>34</sup>

## **THE COMPAORÉ "SYSTEM" AT WORK IN THE IVORIAN CONFLICT**

Compaoré is not the folksy and expressive type. His stern manners often contrast with the affable demeanors of some of his counterparts, whose mediation skills tend to be associated with personal qualities and a capacity to "speak with anyone." Still, Compaoré's well-versed skills as a mediator have been put to effective use more than a half dozen times in the West African region and elsewhere on the continent. He has contributed tremendously to the practice of mediation as a specialized, distinct discipline in African regional politics and diplomacy. He is a man of initiative and political deftness, as well as an experienced strategist. Yet, even in view of his established influence on a number of peace processes across the region, is it possible to speak of a "Compaoré system" that stands out as a recipe for de-escalation, *détente*, and even conflict resolution? If there is, indeed, any system to contend with, it has to be conceived as a model supported by three distinct pillars.



First, Compaoré draws from a rich political capital forged over a quarter century of regional politics that makes him something of a repository of the region's political history. Second, he draws on alliances, extended networks, and unconventional, private procedures that are effectively mobilized whenever he is called upon to mediate. And third, he relies on an external legitimacy conferred not only by seniority but also by his willingness to advance external interests—French, Libyan (under the late Muammar al-Qaddafi), and American—in the region.

A fourth element of strategy that is not documented in the mediation literature pertains to Compaoré's use of highly skilled personal appointees—often his foreign ministers but also a number of advisors—as backstops.<sup>35</sup> The example of Djibril Bassolé is worth mentioning. Bassolé was a police officer who emerged as one of Compaoré's most trusted men. He played a crucial role, first as an appointee in 1990–95 during negotiations between the Tuareg and the Nigerien government, then again in 1993–95 during the Togolese crisis. Since then, as deputy minister (1999–2000), then minister of security (2000–2007), and then minister of foreign affairs twice in 2007–8 and 2011–14, he has been involved in virtually every mediation mission led by the Burkinabè president.<sup>36</sup> In fact, Bassolé became a mediator in his own right when he was appointed jointly by the UN and the African Union in Darfur (2008–11).

The deployment of this type of human resource embeds a practice of personalization in the Compaoré system, with two notable advantages. First, the accumulated experiences of “backstoppers” buttress the capital of trust for the principal mediator. Second, an appearance of distance is cultivated that makes the position of the principal mediator seem informed and carefully considered. In the Ivorian case, this meant that by the time a stakeholder meeting took place, background work already achieved by local cadres and the facilitator's team had smoothed rough edges.<sup>37</sup>

More often than not, Compaoré is able to reframe mandates and reinterpret the terms of his mission according to specific dispositions, especially where his personal stakes are involved. Critics argue that he often is both the arsonist and firefighter in the conflicts he is called upon to help resolve. One commentator, for instance, notes that this reputation makes him “at first glance, an unlikely peacemaker, not least for being a former protégé of Colonel Qaddafi who also had been accused of stoking some of Africa's brutal civil wars.”<sup>38</sup> In fact, while Compaoré was quick to place pragmatism



before loyalty following the fall of Colonel Qaddafi in 2011, evidence of a strong Libyan presence and investments in Burkina Faso still abounds. While Qaddafi's portrait no longer hangs in the hall of the Libya Hotel in Ouagadougou, the hotel is one of many investments that include a conference center, a shopping mall, and residential units in the neighborhood of Laico (for Libyan African Investment Company) in Ouaga 2000, the Burkina Commercial Bank (formerly the Libyan Bank of Development), and many loans and gifts (for example, the Libya Cultural Center and the Monument to the Martyrs).<sup>39</sup> The late colonel received an honorary doctorate from the University of Ouagadougou, and a main thoroughfare of the capital city has been named after him, the Boulevard Muammar-el Kadhafi.

In short, when it comes to dissecting what amounts to a “Compaoré system,” what emerges is a meticulous approach that relies on resource persons and a thorough knowledge of the political environment, as well as key stakeholders capable of influencing internal dynamics. In addition to Bassolé, Compaoré's resource persons came to include Salif Diallo, later ambassador; Gilbert Diendéré, the head of the president's security guard; and a Malian adviser, Lamine Sow, as well as a Mauritanian adviser, Mustapha Chafi.<sup>40</sup> Chafi was instrumental as a go-between for the Nigerien Tuareg and the government and, more importantly, in the various negotiations for the release of hostages kept in the Sahel by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) and other groups.<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, a team of advance men—including *démarcheurs*, infiltrators, informants, and various *hommes-de-main*, most of them unknown to the wider public and working in the shadows—was the apparatus that provided support to Compaoré's intervention strategies. In the Ivorian case, a small and well-structured team comprised the office of the facilitator, headed by Boureima Badini, a prominent lawyer and politician.

