

# Youth's game-playing in Ivorian Public Space: Involving the Youth of Street Dialogue Spaces in Politics

## Introduction

Abidjan folks were awakened, one April morning of 1990, by hordes of young people booing the President of the Republic and chanting *Houphouët thief! Houphouët thief!* In primary schools, the younger ones followed close on the heels of their elders holding up slates where you could read *Houphouët thief! No school! We are hungry!* (Baulin 2000:136). The same year, the Zouglou established itself across Côte d'Ivoire as a challenging and protest music. In 2002, in northern Côte d'Ivoire, the rebels of Côte d'Ivoire Patriotic Movement (MPCI) are led by Soro Kigbofori Guillaume who was deemed by many Ivorian socio-political observers as too young to assume such a responsibility. But he will even reach higher by becoming the head of the Ivorian Government in 2007. In Abidjan, Douk Saga and his friends from the Jet Set launched in 2003 the 'Coupé-décalé' to 'Save Côte d'Ivoire'.

These were the forerunning signs of the youth's growing influence in the Ivorian public space over the past few years. And the purpose of this article is to determine the modes of the youth's intervention in politics. Through observations and interviews, it purports to determine the participation of young people with reference to Street Dialogue Spaces (SDSs) which have emerged in Côte d'Ivoire since the 80s. The survey covers all active spaces on either side of the two borders, separating the government-controlled zone from the rebel-controlled one. Remember that the military and political conflict that erupted on September 19, 2002 split the country into two: the South controlled by loyalist forces or Defence and Security Forces (FDS) and the North held by the Rebellion or Armed Forces of the New Forces (FAFN).

## The Youth in Ivorian Politics

The Ivorian public space is gradually brought to life by a new category of actors: the youth of street dialogue spaces. Who are they? Where do you find them and why?

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## The Youth of Street Dialogue Spaces in Ivorian Public Space

The Ivorian Youth, Education and Sports Ministry defined as youth anybody between 18 to 35 age range (INS 1998), considered a period in one's life half-way between childhood and adulthood. According to some authors, the youth biological age is limited to all individuals under 25 years (Wrzesińska 1995:65). Others believe, however, that it is difficult to set limits based on rigid biological criteria since the youth also show concern for political, economic, social and cultural considerations (Mbembe 1991, Comaroff 2000). The vision of the youth is that of a complex reality, though in this article the limits are arbitrarily set around 25 to 40 age range.

Street dialogue spaces are where young individuals meet to critically look at the latest developments in political events. These debates most often take place, as they are described, next to public places and involve actors whose actions have an impact on the Ivorian socio-political life. In these places where opinions are expressed and formed, they read about events through the prism of their conflicting convictions. In most cases, the debates are led by jobless and unmarried young men living in the popular suburbs of Abidjan (Yopougon, Abobo, Koumassi). "Agoras and parliaments" take the form of political meetings led by orators who attract audiences in the hundreds and even thousands. On the other hand, "Grins" are groups (discreet and more limited in number) of people who assemble around a tea pot boiling on a charcoal stove; the tea party is very often accompanied by the consumption of meat and peanuts.

SDSs surfaced in Côte d'Ivoire during the 80s. The first one to be formally identified is the "Sorbonne" located in the Plateau

district of Abidjan. To determine, historically this space is tantamount to being interested in the public space concept in Côte d'Ivoire. To Leimdorfer, the concept refers to both a physical and symbolic space shared by a variety of actors and whose access and multifarious uses are guaranteed by a power (State, President, ministries, municipalities, ethnic communities) (Leimdorfer 1999:53). From a Habermasian perspective, public space is this intermediate sphere, this half-way between the State and the Civil Society, which was formed during the Lumières era and in which public opinion is built through dialogue (Habermas 1997:38-40). But in Wolton's view, public space cannot be proclaimed (Wolton 2000:222). Opening public space to different expressions of opinions does not suffice to create a public space. Aghi Bahi sees the "Sorbonne" as one of the non-bourgeois places of birth of public space (Bahi 2003:7). This public space is where different religious, economic, social, cultural and political actors aggregate although mutually opposed by historically situated values.

Bourdieu developed his space theory to explain attitude diversity and mobility. He divided space into "fields". These fields are for example art, sport, literature, politics, etc. with a hierarchical relationship (Bourdieu 1980). Space building is the way you represent hierarchical structures between different fields, within the latter. Space is not granted. It is the product of a construction based on a multitude of objective power relations forced upon all actors involved in a field, regardless of their mutual perceptions and intentions. Power relations are forged according to different categories and quantities of power or "capital". Thus, one will find in SDSs economic capital (in its different forms), cultural capital (education, vocational and general training, taste, sensation, music, etc.) and symbolic capital (prestige, reputation, fame, honours, etc.). The political field includes all political institutions, that is, the State, the other public communities and several actors who are hard to identify (Maugenest 2005).

