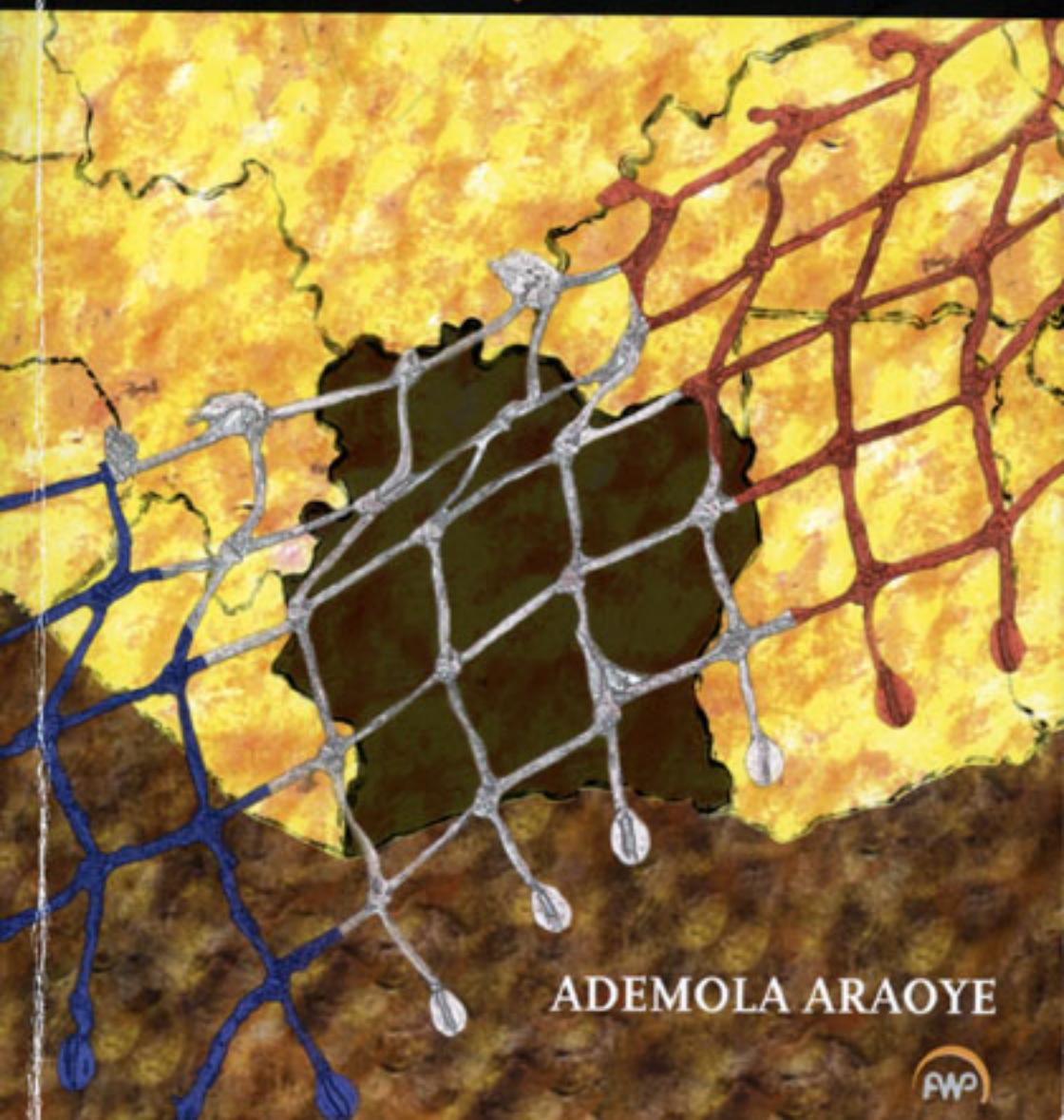


CÔTE D'IVOIRE

The Conundrum of a Still

Wretched of the Earth



ADEMOLA ARAOYE





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⌘ FOREWORD ⌘

**THE INEPTITUDE OF AN AFRICAN
BOURGEOISIE AND THE MENACE OF
FRENCH IMPERIALISM:
THE DISINTEGRATION OF A
POSTCOLONIAL AFRICAN STATE**

by Ntongela Masilela

Côte d'Ivoire: The Conundrum of the Still Wretched of the Earth is a historical sociological analysis of the tragic consequences of neo-colonialist practices of French imperialism in a particular postcolonial African state: in this instance Côte d'Ivoire. The deleterious effects of the stranglehold of French imperial domination on its former African colonies has arguably exceeded those of other European imperial powers, be it British or German or Spanish or Portuguese. Although the French 'decolonized' its imperial possessions in Africa in a seemingly 'rational process', the former Portuguese colonies of Mozambique, Guineau-Bissau and Cape Verde, and Angola in being forced to wage an armed revolutionary struggle were able more effectively to uproot Portuguese cultural imperialism than their counterparts in Francophone Africa, in spite of the postcolonial crises they subsequently encountered. French colonialism in Africa has been the most disastrous as Frantz Fanon prophetically postulated in his political masterpiece: *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961 [1965]). The French fostered the most virulent virus of ineptitude on the national bourgeoisie that inherited a neo-colonial state from their machinations.