## FRANCE'S MAN

Unlike former South African president Thabo Mbeki, for whom the anti-imperial rhetoric provided an ideological hook for gaining the trust of Ivorian political actors, Compaoré was seen as pretty much the man of the West, a defender of French ambition to preserve the ideological architecture of the “*Françafrique*,” even while speaking the language of transparency and relations among “equals.”<sup>42</sup> The *Françafrique* is often likened to a family-like network run by *doyens* (notably the late Houphouët Boigny and Omar Bongo, Abdou Diouf, and Blaise Compaoré) and junior political figures on

the continent and in French political and media circles, characterized by its institutional, semi-institutional, and obscure forms and practices, its annual get-togethers (the Franco-African summit), its elite protocols, and its extended network of mediators and intermediaries. Its tentacles extend into politics, business, and the military, and it has development aid and the political image of incumbent presidents as its terrain of predilection for shady economic and political deals.

The *Françafrique* has thus become a conservative framework, and the sphere of enactment of anachronistic and neocolonial types of relations in lieu of “normalized” and transparent relations between autonomous entities. The outward manifestations are French military bases, the use of the CFA Franc pegged to the Euro by eight African countries, and numerous French businesses, consultants, and “advisors.” The other side, often decried in the media and by civil society groups, is associated with underhanded practices that have supported the rule of dictators and human rights violators throughout the past decades.

The *Françafrique* is also associated with the pillage and predatory exploitation of African economic resources by French and African political and economic elites, capital flight, corruption, mercenary expeditions, devastating wars (in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Biafra, and Côte d’Ivoire), election rigging, constitutional manipulation, and so on.<sup>43</sup> The Gbagbo camp was particularly distrustful toward Compaoré, who constituted, in their eyes, a major ideological obstacle to “a second” African independence from France.

When all has been said, however, and despite the uneasy position of the Burkinabè president, his involvement in the resolution of the Ivorian conflict was inevitable. Officially over 2.5 million Burkinabè were living in Côte d’Ivoire at the time of the conflict in 2001–2. He could therefore in no way be indifferent to the political situation of his country’s immediate neighbor, given how it affected the welfare of Burkinabè nationals. Moreover, as a landlocked country that depends on the port of Abidjan for its imports, Burkina Faso had a vested interest in the resumption of normal economic activities in Côte d’Ivoire. Incidentally, “Compaoré also happened to be the acting president of ECOWAS so that it was ‘natural’ that he should attempt to mediate between the different parties.”<sup>44</sup>

In these circumstances, an invitation through the official channels of ECOWAS made Compaoré’s involvement less problematic. Officially, President Gbagbo “submitted” a request to the rotating president of ECOWAS on

January 23, 2007, to “facilitate direct dialogue between former belligerents to the armed conflict of Côte d’Ivoire,” in accordance with UN Resolutions 1633 (2005) and 1721 (2006).<sup>45</sup> In reality, with the help of close collaborators such as Chafi, Compaoré could act as both a “personal” and an ECOWAS mediator, and he could rely on a range of both official and unofficial channels to carry out his mission. If, in theory, the objectives of the Compaoré mission were not that different from those of previous ECOWAS or UN missions, the tensions between the various heads of state that had been involved before him had a negative influence on the peace process. When Compaoré took over, his mission could be carried out unimpeded by potentially competing interpretations or interests.

### **THE OUAGADOUGOU PEACE AGREEMENT: A ROAD MAP OUT OF A CRISIS**

It is common knowledge that Blaise Compaoré heavily sponsored the Forces Nouvelles and gave them safe haven in Burkina Faso. The many villas in the new district of Ouaga 2000 that belong to members of the Forces Nouvelles are testimony to the ease with which the rebels were able to conduct their business unimpeded in Burkina Faso. Compaoré is said to have been involved in the “the planning, the organization, the provision of weapons and the funding of the Mouvement Patriotique de Côte d’Ivoire (MPCI) that later became the Forces Nouvelles (FN).”<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, for many, Compaoré was more than a financier and was, in fact, the political sponsor of the rebellion. For Laurent Gbagbo in particular, the Ivorian crisis was first and foremost “a bilateral problem between Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina,”<sup>47</sup> a “foreign terrorist attack” representing a conflict that could only ever be resolved through bilateral diplomacy. A meeting in Abuja in December 2006 provided an opportunity to Désiré Tagro, then Gbagbo’s interior minister, to approach Burkinabè officials with a suggestion that their president put his experience to good use by facilitating direct talks between warring parties.

This, arguably, was Gbagbo’s extension of an “invitation” to Compaoré to get involved. One can understand his reluctance to extend it, even though a pragmatic logic may have dictated he keep an enemy neighbor even closer by officially making him a stakeholder in the peace process. Already, Gbagbo had accused Burkinabè agents of being part of an attempt to stage a coup on January 7, 2001, an incident that sparked a series of violent attacks against

Burkinabè nationals and spurred mass flight into Burkina Faso.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, Compaoré was never a passive actor in the process, even before he was involved as a mediator. In the political economy of the Ivorian conflict management, his was very much a position of “*demandeur*”<sup>49</sup>— in other words, that of a proactive actor.