The political field takes on in these places a combat form to ensure a legitimate perception of the social world. The purpose here is to conquer – through space reconstruction – the power to form groups or categories with their characteristics and properties, whether good or bad. The effective production of social groups (re)categorised by these actors is aimed at maintaining or modifying hierarchical positions between fields – political, economic, cultural, social, etc., denying access to certain groups – stigmatised ones – , certain fields and/or restricting to certain groups the potential benefits that certain fields might generate. Even though, by their activities, SDSs are interested in culture, sport, etc., they have focused more on the political field where they have really captured much attention.

### In Crises Maelstrom: Inventing Street Dialogue Spaces

SDSs appeared in a context of deep social changes, as socio-professional mobility narrowed for the youth. During the period from 1980 to 1990, Côte d'Ivoire plunged into a cycle of economic recession, the causes of which are linked to both external and internal factors. Indeed, falling prices of raw materials on international markets, oil shocks, drought, over indebtedness resulting from state investments<sup>1</sup> (for the sake of prestige and non profitable in some cases) and public finance mismanagement can be held as the key causes of the crisis.

The Ivorian economy which mostly relies on export cash crops was destabilised by the deteriorating terms of raw materials trading. Recourse to foreign investments, too limited internal savings and insufficient crop diversification are some of the factors making Côte d'Ivoire unable to resist the collapse of coffee and cocoa prices as from 1978. Subsequently, external debt increased fourfold between 1975 and 1979. Adding to this huge debt were balance of payment and budgetary deficits which represented 17.4 per cent and 11.9 per cent of GDP respectively. Côte d'Ivoire had no choice but to turn to the Bretton-Woods institutions for a first Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which was implemented over the 1981-1983 period, followed by two other SAPs in 1983 and 1986 (Akindès 2000). With these programmes, it was required of the

country to reduce spending and raise earnings; these conditionalities affected mostly city dwellers and particularly the youth, a vulnerable component of the population.

The SAPs led to an increase in urban transport fares, oil prices, water and electricity bills as well as food commodity prices. The prices went spiralling while there was a freeze on salaries paid in the civil service, and many state-controlled companies were shut down. Concurrently, between 1980 and 1984, per capita GDP plummeted by 26.2 per cent. In 1984, recruitments by the civil service were reduced, restricting young graduates' access to employment in this sector or in State-owned companies while also contracting the number of scholarships granted to university and secondary school students. The hardships of daily life reflected by this set of indicators will result in the emergence of what Ivorians termed "conjoncture" (current economic situation) to describe the country's deteriorating economic situation in comparison to the previous era.

It was in the context of the economic crisis of the 80s that the Abidjan-based "Sorbonne" came into being. Old "Philo"<sup>2</sup> and other Ivorian job seekers used to meet in the public squares of Abidjan business centre to "kill time" and criticise President Houphouët Boigny's management of the country until they can find a job. In 2002, it was not until dissension appeared between the "Sorbonne" leaders that this space split into 3 blocs. The first bloc made up of "Agoras and Parliaments" are close to the ruling party, the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) while the second bloc is led by young followers who identify with the opposition ideologies, notably the party of former Prime Minister, Alassane Dramane Ouattara, known as the Rally of the Republicans (RDR) (Théroux-Bénoni and Bahi 2005:9-12). Lastly, the third bloc to appear on the Ivorian scene lately captured the spaces of the rebellion-controlled zone which identified with its ideology (Silué 2006). The most famous of them is the "Senate" based in Bouaké, a city hosting the main administrative services of the Ivorian Rebellion. Street dialogue spaces have rallied behind political parties or organisations whose ultimate goal is to rule the country. Beyond what may be described as rapprochement or inter-connec-

tion with the political sphere, the youth of these spaces have (re)invented a new culture.

### Youth's Game-playing in Politics

SDSs are close to political parties or organisations with ties to them. These spaces have enriched public space by inventing new practices.

### In the Heart of the Violence: Street Education

SDSs have contributed to a general street culture, emerging in spaces forsaken to structural violence. Erupting at the borderline of this many-sided violence (Biaya 2000), new forms of social practices have become to be known as 'standing parliaments' in Kinshasa, DRC and 'Grins' in Mali, Burkina-Faso and other sub-Saharan countries (Kieffer 2006). Long disappointed by the failed promises made by the leaders, young people have invented ways of exteriorising their feelings and frustrations somewhere in-between the confines of legality and illegality, of what is permissible and forbidden.