The concrete manifestation of the devastation of French imperialism in Africa was evident in May 2010 when President Nicolas Sarkozy visited Kigali and spent about two days apologizing to the Rwandan people and to President Paul Kagame for France's culpability in the Rwanda Genocide of 1994. One has to wonder at the motive for this since France has waited nearly seventeen years to officially acknowledge its partial guilt in this tragedy. It would seem that the real motive for the visit, which was not accompanied by any elaborate official diplomatic protocols, was to persuade President Kagame to reverse his decision taken a year before the visit to replace French with the English language as the official language of Rwanda! The French are absolutely imperial in the belief in the sacrosanct nature of the French language and its supposed superiority over any other language. One wonders whether Frantz Fanon would have been surprised by France's descent into this utter catastrophic Inferno given its abominable acts against the Algerian people during the Algerian Revolution.

Ademola Araoye traces the genesis and the metamorphoses of the failure and ineptitude of the African bourgeoisie in facilitating a progressive and correct political practice in accordance with the newly emergent democratic interests of the *new history* of the postcolonial African state, as Fanon predicted would be the case if the African middle class was more intent on following the instructions dictated by European and American imperialism rather than listening to the national will of its own people remaking themselves in line with the imperatives of *modern* national experience. In support of Fanon prophetic powers of analysis, Ademola Araoye undertakes a sociological, demographic, historical and political study of the multifarious processes that have brought about the ruination of many national projects in Africa using Côte d'Ivoire as a classical example.

From the moment of his assumption of the presidency of Côte d'Ivoire in 1960 to his death in 1993 Félix Houphouët-Boigny located state power of the nation among his own Baulé ethnic group largely based in the southern part of the country rather than decentralizing it throughout the national territory. In order to make its location hegemonic and safeguard its durability through many decades, he aligned himself with the international dictates of French imperialism. With prescience at the very beginning of the history of the postcolonial African state, Fanon had seen this political atomization of the nation as one of the fundamental failures of political imagination of African leadership and the middle class. As was the case in other postcolonial African states, the death of Houphouët-Boigny triggered the historical de-legitimization of the ethnic nature of state power if not its class composition.

While the regime of Houphouët-Boigny was misruling the country its demographic structure underwent a seismic change as immigrants from other countries came in enticed by its economic success. Undertaking a remarkable sociological analysis of the structural transfiguration, if not transformation, and the attendant political consequences that followed leading to the disintegration of the state and the Civil War that ensued, Ademola Araoye in the early chapters of the book untangles with precision and acuteness at a conceptual level the contradictions and complexities that delimited the topographical nature of state power and consequently fractured the national territory.

Concentrating on the instance of Côte d'Ivoire, with a purview that it was a phenomenon prevalent in many other postcolonial African states, Ademola Araoye formulates riveting themes, one or two of which will be enumerated here. First, the relative political and economic stability of the Houphouët-Boigny era was simultaneous with the slow disintegration of the state that was seemingly invisible but with the death of the benign dictator it became visible to every Ivorian. The crisis of the postcolonial African state in this particular instance took a distinct form when Ivorian national consciousness could no longer accept as a historical given the unity of *nationality* (ethnicity) and *citizenship*. The fracturing that ensued was not only national but also regional practically engulfing all domains of social: party affiliations, familial relationships, ethnic identities, class allegiances, religious alignments, and so on. The claim to historical belongingness was fractured in a multiplicity of ways. As his *forte*, untangling the many consequences or effects of this contradiction or antinomy or binary, Ademola Araoye writes some very suggestive sentences:

Against the backdrop of the social construction of the state defined by the structural alignments of traditional sovereign entities within that state, the concept of foreign had two connotations. The first was related to having origins outside the neo-political territorial demarcation that had acquired a sovereign status, while the second referred to non-membership of an ethnic community bounded by its traditional territory. Yet, a counterpoise to this is that membership also implied having origins within the newly demarcated space or belonging to one of the sixty five traditional communities represented in the newly bounded political space irrespective of origins in a specific territorial location that is outside the frontiers of the new geo-political space now identified as a state. An insider, in one sense, could be an outsider and an outsider, in the other sense, an insider . . . The nation building project was essentially a process of alienating and decon-

structing existing identities, allegiances that were based on entrenched demarcations of traditional territorial spaces. This project demanded first of all defining parameters of citizenship that essentially sought to alienate historical and traditional affinities that bound people within their ethnic communities together. The citizens of the new state possessed overlapping and competing loyalties. Their stronger loyalty was to the traditional ethnic communities. (p. 26-27).