Gbagbo’s decision to invite Compaoré to facilitate the direct talks was an interesting move that runs counter to common arguments in the mediation literature about the imperative of impartiality in negotiation processes. In fact, it demonstrates that the policy on impartiality is rather untenable, as it does not sufficiently problematize the intersection of intent and interests with regard to the various stakeholders involved in any negotiation. It does not look very critically, either, at the link between the need for leverage and the nature of relations between stakeholders. The factors that determine a mediation mandate are, for instance, far from straightforward. In the case of Compaoré, there was an added political significance: more than any previous mediator, Compaoré’s entrance marked a significant ideological departure on the one hand and a methodological experiment on the other. He did not just “appear” out of nowhere. His shadow had all along obscured the various transactions for peace. The Ouaga talks gave real meaning to the idea of “direct talks” in a way that conveyed the converging motivations of actors involved.

The establishment of an office of facilitator tasked with enabling “the realization of the objectives contained in the [Ouaga] agreement”<sup>50</sup> and headed by a special representative, Boureima Badini, was crucial to the maintenance of close contact with the main stakeholders and to a methodical follow-up of the implementation process. For the work of the mediator was far from achieved with the signing of the Ouaga agreement. It was carried on throughout the following years, until all parties involved came to agree that the time was right for the organization of presidential elections. The special representative, serving between March 2007 and May 2012, operated like an after-sales service whose role was twofold. He was to bring the two main signatory parties, the presidential camp and the Forces Nouvelles, to agree on a consensual interpretation of the Ouaga agreement and commit to implementing its clauses. Given that Ouaga was the last of a long list of agreements, its implementation would determine the extent of success or failure. In addition, the special representative was to seek creative ways of including other political parties and civil society organizations in the peace process—hence the establishment of the CEA.<sup>51</sup>

Formal negotiations lasted roughly a month, between February 5 and March 3, 2007, although important behind-the-scene talks and dealings paved the way to the actual meetings in Ouaga. The specificity of the Ouaga agreement compared to previous meetings and agreements owed much to the personality of Compaoré, but also to the factors and circumstances that had repeatedly thwarted the implantation of key points of previous agreements: the process of identifying combatants, the demobilization and reinsertion of rebel armies into the national army, the organization of inclusive elections, the question of land, and so on. In fact, Compaoré stepped in as mediator at a time of great “crisis fatigue”; the Ivorian national economy was on the verge of paralysis, and ordinary Ivorians were starting to show signs of imminent revolt against warring parties.

There was also the fear that the conflict would drag on for many more years, with debilitating consequences for all involved. Compaoré took up his mandate in a situation in which successive mediators had been caught in instrumentalization strategies, often becoming either collateral damage or involuntary protagonists in a merciless struggle. From the very beginning, indeed, the Ivorian crisis was mired in its own intractability, with many conflict resolution strategies already exhausted at all levels of institutional representation—regional (ECOWAS), continental (the AU), and international (the UN, the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie [OIF], and the Community of Sant’ Egidio). Furthermore, the failure of regional organizations in the face of the parties’ intransigence called for a different mediation formula that was result-driven, rather than the successive “inclusive” frameworks marred by lengthy procedures.

## **INTERLOCUTOR, FACILITATOR, AND FORMULATOR**

Compaoré’s intervention in the Ivorian conflict can be conceptualized within changing mediation practices, especially in a global environment, where mediation processes have become increasingly politicized. Thinking about mediation in terms of intervention is conceptually useful, especially since the political crisis made Côte d’Ivoire a zone of intensive, multilevel interventions. In fact, from the date of expiration of Gbagbo’s term as president in 2005, Côte d’Ivoire was placed under UN tutelage and, so to speak, “on a drip,” as the overlapping jurisdiction and applicability of its national constitution and the effects of various UN Security Council resolutions demonstrated conflicting forms and levels of interference as well as political and legal confusion. This followed a persistent pattern of French interventionism

in Ivorian internal affairs, as exemplified by the Linas-Marcoussis agreement, which catalyzed anti-French sentiment in Côte d'Ivoire. Under such circumstances, Compaoré's "intervention," although received with mixed views given the Burkinabè president's position as both actor and arbitrator in addition to being a man of the West, elicited less animosity than one might have expected, for four reasons.

First, Gbagbo's contention that the Ivorian political crisis was a bilateral problem between Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso was not entirely unfounded. Compaoré's involvement was informed by a cost-benefit analysis, and the potential gains for the rebellion in the outcome of the negotiations equally served his interests as the rebels' mentor and possibly sponsor.