SDSs have appeared in this context as alternative places for education and training. The names they give themselves tell us a lot on this educational project. "Grins" is one of the names covered by a generic term like "University of Free Time" (UTL)<sup>3</sup> while "Agoras and Parliaments" are referred to as "Open Sky University" with a faculty of political science" (Bahi 2003:4). Identity building is reflected here in a symbolic that turns streets into amphitheatres where "teachers" teach classes to students and also with key "Lab work".<sup>4</sup> The orators of "Agoras and Parliaments" and "Senate" called *professors* display their knowledge and language skills in front of audiences who carry along sometime their pens and writing pads to take notes.

"Grins" look like African traditional societies who operate on the principles (respect for elders, abnegation and discipline) governing relationship between elder and younger generations. Roles (the most visible being *Kôrô* and *dôgô*)<sup>5</sup> have not been formally systematised in a written document. But they have become established with time, and failure to abide by this organisation carries sanctions ranging from fines to chores being imposed upon someone or someone be-

ing banned in the worst case. “Kôro is an incarnation of wisdom. He behaves irreproachably in the moral sense. He is a model for his behaviour that everyone admires” (Silué 2006). The youngest or *dôgô* are assigned to preparing and serving tea. And of course, they are also in charge of buying sugar and tea at meal time.

SDSs are alternative education places offering the youth category new possibilities for knowledge building. The documents on sale in the “Agoras and Parliaments” and the “Senate” contribute to youth intellectual enrichment and prepare them for accessing political city state. This political socialisation also trains the youth in oral (speaking in public), discussion and debate skills. Not surprisingly the “Sorbonne” slogan is “words of mouth, words of mouth only” while the “Grins” slogan is *akilisso*,<sup>6</sup> so to put the focus on the major role of discourse practices in these spaces.

Citizenship commitment has also been strongly inculcated in the actors of SDSs. Unfolding alongside the republican values preached are debates allowing citizens to reflect, in their own way, on the future of their country. This commitment at times is ground for nationalist sentiment or collective fears against a real or imaginary enemy. “Agoras and Parliaments” describe France and the United Nations Organisation (UNO) as having instigated the September 19, 2002 war in Côte d’Ivoire (Banégas 2006, Marshall 2005). The “Grins” and the “Senate” do not trust the ruling party and its affiliate press (Théroux-Bénoni et Bahi 2005, Silué 2006).

#### A Safety Net: Inventing New Solidarity Ties

SDSs have emerged as places for building solidarity ties. In an environment where you have to be resourceful, these spaces operate as structures that fill the gaps for weak integration institutions such as the family. SDSs have become part of the social organisation of the suburbs. Initially a meeting place for young, secondary school goers or drop-outs, they have gradually turned into refuges as members grow older.

This community is a foster family where members are educated. Street dialogue space is a place for socialisation or a continuation of traditional organisation model

founded on the principles governing intergenerational relationship (Kieffer 2006:70). The new family structure reproduced relies on values such as brotherhood and solidarity. All the members know one another to the extent that individual qualities, defects and tastes are no secret to anyone of them. Members’ union ties are also strengthened through sports and other socio-cultural activities.

During protests, this solidarity can quickly turn into herd instinct, not only between individuals, but between organisations as well. Thus, when a structure organises an activity, the others throw their energies into it to make the project a success. This solidarity operates between blocs. For instance, when a meeting is organised by the “Powerful Abobo Conference” (TPCA), the orators of other spaces like the “Sorbonne” provide support either by taking the floor or adding to the human resources. The vitality of the solidarity tie is the best life insurance in Ivorian politics because it is indicative of mobilisation capacity. The rapprochement between political leaders and street dialogue spaces can be explained in part by the latter’s capacity to mobilise large crowds during inter-party power tests.

Presumably, it was the saturation of the solidarity tie between members of SDSs, as they came into contact with the political world, that turned them into a militia in the Duverger sense. That is to say organisations with military attributes (“security” services or departments, salutes, uniforms, drills and military languages) or in some cases, creation of armed militia as is currently the case of Pastor Gammi, head of *Mouvement Ivoirien de Libération de l’Ouest de la Côte d’Ivoire (MILOCI)* and orator at the Abidjan-based “Sorbonne”. Others like Maguy le Tocard, orator at the “Sorbonne”, also operate a militia. Willy Djimi, orator at one of the Parliament of the popular suburb of Yopougon and a regularly registered sociology graduate student at the University of Cocody in Abidjan is also a chief militiaman. Trained in commando techniques, these men are mobilised to ensure security during “Agoras and Parliaments” demonstrations. The “Grins” and the “Senate” also have their security operatives who are deployed to “protect” members of the parties they are close to.