Continuing on this thought, he further writes:

In this manner, the concept of nationality often clashes with the imperatives of traditional allegiances and institutions and the perceived need to maintain the character of the locale as an ancestral home of a people. Without the land and its control, the center will not hold for the group and may lead to social destitution. Given the disequilibrating impact of demographic transformation in these traditional communities, the rural land tenure system became a highly emotive political subject and one of the major contentions of the Ivorian crisis . . . As such, the main divide in the Ivorian conflict is between those who perceive themselves as nationalists and those who appear to be seeking to enlarge the Ivorian citizenship laws to accommodate many more "new" entrants as bona fide citizens of the country. In this divide, the protagonists have sought to cultivate allies in the sub region based on cultural and religious affinities. Yet, the domestic process is heavily mediated by the overwhelming influence of France, which has dictated the direction in which the crisis has evolved and largely determined perceptions of the legitimacy of policy pursued by the various protagonists by the international community. (p. 29-31).

The contradictory relation between nationality and citizenship was at the center of the collapse of the Ivorian postcolonial state. This led to the division of the country into two parts, each with its own state apparatus and governmental machinery claiming to represent the best interests of all Ivorians.

Although a large narrative of the book interweaves interrelated themes such as the machinations of French imperialism in Ivorian state crisis with the purpose of thwarting the re-unification of the country on the basis of progressive nationalist edicts, the role of various Accords seeking to formulate a political process through which the contending political parties could come into an agreement, organizations and factions could come to an agreeable understanding of the best way to

reconstitute a new Ivorian statehood and nationhood, the contentions of various regional governments be it Malian or Liberian or Guinean or Ghanaian especially Burkinabé to have their national interests in the Ivorian crisis be given priority over all the others, the second theme that deserves primary mention in this Foreword is the emergence of a new kind of *African political leadership* in the post Mandela era.

The new kind African political leadership to emerge from the still evolving Ivorian political crisis is exemplified by the brilliant acumen of Laurent Gbagbo. He embodies a new conception of African *nationalist leadership*. This is immediately apparent in Laurent Gbagbo's unambiguous demarcation of Ivorian national interests from those of French imperialism in the form of neo-colonial interests. It may be that that Gbagbo represents a new form of African nationalism that has emerged in these early years of the twenty-first century. Page after page of Ademola Araoye's lucid and objective analysis of the principal political actors of the Ivorian state and national crisis, he emerges again and again as a man of vision who embodies Ivorian *democratic* national interests. Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* did define some of the qualities and characteristics that should be at the center of such political leadership: not only does it militate against the emergence of a personality cult, it avoids the catastrophic consequence of replacing the party system with a personality cult; it is permanently or constantly vigilant in defense of national interests against imperial machinations; it gives primacy to the interests of the most dispossessed classes in the definition and articulation of the national will; though recognizing the historical necessity of nationalism, it gives primacy to the development of national consciousness; tribalism is one of its primary enemies; it instinctively knows the dangers of racial philosophies and the exacerbation of religious differences. In the pre-Mandela era, African political leaders such as Mwalimu Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, Modibo Keita in Mali, Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, Samora Machel in Mozambique, and Ahmed Ben Bella in Algeria were the very paragons of these qualities.

One of the revealing and enlightening things about *Côte d'Ivoire: The Conundrum of the Still Wretched of the Earth* is the remarkable *political intelligence* and *political courage* that Laurent Gbagbo possesses. In Chapter 3: France in the Ivorian Conflict, Ademola Araoye writes the following:

As would be shown later, the Ivorian crisis coincided with the loss of many lucrative contract awards by French companies owned by powerful French political families operating in that country. In the past, those contracts automatically went to

these French companies on terms often dictated by them. In the least, given threats to its long term economic interests, France had a motive to remove the Laurent Gbagbo government. The Laurent Gbagbo administration had not only veered too far on a radical course that threatened economic, political and cultural underpinnings of Franco-Ivorian relations, its policies undermined the political fortunes of a whole generation of Ivorian political actors who had ridden on the coattails of Houphouët-Boigny, and his Franco-centric worldview, to national relevance and prominence. Their continued relevance in the post Boigny era rested on dislodging the new nationalist force that had emerged so forcefully following the policy failure France in Côte d'Ivoire since the death of Houphouët-Boigny. (p. 109).