Second, as a facilitator, Compaoré was to bring the rebels to the negotiation table and make them amenable to the terms of compromise that required of them coresponsibility—that is, a change of mindset from a "rebellion mentality" to a more conventional posture. Crucially, the mediation allowed Compaoré to reassert and consolidate his leading role in the region through sheer political feat. He not only managed to convince the rebels to take a positive stance toward negotiation, but he also succeeded in convincing Gbagbo, a man who had always seen him as a dangerous manipulator, to agree to a set of pragmatic arrangements having to do with identification, demobilization, and the organization of open elections. Throughout the process, Compaoré had to tread on delicate ground, given the manner in which personal political interests and mediation objectives were intertwined.

Third, Compaoré operated at times as a "formulator." The rebels' dependence on him for support and on Burkina Faso for the material existence of the rebellion allowed him to exert considerable influence on their political vision. The formulator aspect of Compaoré's role was already salient during the Marcoussis talks in 2003 and, therefore, even before he became the official mediator in 2006–7. In flagging the question of land early in the process, Compaoré sought to initiate a multilevel approach to a question that concerned both Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina, given the important Burkinabè population working in the agricultural sector in Côte d'Ivoire. In this the personal and the national intersected in a striking manner. Compaoré also had every reason to work toward a political resolution that conceded power and resources to the rebellion. A "return on investment" for him would also translate into economic benefits for Burkina Faso.<sup>52</sup>

Finally, the Ouaga agreement was a sort of rebound from the infamous Marcoussis agreement. Many saw in some of Compaoré's strategies French remote piloting and influence.

## **A PECULIAR KIND OF SOVEREIGNTY**

For Compaoré to be able to negotiate the Ouagadougou Agreement successfully, he had to deploy the skills of an experienced mediator, but he also had to rely on his political resources, both in Côte d'Ivoire and the extended networks woven over the years across the region. One cannot underestimate the extent of political knowledge and networks at the disposal of someone many have come to regard as a godfather figure in West African politics. Trust was obviously a nagging issue, and its operationalization a recurrent dilemma for a facilitator already saddled with a controversial reputation. Compaoré's detractors contend that "his allies always win,"<sup>53</sup> as if his very mediation were part of a well-designed and carefully thought-out plan that stretched the logic of conflict into nonviolent, but equally coercive, means. But such views are not always helpful; they seem to suggest that his practice of mediation cannot be assessed as a distinct political practice on its own merit.

Nonetheless, Compaoré proved to be a persuasive mediator, for his facilitation enabled a relatively peaceful transition toward presidential elections in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010. His mission as facilitator did not end with the signing of the agreement. Countless meetings took place with the Cadre Permanent de Concertation (CPC), made up of the four key figures of the political conflict—the then incumbent Laurent Gbagbo (FPI), Guillaume Soro (Forces Nouvelles), Alassane Ouattara (RDR), and Konan Bedie (PDCI)—and the CEA, tasked with monitoring the implementation of the agreement as a permanent framework for the consolidation of national cohesion.<sup>54</sup> In many ways, Ouaga became a hub of deliberation on Ivorian politics, as it was now easy for nighttime visitors to seek openly the advice of the official facilitator. In fact, Hotel Laico (formerly the Libya Hotel), a five-star hotel built with Libyan investment, came to be something of a vibrant hangout for West African politicians, replacing the palace of Yamassoukouro under Houphouët.

At any rate, Compaoré's role went beyond balancing shifting power between Ivorian adversaries; it consisted of ensuring that the terms of the agreement became a framework for new approaches to building trust



and the practice of healthier partisan politics. In contrast to previous agreements, the parameters of the Ouaga political agreement enabled a transfer of “ownership” to key stakeholders. If Accra and Pretoria were to an extent merely mechanisms of implementation of the Linas-Marcoussis agreement, Ouaga enabled a face-to-face dialogue between the different protagonists with limited external interference.<sup>55</sup> The previous mediations, rather predictably, aimed at and resulted in a transitional split leadership. But Compaoré in a way achieved what others could secure only temporarily, that is, a “diplomatic neutralization” of the main adversaries—namely, the Gbagbo camp and the Forces Nouvelles.<sup>56</sup>

First, he convinced Guillaume Soro, the leader of the Forces Nouvelles, to recognize Laurent Gbagbo as president even if his electoral mandate had expired in October 2005 and despite the fact that he owed the extension of his mandate to a UN resolution. Soro, along with the nonarmed Ivorian opposition leaders, had rejected Gbagbo as a “resolution president” rather than a “constitutional president.” Second, the two parties were more willing after Ouaga not only to be more committed to a power-sharing arrangement but also to oversee the very implementation of identification, demobilization, and reintegration as part of national reconstruction.

How Blaise Compaoré managed to succeed where his predecessors had failed is a question open to many interpretations.<sup>57</sup> If often the “creation of leverage for effective mediation could be the result of remunerative, normative, and coercive bases of power, touted in a manner to discourage warfare,”<sup>58</sup> one could safely argue in the Ivorian case that Compaoré’s commitment to working alongside the main protagonists for a concerted solution to the crisis—even if this was to elicit frustration from a number of stakeholders—was as much a political necessity as it was the enactment of a particular capacity to innovate within conservative parameters. Crisis fatigue, combined with the erosion of popular support for continuous confrontation, certainly had something to do with that.