#### Street Dialogue Spaces as Political Ideology Dissemination Instruments

The history of street dialogue spaces in Côte d’Ivoire has clearly shown that at a given time of their evolution, they gave in to political temptation. Originally, the first space known as the “Sorbonne” showed interest in all topical subjects (economics, health, agriculture, etc.); the process of political exploitation actually started in 1999 under President Guéi Robert’s administration. In 2002, war eruption led to the birth of blocs and inter-bloc war. Aware of the advantage they can reap from SDSs, political leaders moved closer and closer to them. As an immediate consequence of that move, SDSs were transformed into political ideology dissemination medium.

The actors of SDSs are in some ways political actors. They take far-reaching political decisions and make their voices heard by those who have been officially proclaimed political leaders as per their positions. As such, their political legitimacy has been acknowledged and accepted by all. Based on this legitimacy, they can take positions regarding the events taking place on the Ivorian political scene. On the other hand, despite the fact that they have no official recognition as a political organisation, SDSs operate with their self-proclaimed. This is because these organisations position themselves at the heart of the political game, especially through their close ties to political parties. With the eruption of the war, the *Congrès National de Résistance pour la Démocratie (CNRD)*, a coalition of all political parties with close ties to the presidential movement, has a membership including the *Fédération Nationale des Agoras et Parlements de Côte d’Ivoire (FENAAPCI)* and the *Fédération Nationale des Orateurs des Parlements et Agoras de Côte d’Ivoire (FENOPACI)*. Ideology is propagated in three ways. Young people open their spaces to politicians for meetings. To maintain themselves in activity, the spaces in turn approach politicians. Other factors facilitating ideology propagation include actors’ mobility (through the communes) especially orators, emotion building and speech writing with political leaders (Silué 2007). Finally, Youth’s interconnections with political actors pave the way for them to convert political capital into socio-economic capital.

### At the Heart of the Political Game: Between Resourcefulness and Vote-catching

Since 1990, Côte d'Ivoire has been witnessing an extreme politicisation of individual interrelations. Any event quickly takes a public and political turn. Company workers' strike, student movements etc. are all turned into a 'presidential matter'. Political parties are increasing in number with their influence over the management of public affairs. In this game, SDS youth most of whom are out of jobs exchange their political capital for advantages and services from political leaders. Indeed:

In this country, the only people who do not feel the impact of economic crisis are the politicians; they have access to all services. If you want to be successful, you'd better get closer to them.<sup>7</sup>

Young SDS actors are quite aware of the fact that they are using their political positioning to bargain for their socio-professional integration. There is a flow of services and gifts between the youth and political leaders.

Youth are responsible for resource mobilisation, which covers organisation of meetings between the political party youth and their leaders, preparing (bus seeking, distribution of T-shirts, flyers and other activist gadgets, sale of gadgets, etc.) the audiences for the leaders by preceding them to highly strategic spots, warming up meetings and power tests (punitive operations against turncoats or opponents, marching or picket line, intimidation, etc.) In exchange for these services, SDSs youth have access to privileges that range from conservation of their spaces, obtaining cash or privileges to getting a job. The FENAAPCI President is a student in tax administration at the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA)*, many of the "Parliament" orators have been employed since 2008 by the Abidjan Port Authority (*PAA*). Many others have entered the police training school and other departments of public administration. In its June 17, 2005 issue, the *Courrier d'Abidjan* newspaper wrote in this connection that:

The President of Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI), Pascal Affi N'Guessan, was about to offer a lot of equipments to the National Federation of Ivorian Agoras and Parliament (FENAAPCI), led by Idriss Ouattara (...). According

to our sources, FPI President's support to Agoras and Parliaments – fifty in number – located across the entire Ivorian territory, will consist in donating practical equipments. That is to say tools that "Parliamentarians" need in discharging their activities. These include indeed many megaphones, loud speakers, complete sound equipment, benches, tarpaulins, etc., which orators and the public need during debates. (...) In reality, the FPI President's tour to explain the crisis in the Agoras and Parliaments of Abidjan at crisis peak was in response to the grievances of these places leadership.<sup>8</sup>

In the "Grins" and the "Senate", underlying the political struggle is economic logic. When you integrate a dialogue space, your purpose is to tap any economic resources that are likely to improve your difficult social condition. Thus, for a member:

With the on-going crisis, the Grin generates hope for economic integration because it allows you to build a small network of relations, and when you are in perfect control, you can then win bids, contracts or get a petty job [K. 15 September, 2006].

The oratorical contest market is favourable to "Parliaments" and "Senate" orators all the more so as it tends to become professionalised. At the "Sorbonne", these orators make a daily FCFA 15,000 to 20,000 not to mention the small "occasional treats" which they receive from those who invited them. These are meals with a menu made of grilled fish or meat, a spicy soup and attiéké served with beverages. This festive atmosphere is palpable since the announcement of future presidential elections for November 29, 2009. The counterpart for exchanging with the youth is their mobilisation capacity served by new information and communication technologies (NICTs).