Compaoré’s style represented a meticulously deployed approach to conflict resolution, one that prioritizes a practice of dialogue that integrates the parameters of the political conflict. If many mediators tend to shy away from the risk of being sucked into often muddy domestic politics, Compaoré tended to model his approach to the contours of the political landscape. In fact, as the Ouagadougou negotiations proceeded, a particular ideological confrontation was taking place between Gbagbo and Compaoré as ultimately the key protagonists in a long, drawn-out battle concerning whether political



compromise could ultimately prevail over an ad hoc approach to the issues at hand.

The personalization of the mediation process, as evidenced by the form and content of key texts and conclusions, was most apparent in the Marcoussis (2003) and Ouaga (2007) agreements. In fact, despite being only a “guest” at the talks, Compaoré’s participation in Marcoussis was pivotal; he was instrumental in the inclusion of a special clause on land tenure reform. As mentioned above, the land question, so crucial to Burkina Faso because of the large proportion of Burkinabè living in Côte d’Ivoire, is as much an internal problem to Burkina as it is to Côte d’Ivoire. In fact, the massive return of Burkinabè migrants from Côte d’Ivoire had resulted in much pressure on land claims and subsequent political incidents that threatened to destabilize the Compaoré regime (e.g., a protest vote, urban riots, etc.).<sup>59</sup> Despite giving signs of a wide consultation of regional institutions (namely ECOWAS and the AU) and key and peripheral players, Compaoré mostly acted alone. He relied on a small but diligent team and network to run his mission. His minister of foreign affairs, Djibril Bassolé, was a key player throughout.

The example of Compaoré’s approach to the Ivorian mediation is useful in reframing the conceptual underpinning of the position and responsibilities of a mediator. Contrary to common practices, Compaoré’s understanding of political reform and peaceful transition in Côte d’Ivoire was transformative rather than conservative, and it was inscribed in a long-term strategy that kept him involved and depended upon beyond the signing of the Ouaga agreement. His position was a stark contrast to Mbeki’s insistence on supporting the “legitimate” (that is, elected) authority of Côte d’Ivoire. Compaoré’s personalized method was thus apparent in his capacity to deviate from the original logic of the mediation. Based on what some of the actors who had been involved in the mediation process are willing to concede, the two main parties seemingly were willing to rely on the continued arbitration of the facilitator to keep each other accountable with regard to implementation of the basic terms of the agreement. Compaoré’s political vision of a post-Ouaga framework was to be partly exercised through subsequent engagement. The facilitator, in person or through his permanent representative, was a sitting member of both the CPC and the CEA. It was expected, and agreed, that Compaoré would arbitrate in the event of divergence within the two committees on the interpretation of the Ouaga agreement.

Pecuniary benefits were not the only incentive or motivation for the various candidates to be mediators.<sup>60</sup> There is always something morally gratifying, for any president, in resolving a conflict. The mediation process was stalled several times because of rivalries and squabbles over regional leadership between Abdoulaye Wade on the one hand and Gnassingbé Eyadéma, Olusegun Obasanjo, and Bongo on the other. This denoted a first level of personalization, at which regional political actors with competing ambitions and interests vied for prominence and legitimacy in leading the peace talks. The petty competition was all the more detrimental as it stalled the peace process at the onset.

A second level of personalization was obvious in the overlapping of interest and mandate in the case of Compaoré. While the connection between actors' personal interests and their mandates may go counter to key principles of successful mediation—namely, the requirement of *neutrality* and *impartiality*—this paper has tried to argue that the Burkinabè mediation was relatively successful precisely because the concern for neutrality and impartiality stopped being an overarching principle once Compaoré, largely perceived as party to the conflict, was called upon to facilitate direct talks.

There is, therefore, a need to reconceptualize the element of *bias*, as not always nor necessarily constituting an impediment to a “successful” mediation, as has generally been argued in the literature, but as something that can be factored constructively into resolution models. As Kwesi Aning contends, when international peace negotiations become part of national politics, they become a possible means for political struggle over different economic and political goals involving domestic, regional, and international actors with particular interests in the outcome of a given conflict situation.<sup>61</sup>

Evidence from the Ivorian case points to an important fact: a mediation process is never autonomous and impartial, but rather the partial translation of distinct ambitions and interests and sometimes serious tensions between domestic and international politics. The Ivorian conflict resolution ultimately is a classic example of neighbors being called in to mediate conflicts. Here, the “science” of mediation as the deployment of well-structured strategies and methods is put to test as “rational” and tested models find their limits.

## CONCLUSION

An appreciation of mediation processes based on the peculiar trajectory of Blaise Compaoré points to the evolution of principles, norms, and practices

of mediation diplomacy from a set of standardized models and strategies of conflict resolution to a personalized enterprise. The efficacy of mediation missions often relies on a balanced combination of contingency and context, both of which can be superseded or overwritten by particular personal approaches that tend to confirm one key aspect: that nothing is random about these processes. If Compaoré's stature is without doubt that of a pivotal actor in West African politics, the strength of his credibility depends on whom you ask. Compaoré did not, however, enter the fray of the Ivorian mediation process as a complete stranger. His ambiguous position as neighbor, actor, stakeholder, and facilitator accorded him key insights, which were fully deployed in his task to persuade the parties to the conflict to take the opportunity for peace rather than continue a draining and costly war.

The degree of personalization of the negotiation process meant that the facilitator's agenda heavily shaped the conditions and the outcome of the talks. If, in the end, the Ouaga agreement merely became a script for the management of a temporary and artificially maintained stability, this was in keeping with an increasing tendency for actors involved in peace processes, at the national, regional, and international levels, to rely on the organization of elections as the goal of mediation and an ultimate enforcement strategy.

## NOTES

1. This paper is part of a research project on mediation in West Africa generously funded by the African Peacebuilding Network and the Social Science Research Council. I would like to thank Dr. Cyril Obi and his team for their dedication to supporting research excellence on the continent.

2. The Linas-Marcoussis talks were the very first formal mediation attempt convened by the French president Jacques Chirac in Linas-Marcoussis (France) from January 15 to 23, 2003. The roundtable talks gathered the main Ivorian stakeholders under facilitation of the UN, the AU, and ECOWAS.

3. Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies aux Droits de l'Homme, "Rapport de la Commission d'enquête sur les événements liés à la marche prévue le 25 mars 2004 à Abidjan," May 13, 2004; "Le nouveau racisme: La manipulation politique de l'ethnicité en Côte d'Ivoire," *Human Rights Watch Report* 13, no. 6 (August 2001).

4. S. Ellis and G. Ter Haar, "Religion and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 2 (1998): 197.

5. Interview with B. Kessy, Abidjan, January 2013.

6. United Nations, *Summary Report along with Observations by the Chairman on the Exploratory Hearing on Sierra Leone Diamonds (31 July and 1 August 2000)*, UN S/2000/1150, New York, December 4, 2000.

7. United Nations, *Final Report of the UN Panel of Experts on Violations of Security Council Sanctions against UNITA (The "Fowler Report")*, UN S/2000/203, March 10, 2000. See also the letter dated March 10, 2000, from the chairman of the Security Council committee established pursuant to resolution 864 (1993) concerning the situation in Angola, addressed to the president of the Security Council. The report mentions testimonies that made allegations about gifts of diamonds and other personal payments made to Blaise Compaoré by Jonas Savimbi, the leader of UNITA. Savimbi is also said to have helped Compaoré fund his political campaigns and the Burkinabè government to meet its financial obligations.

8. Louise Arbour, also former prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia and for Rwanda, published an opinion piece in the *Herald Tribune*; Louise Arbour, "Keeping West Africa Stable," *International Herald Tribune*, November 27, 2009. Taylor is said to have had a house in Burkina Faso and his name in the country's telephone directory until recently, just the same way that Sierra RUF and the Ivorian Forces Nouvelles had their headquarters in Ouagadougou; see Francis Kpatindé's interview on RFI by Christophe Champin, "Compaoré a été le pompier-pyromane de la région," July 31, 2014. See also "Blaise Compaoré: La salve de Louise Arbour," *Survie*, January 15, 2010, <http://survie.org/billets-d-afrique/2010/187-janvier-2010/article/blaise-compaore-la-salve-de-louise> [accessed on November 29, 2014].

9. Craig Whitlock, "U.S. Expands Secret Intelligence Operations in Africa," *Washington Post*, June 13, 2012, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-expands-secret-intelligence-operations-in-africa/2012/06/13/gJQAHyAbV\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-expands-secret-intelligence-operations-in-africa/2012/06/13/gJQAHyAbV_story.html). The official reason for increased US military presence in Burkina Faso was "medical evacuation and logistics requirements," although critics saw the establishment of American military sites in Burkina Faso and the latter's surrender to genetically modified cotton (grown by Monsanto) as part of Compaoré's strategies to remain in the good books of his Western allies. The October 2014 street protests that toppled him, however, prove the limits of external support as a substitute for internal legitimacy.

10. See Tirhankar Chanda, "C comme Compaoré: Abécédaire d'un président déchu," RFI, October 30, 2014, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20141028-burkina-faso-blaise-compaore-revision-constitution-article-37-sankara-mediateur-norbert-zongo-cdp/> [accessed November 30, 2014], for a very useful overview of Compaoré's political biography.

11. UN Human Rights Committee, "Pacte international relatif aux droits civils et politiques," Communication No. 1159/2003, CCPR/C/86/D/1159/2003, 2003. The committee examined fundamental questions that pertained to the absence of a public enquiry, of judicial proceedings following the assassination; inhuman treatment; lack of correction of Sankara's death certificate (it stated that Sankara died of natural causes); denial of justice; principle of equality of arms; right for one to be heard by an independent and impartial court within reasonable deadlines; right to personal security of the person; and discrimination on the basis of political opinion.