### Space Domination Through Control of NICTs

NICTs have deeply modified the operation of SDSs. Between 1980 and 2009, spaces re-appropriated the modern communication media appearing in Côte d'Ivoire. Traditional media like radios were mobilised according to their political inclination. In 'Parliaments and Agoras', the opposition press and international media are perceived as 'collaborators' of the

Rebellion. *Radio France Internationale (RFI)* fell victim of this suspicious feeling to the extent that it was called *Radio Rubbish International*. On the other hand, in the "Grins" and the "Senate", international media such as RFI, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Africa N° 1 and Voice of America (VOA) were praised because they were deemed more credible and impartial.

Web resources top the list of instruments used to prepare speeches for SDS actors. Information on topical issues is tapped from it. Hours are spent in cyber cafés downloading onto electronic and flash discs a data base on issues of interest to them.

The freedom to communicate can at times give you an edge. In Côte d'Ivoire, the coup d'Etat of December 24, 1999 was coordinated through a cell phone (Kieffer 2000:28). The young insurgents used their cell phones to convey orders on the management of this military action. Soro Kigbafori Guillaume used a satellite phone to coordinate the coup d'Etat of September 19, 2002 (Soro 2005:85), and Charles Blé Goudé, leader of COJEP also used his cell phone during the November 2004 events (Blé 2006:110).

Cell phone is used as a device to mobilise collective actions. It allows fast and secure communication of watchwords on the ground. One official of this space explained to us how messages are circulated through the cell phone:

When there is an urgent message to convey, General Blé Goudé calls Richard, yes they are not together. Now, he is the one calling the different officials to convey watchwords to the different Parliaments and Agoras of Côte d'Ivoire. Thus, when you reach an individual, you are in touch with the whole structure. Anyway, cell phone is an essential tool for us [G. 6 May, 2006].

While those surveyed were unable to exactly quantify the number of message dispatches, texting has, however, become fully integrated in the communication mechanism of SDSs. And yet, the frequency of texting varies according to what is happening on the political scene. In a crisis period, texting is used more intensively.

We regularly exchange messages. But when there is a movement, that is to

say, when political activity is tense, texting is used more frequently. When you have a CFAF 1,000 credit recharge, it may be exhausted in less than an hour. The credit recharge is quickly exhausted but texting is done also faster [K., member of Sorbonne, May 6, 2006].

Texting also acts as a security device for the young people because the parties involved can discreetly send and receive messages (Martin 2007:107; Journet 2007:28). This feature is particularly appreciated as it allows them to communicate rapidly in crisis situations without drawing the attention of their surroundings. The concern for security by those involved justifies the coded language used in communicational transactions. A form of writing only known to, and shared by, members of these spaces was even devised. The language was created and maintained in order to protect the identity of some people and the confidential nature of some so-called strategic pieces of information. The confidential nature of messages has led them to create a "sacred" form of writing, in other words, a written language only known to a few. Texting uses a language level which very often does not follow the writing standards of the French language.

In the 1980s, NICTs invasion of Africa (Chénau-Loquay 2003:122) brought the Ivorian youth under the influence of video clubs.<sup>9</sup> When CDs, VCDs and DVDs emerged on the market in 2000, political actors finally had an opportunity to go into film production. Because not all political leaders' speeches could reach the population since the latter cannot follow them in their tours, CDs and CD-ROMs were thus recorded by SDSs notably the "Sorbonne" and other leaders of the patriotic galaxy. These media are then sold at the "Sorbonne" at a rebate (between CFAF 500 and 1000).

Space control through NICTs deployment is indicative of the youth's attempt to control the future. They finally see them as a way of projecting themselves into a bright future in which they have full control over current threats and opportunities. Space here is plural, fragmented, informal, deregulated with little weights allocated to time management and matter. The manipulations derived from the use of cell phones, Ipods and computers have given birth to a *homo electrus*, gifted with

such skills as will allow him/her to dominate his/her space and subject it through his/her imposition of standards. When the space produced by the youth tries to become formalised, to establish its identity and standard, social elders look at it with circumspection. It becomes suspicious. Elders see through the visible cracks left by the youth what they suspect to be an invention of a new protean sub-culture and a new idea generating order the confusing and defuse outlines of which are both fascinating and scary.

### Reinventing Youth Culture

SDSs mirror a microcosm of Ivorian political circles. They are the forewarning signs of the emergence of new forms of sociability.