12. Chanda, "C comme Compaoré."

13. The legal conundrum around Article 37 is due to a practice of tinkering that first resulted in the disappearance of the clause "(term) renewable once" in the constitution of the "corrective period" adopted by referendum on June 2, 1991. Following quasi-insurrectional protest in the aftermath of the murder of Norbert Zongo, however, Compaoré agreed to both a reduction of the president's term in office, from seven to five years, and a limitation of the terms to two. The April 11, 2000, constitution that allowed the changes was not applied retroactively, though. As a result, the new law only applied to the 2005 elections on.

14. See Kpatindé interview.

15. However, most of the rebels he allegedly supported were suspected of having a pied-à-terre in Ouagadougou.

16. In the limited and carefully staged interviews he has agreed to grant on the question of his mediation activities, Compaoré speaks of a moral mission as a Christian and concerned neighbor devoted to building peace in the region. Something of a self-styled persona emerges from his own depiction of his mediation career, and there is something relentless about the manner in which he has undergone a redemptive transformation from a turbulent activist to a senior advisor.

17. Compaoré has indicated in interviews that he is solely motivated by his Christian faith and obligation to cultivate peace and work toward its restoration whenever it has been breached, especially when his neighbors have needed his assistance. In his many interventions in mainstream media and different forums, Compaoré has succeeded in deflecting recurrent questions about his ambiguous positions in mediation missions, tending to displace his political activism to the terrain of the much abhorred "Françafrique," whereas in reality, the transactions of a mediator have weighed more heavily at times on the political balance than external pressures.

18. International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso: Avec ou sans Compaoré, le temps des incertitudes*, Rapport Afrique No. 205, July 2013.

19. This line of argument is usefully developed by Jonathan Fisher in "Managing Donor Perceptions: Contextualizing Uganda's 2007 Intervention in Somalia," *African Affairs* 111, no. 444 (2012): 404–23.

20. Thabo Mbeki was criticized for conceding tremendous prerogatives to the presidential camp in the interpretation and implementation of the Pretoria agreements. He was therefore accused of "reinforcing the divide between the protagonists instead of bringing them together." Francis Akindès, "South African Mediation in the Ivorian Crisis," in *Africa's Peacemaker? Lessons from South African Conflict Mediation*, ed. K. Shilling (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2009), 143.

21. Francis Akindès, "Racines des crises socio-politiques en Côte d'Ivoire et sens de l'histoire," paper presented at the Conference on Identity, Security and the Negotiation of

National Belonging in West Africa: Reflections on the Crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, CODESRIA and the Nordic Africa Institute, Dakar, May 15–16, 2003.

22. See Cutolo for an insightful analysis of the intersection of *ivoirité*, modernity, liberalism, and citizenship in Côte d'Ivoire; Amando Cutolo, "Modernity, Autochthony and the Ivorian Nation: The End of a Century in Côte d'Ivoire," *Africa* 80, no. 4 (2010): 527–52.

23. Gilbert Khadiagala, "South Africa's Role in Conflict Resolution in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)," in Shilling, ed., *Africa's Peacemaker?*, 71.

24. Thanks to Mbeki's active diplomacy in Côte d'Ivoire, South African companies were able to secure contracts in cell phones, public transportation, and car dealerships. There were also rumors of an arms deal despite the embargo imposed on the Gbagbo government.

25. I. William Zartman, "Inter-African Negotiations and Reforming Political Order," in *Africa in World Politics: Reforming Political Order*, ed. Donald Rothchild and John W. Harbeson (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), 222.

26. Ibid.

27. Interview with Boureima Badini, Ouagadougou, January 2013.

28. Interview with Boureima Badini, Ouagadougou, January 2013.

29. International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso*, 23.

30. Members of the office are said to have benefited from the mission. The daughter of the permanent representative was, for instance, awarded mining concessions in Côte d'Ivoire.

31. Interview with A. Arnold, January 2013.

32. Richard Banégas, "Côte d'Ivoire: Une guerre de la seconde indépendance? Refonder la coopération française sur les brisées du legs colonial," *Fonds D'analyse des Sociétés Politiques* 2 (2006): 197–251.

33. See Didier Depry, "Prétendu survol de l'espace aérien burkinabé par les avions de combat ivoirien, des officiers des FANCI réagissent: 'Les autorités burkinabè ont des hallucinations,'" *Notre Voie* (Abidjan), July 6, 2004, [http://www.africanindependent.com/ci\\_burkina\\_hostilites.html](http://www.africanindependent.com/ci_burkina_hostilites.html).

34. Barthelemey Kouamé, "Le Burkina proteste auprès de l'Union africaine contre des violations de son espace aérien par des appareils en provenance de Côte d'Ivoire," *Fraternité Matin* (Abidjan), July 5, 2004, [http://www.africanindependent.com/ci\\_burkina\\_hostilites.html](http://www.africanindependent.com/ci_burkina_hostilites.html); Kigbafory Inza, "Survol du territoire burkinabé par des avions militaires des FANCI: Gbagbo veut internationaliser le conflit ivoirien," *Le Patriote* (Abidjan), July 6, 2004, [http://www.africanindependent.com/ci\\_burkina\\_hostilites.html](http://www.africanindependent.com/ci_burkina_hostilites.html).

35. I owe this point to one anonymous reviewer.

36. See Fabienne Pompey, "Les hommes de l'ombre," *Jeune Afrique*, November 30, 2009.
37. Interview with Boureima Badini, Ouagadougou, January 2013.
38. Colin Freeman, "Meet President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso," *Telegraph*, November 17, 2012.
39. Damien Glez, "Compaoré, le chouchou émancipé de Kadhafi," *Slate Afrique*, 2011, <http://www.slateafrique.com/2657/burkina-faso-compaore-le-chouchou-emancipe-de-kadhafi> [accessed November 28, 2014]. The Libyan Arab Foreign Bank (LAFB) owned 50 percent of the Burkina Commercial Bank.
40. Ibid.
41. Vincent Hugué, "Sahel: Les secrets d'un sauveur d'otages," *L'Express*, March 10, 2013.
42. Bruno Jafré, "Le Burkina Faso, pilier de la 'Françafrique,'" *Le Monde Diplomatique*, January 2010.
43. The Françafrique has endured despite a changing economic environment that has brought new partners with no colonial ties to Africa. For a comprehensive overview, see Fédération Survie, "Exposé pédagogique de la politique Française en Afrique," February 2004.
44. Interview with PD, March 2013.
45. PDCI-RDA Communiqué, "Dialogue direct: Accord politique de Ouagadougou," March 2007; UN, Déclaration du Président du Conseil de Sécurité des Nations Unies, New York, March 27, 2007/S/2007/144.
46. International Crisis Group, *Côte d'Ivoire: Faut-il croire à l'Accord de Ouagadougou*, Rapport Afrique No. 127 (Dakar, Senegal: ICG, 2007), 5.
47. Interview with a Burkinabè journalist, Ouagadougou, January 7, 2013. (Most of my interviewees, especially Burkinabè journalists, wished to remain anonymous; even if there is relative freedom of speech in Burkina, many think one still has to be careful about what one says in public.) During the years 2001 and 2002, there were many attempts to ease tensions between the two countries following a series of incidents, as well as hostile declarations on both sides about their neighbors' designs to destabilize them. Following the sequestration of the Burkinabè ambassador on July 11, 2001, in Abidjan, Ouagadougou recalled him on July 30 as a protest against Abidjan's inadequate response to the incident.
48. UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Côte d'Ivoire*, S/2003/374, March 26, 2003.
49. Interview with ONUCI official, Abidjan, January 2013.

50. Also Office of the Special Representative; interview, Burkinabè journalist, Ouagadougou, January 2013.

51. Interview with Boureima Badini, Ouagadougou, January 2013.

52. During the conflict, the rebellion used Burkina Faso to export resources, such as cocoa. In fact, the vice president of the National Association of Farmers Organizations of Côte d'Ivoire (ANOPACI) accused Burkina Faso and Mali of exporting cocoa illegally, for neither country was a producer; see Panapress, "Burkina Faso, Mali Accused of Exporting Ivorian Cocoa," June 3, 2004, <http://www.panapress.com/Burkina-Faso,-Mali-accused-of-exporting-ivorian-cocoa--13-548213-17-lang1-index.html> (accessed on November 28, 2014).

53. Interview with A. Arnold, Abidjan, January 2013.

54. M. Pépé, "Blaise Compaoré arrive aujourd'hui a Yamassoukouro," *Fraternité Matin*, March 8, 2008.

55. Interview with Burkinabè official, Ouaga, January 2013.

56. See International Crisis Group, *Cote d'Ivoire: Faut-il croire à l'Accord*.

57. The idea that the Ouaga agreement was a success is obviously open to debate. If nothing else, the disastrous 2010 elections, the results of which had to be militarily enforced to oust Gbagbo, proved that the mediation merely consolidated a standoff and provided a semblance of stability so that elections could be organized as an ultimate instrument of conflict resolution.

58. Kwesi Aning, "Healer or Hegemon? Assessing Perceptions of South Africa's Role and Motivation in African Mediation," in Shilling, ed., *Africa's Peacemaker?*, 57.

59. One Burkinabè minister accused the diaspora of being behind riots and mutinies in Burkina Faso in 2011. The power of both Compaoré (who ran from his presidential palace) and Gbagbo (April 2011) was threatened by destabilization.

60. Although in the case of Compaoré, the accumulated gains of the various missions were probably quite substantial.

61. Aning, "Healer or Hegemon?," 60.



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