### Producing New Success Figures

SDSs contribute to the process of city state production by the youth. Between resourcefulness and violence, they have invented new forms of sociability to circumvent or break the rules preventing them from expressing themselves. The youth's use of violence in politics is a way of giving vent to the resentments linked to the structural violence (unemployment, school dysfunctions, weak social networks, etc.) with which they have to cope every single day. One of their answers to the situation is another form of violence through mass protest, pirating intellectual properties, marches, strikes, physical and/or oral confrontations between these spaces and the armed forces (police, gendarmes, etc.) on the one hand, and between the spaces themselves, on the other. When cornered after dialogue failed with their elder city state managers, they then use force out of anger. Thus, nowadays when they want to be listened to, outbreaks of violence operate as collective catharsis through which they can exteriorise their long contained frustrations.

Violence further appears as a resource, a tool with which the youth can acquire political power. By the use of force, they make their way to power by penetrating the entire social fabric. The emerging new political figures are reinforcing this feeling of self-development and self-assertion. Soro Kigbafori Guillaume, Charles Blé Goudé and Karamoko Yayoro are the new success figures. Many young people are making their way into politics alongside

several football players who have settled in the wastelands of Abidjan and other cities in the countryside.

The youth have many integration options: business creation or enrolling as a member of a political leader support club or a political party, a militia or Rebellion member and, in the case of educated youth, enrolling as an activist of the *Fédération Etudiante et Scolaire de Côte d'Ivoire (FESCI)*; each of the Rebellion and "Senate" youth wants to become a Ouattara Issiaka nicknamed "Wattao", an adulated rebel chief admired by the youth. The dream of almost all FESCI members<sup>10</sup> is to follow similar path as most of their elders who now hold influential positions on the Ivorian political stage. The life story of their elders is quite revealing from this perspective. From the first FESCI secretary general (Ahipeaud Martial, who later became a teacher and scholar at the Department of History of the University of Bouaké) to the latest official (Serges Koffi), all former unionists of this movement have created organisations with close ties to political leaders or have been directly employed by them. In this connection, Damana Adia Pikas, former N° 2 of FESCI from 1995 to 1998 and current special adviser to FPI president (Affi N'Guessan) in charge of political matters and a Home Ministry official, working as a civil administrator, an assistant to the managing director of Local Decentralisation and Development (DGDDL) hammered out:

The Côte d'Ivoire of to-morrow will be led by the FESCI generation. (...) It's a matter of the Fescist spirit and system and not of individuals.<sup>11</sup>

All the former union leaders have a life story which directly or indirectly fascinates the youth. According to the youth, these successes are the result of their own personal efforts. Thus,

Contrary to the independence generation, a time of a one-party system and single thought of the day, today while sons bear their fathers' name, they are also and mostly the ones who now reveal their parents, make them known to the public at large.. (...) From a generation of "Daddies' sons", Côte d'Ivoire has shifted to "Sons' daddies". (...) Our generation is a generation of young women and men, who are forging their own destiny and who,

like a river, are making their own bed. A generation of self-made men who does not wait for their choices and tastes to be dictated to them; they know that *No hay camino, se hace camino al andar* / There is no clear path to follow, you have to walk the path and make way (Blé 2009: 50-51).

Juvenile sub-culture (re)production is a reflection of self-destructive, self-reproducing and self-reinventing body policies in a conflicting environment with an ever-changing accumulation market. Bodies appear as a field where consensual and sometimes conflicting logics criss-cross. The resulting divergences turn those bodies into a battlefield, an arena in which young people are fighting each other and against the elders. The space created is thus used as a tool for thought and action as well as control and domination (Lefebvre 2000:35). It is also a body producing place. This new "envelop" becomes a tool for building new identities that are likely to facilitate integration into new spaces. These new lives operate as inter-generational moderating factors. One is witnessing body mobility in space.

Turned into a Foucauldian bio power, the youth body is the seat of delivery power. This power should be understood to mean the ability, in the face of constraint and domination logics, to transform one's body into a socio-economic capital. This capital is transferred to places where indeed the capacities to tilt towards the youth part or all of one's identity-building can be demonstrated. The struggle for power conquest abolishes moral and educational limits and opts instead for body techniques by learning specific and, even, violent practices. The individual reinvents himself/herself by giving a new meaning to the use of his/her body and, hence, of reproduction techniques as a whole (Mauss 1950:383). The body is also a mediating vehicle for integration, success and fame values. Youth movements across different socio-cultural contexts is part of a vast body techniques "project" which aggregates several imagi-nations embedded in often conflicting social-economic logics.

### High Tech Generation

The current generation of SDSs members is a cross section of the Ivorian youth as a whole. An increasing number of them own a cell phone, communicate through

the Web, CDs and DVDs. More recently, Ipods have become part of SDSs' practices. These devices are used as vehicles for broadcasting ideologies and have given birth to new practices, notably in creating new communication codes. A new way of communicating which is not respectful of traditional writing standards has come into being through texting, "Bips" and "MMS".

This language infringement is a creation in Michel de Certeau's sense (1990) since the actors or these young people have invented a new use not provided for in the cell phone operators' project. This diversion of use hinges on the flexibility of a concise writing mode which, contrary to Desjeux's argument (2005), is not that simple. The writing named *texto* is all the more complex, as it reflects the emergence of new juvenile identities in a technology-saturated consumer society. The appropriation inroads made through texting, Bluetooth and Bip are the forewarning signs of new ways of reappropriating these new objects that participate in the creation of youth-type lifestyle.

### The Informal Persists

All the measures taken to end CD and DVD sales in these spaces notably their matrix, the "Sorbonne", failed. To some extent, the installation and development of informal transactions in the trade, cultural and pharmaceutical sectors have been facilitated by these spaces. Medication and pirated music CDs are on display for sale side by side. Worse still, everyone goes shopping in those places: the police, gendarmes, the military, priests, nuns, pastors, civil servants, the jobless, pupils, students, senior citizens, etc. Cyber crimes are encouraged through acts of CD piracy. Between May and June, 2009, there was this case of "A secretary who was sleeping with her boss in the Plateau district" which, once again, prompted debate on piracy at the "Sorbonne". A porno video of about 15 minutes featuring a woman and her head of department' hit newspaper headlines in Côte d'Ivoire, and the CD was on sale at the "Sorbonne" for CFAF 1000 or was accessible via Bluetooth on cell phones at a cost of CFAF 500. The scandal was devastating and made the population uncomfortable, as they felt compassion for the woman whose face could be seen on the footage and not that of her part-

ner. In order to end the spiralling distribution of the video, the police carried out a sting operation at the "Sorbonne" to destroy the embarrassing CDs. But as always, this video continues to be sold at the "Sorbonne"; informal activity in its multiple forms is thus encouraged by this space which also resists conventional economy by evading all controls.

The development of informal sector is also facilitated through the exploitation of the spaces hosting SDSs. Their illegal settling on private and state-owned spaces is also cause for dispute with the municipal authorities of the places where SDSs carry on their activities. Some crises were also linked to the commercial activities taking place there. Public space is acquired through the imposition of trademarks and counter trademarks followed by appropriation; public space is thus no longer a shared space because stakes are involved; it becomes then more of a territory to be conquered or defended.

The way the "Sorbonne" occupies and conserves the space where "Sorbonnards" and "Sorbonnians" carry on activities resulted in some power tests between the "Sorbonne", the Plateau Municipality and the Ivorian Copyrights Office (BURIDA). The wasteland where the TPCA conference participants<sup>12</sup> meet is disputed with two entities: an economic agent and the municipality. Between June and July 2004, a dispute erupted between conference participants and this economic agent resulting in the destruction of the building being constructed on this space.

The mode of space acquisition and conservation is indicative of a redefinition of street uses by the actors. These are territories whose appropriation, control and defence constitute socio-political stakes. They are also highly reactive and mobilising spaces in which forms of approval or protest can erupt. The latent or violent clashes linked to the management of SDS spaces are part of the general difficulties posed by urban space management in Côte d'Ivoire. Very strong pressures are exerted on urban real estate followed by extreme land speculation; yet, not so long ago, land was a non-transferable goods. Housing projects for civil servants, private sector employees or simply private ones soon turn urban space into a Gruyere cheese at the mercy of greedy new urbanites caught in the vertigo of an ill-controlled development.

Besides, the incursion of discursive sex practices reveals a close link between politics and sex. In *sex city*, politics gives access to economic resources, which in turn pave the way for sexual resources; in short, fill the stomach and access the groin. The link between sex and political power is undeniable (Toulabor 1992). "Indeed, pleasure and power are not mutually neutralising; they do not turn against each other; they run after each other, overlap and restart. They interweave through complex and positive, exciting and incentive mechanisms" (Foucault 1976:66-67).

### Street Dialogue Spaces, an Alternative Exchange Mechanism

SDSs are alternative means of communication between the people and the authorities but also between the populations themselves. The debates initiated in these spaces at times forces leaders to express their positions on those issues. They act here as polling stations established not only to sound or rather "listen" to the street but mostly to provide an answer to the questions and fears of an audience under various influences. The challenge is to test one's opinion on unfolding events (Champagne 1990:215). The populations encourage exchanges in order to have good visibility and perfect legibility of current political affairs. This is a sort of "bottom up" politics that they are instigating. The individual, notably a youngster originating from a popular suburb, can through those spaces, speak directly or indirectly to the authorities who were inaccessible by their origins and functions.

On the other hand, SDSs allow citizens to exchange among themselves on matters of the city state. Despite the threat of a single thought pattern in these spaces and their replication in different blocs, the truth is that SDSs operate as windows through which individuals can express themselves in the public space. But in the face of political censoring, rumour mongering offers the population an opportunity to exchange information and powers on the ruling power. The emergence and propagation of rumours create a game space to challenge the ruling order and contribute to the strategies deployed by social actors for adjusting forms of expressions of claims and discontent. The SDSs phenomenon is one of these spontaneous and popular modes of intervention in politics in Côte d'Ivoire and some

African countries. Information comes to plug a need for information and training (Nyamnjoh 2005:218).

### Conclusion

At the initiative of the youth, SDSs appeared in Côte d'Ivoire in 1980, in the context of a socio-economic crisis. Appearing initially in a general format as the "Sorbonne", it today operates as three different blocs. SDSs have interconnections with political spheres. As a result, the intrigues taking place in those spheres are taken over by the streets. "Agoras and Parliaments" bring together young people with close ties to the ruling party, the FPI. The "Grins" identify with the RDR's message while the "Senate" subscribes to the Rebellion's ideology.

Integrated in the communication mechanism of parties and political organisations to which they have ties, SDSs contribute to the building and activity of public space, in general, and political sphere in particular. They participate in the propagation of the political ideologies of the parties they support. They open their spaces for the organisation of public meetings or debates and jointly prepare speeches with politicians while moving from one space to another "campaigning" for their candidates.

SDSs operate as alternative means of communication with the social fabric as a whole. By their practice of violence, NICT re-appropriation, strategies implemented to facilitate their integration in the job market, based on their political positioning and building of new identities, SDSs represent alternative places of expression. Behind the wall of occasional deviant behaviours, new forms of political participation, a different world vision filled with technological applications are being foreshadowed. Politics is an instrument, a means of social positioning (Tessy 1992:259, Coulibaly 2002) in a public space where mobility is restricted for most of the younger population. They are "places of resistance" where there are opportunities for citizens from the poorest social strata or the so called "lower than low" to force exchange with the leaders or so called "top of the top" on the management of the city state's affairs. For, while decision-making is for leaders a game in which they can make mistakes and make "adjustments" later on, remember they are putting here human lives on the line. And

in the vanguard of these new forms of resistance and expression are the youth with new ideas and acting as vehicles for complex new ideologies. As they resist being confined to a socially thinking mould, these ideas have given rise to suspicions.

### Notes

1. The cocoa rice paid to the producer decreased from CFAF 400 per kg to CFAF 250 then to CFAF 200 in 1990.
2. He is said to be the n°1 orator at the Abidjan-based "Sorbonne".
3. *Fraternité-Matin* newspaper, N° 13293 dated Tuesday 3rd March, 2009.
4. "Lab work" refers to the practical exercises taught to students.
5. In the Mandinka language *Kôrô* means elder and *Dôgô* younger brother.
6. Means "Temple of Knowledge", a think tank in the Mandinka language.
7. Statement by Mrs Constance Yaï, former Minister and women's rights activist in Côte d'Ivoire.
8. *Le Courrier d'Abidjan* newspaper dated 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2005.
9. *Fraternité Matin* newspaper n° 93 71 dated 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1996
10. Name given to FESCI militants.
11. *L'Inter* newspaper, N° 3013 dated Friday 30<sup>th</sup> May, 2008.
12. Name given to all those who carry on activities on the space: orators, traders, the curious, etc.

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## Statism, Youth and Civic Imagination

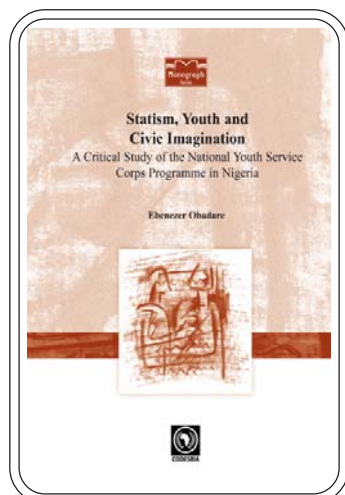
*A Critical Study of the National Youth Service Corps Programme in Nigeria*

**Ebenezer Obadare**

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This study explores the service–citizenship nexus in Nigeria, using the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme as an empirical backdrop. It attempts to understand the relationship between civic service and citizenship on the one hand, and it examines the question as to whether youth service promotes a sense of citizenship and patriotism on the other. In the relevant studies on service and sociology, the assumption that service is antecedent to, and impacts positively on citizenship, is taken for granted. The study articulates allegiance to national ideals as an essential foundation for creating and nurturing citizenship.