In Chapter 4: The Pretoria Accord, the Ouagadougou Political Agreement and the Breaking of the Ivorian Logjam Ademola Araoye shows the *intellectual foresightedness* of the man in tandem with his political intelligence:

A confluence of factors prepared the grounds for the signing of the Ouagadougou Peace Accord (OPA) on 26 March, 2007. These factors included the transformed attitudes of President Laurent Gbagbo of Côte d'Ivoire and his Burkinabé homologue, President Blaise Compaoré, after six years of stalemate and mutual antagonism, frustration with the failure of international mediation on the part of all Ivorian stakeholders, from the Ivorian presidency and the Forces Nouvelles to civil society organizations as well as across the spectrum of political forces, and perceived political exploitation of the impasse by the G7-the Houphouëtistes- allies of the Forces Nouvelles. For many Ivorians, in particular those trapped behind the zone of confidence in Forces Nouvelles controlled areas, ending the rebellion was directly related to terminating the intolerable situation of daily deprivations on bread and butter issues. These constituted immediate pressures on all stakeholders in the crisis. The intellectual affinity between South Africa President Thabo Mbeki and President Laurent Gbagbo contributed immensely to the dramatic breakthrough on the political contentions achieved in the Pretoria process. The African Renaissance deployed as a paradigm of action would appear to have provided a compass that directed Thabo Mbeki's approach to the mediation. (p. 134).

In Chapter 5: The Transformed Context of the Ivorian Crisis Ademola Araoye demonstrates the *political courage* of the man in making excruciating concessions in the best interests of the nation:

The movement toward the proposed 29 November 2009 elections was taking place against the background of radically evolved internal and external contexts to the Ivorian crisis. Internally, the realignments among key actors and stakeholders that had taken place, in particular following the signing of the Ouagadougou Political Agreement, had transformed the character of the Ivorian crisis. The former major antagonists, the former armed rebellion, the Forces Nouvelles, and the presidency of Laurent Gbagbo, had come to certain understandings and were working together to achieve peace. With the assumption of the office of Prime Minister by Guillaume Soro, Secretary General of the Forces Nouvelles, the Forces Nouvelles and the Laurent Gbagbo presidency now constituted the state. The non armed political opposition parties were now confronted with the state partly constituted by their former ally, the Forces Nouvelles, and their former principal opponent, the Laurent Gbagbo administration. The two originally armed protagonists in the conflict were now on one side of the Ivorian divide, while the non armed political actors now constituted the core of the opposition against this transformed state. The dividing line in the transformed Ivorian crisis in October 2009 was between the armed protagonists on one side and non armed political opposition against the state on the other side. *In effect, the Ivorian crisis had transformed itself from an armed confrontation to a political one.* These were the immediate consequences of the direct negotiations that had culminated in the signing of the Ouagadougou Political Agreement. The smooth evolution of the Ouagadougou Political Agreement process and a strong rapprochement in bilateral relations between President Laurent Gbagbo and Burkinabé President Blaise Compaoré had helped the latter in consolidating perceptions of the legitimacy of his regime domestically. (p. 158, italics in the original).

In Chapter 6: The Ghosts of Linas-Marcousis and the Presidential Elections, Ademola Araoye reveals the *political decisiveness* of Laurent Gbagbo in dissolving the Independent Electoral Commission when it was discovered that its Chairman had tried fraudulently to insert 429,000 persons into the electoral register thereby illegally tipping the scales against the political faction of Laurent Gbagbo:

The consequence of this was the decision of President Laurent Gbagbo to dissolve the Government and the Commission. The response of the opposition was to mobilize its partisans with clear battle order to deploy all means possible to dislodge the president from office. The political engagement of the opposition in public and on the streets became violent and its discourse truculent, while appealing mainly to the international community to seek to delegitimize the Laurent Gbagbo presidency. The state responded to the violence of the opposition that seemed to be spiraling out of control with a deadly force that led to fatalities of young partisans of the Houphouëtiste opposition. The opposition political leaders railed against the presidential camp and the persons of President Laurent Gbagbo. (p. 214).

This resolute decision of Laurent Gbagbo to safeguard the integrity of the national elections resulted not only in the postponement of elections within a matter of weeks of their scheduled happening which had already been postponed many times in the preceding three years for one reason or another, but also in the outbreak of street violence which he had to quell through military force which resulted in some deaths. Bringing his narrative to a close, Ademola Araoye concludes:

The President was also precise in reiterating that the new government's priority was solely to conduct of elections to exit the country from its crisis. The twenty eight member government was inaugurated on 26 February with seventeen portfolios filled. The eleven ministerial offices reserved for the opposition remained vacant as its members refused to take their places. After many days of further negotiations with Prime Minister Guillaume Soro, the eleven cabinet members entered the government on the fourth of March, 2010. The first meeting of the complete cabinet was held under the chairmanship of President Laurent Gbagbo the same day. Earlier, the spokesperson of the presidency had read the presidential decree setting up the government and also announced the formation of the government and the portfolios of its members. The take off of the government represented a major step in the normalization of the political process interrupted by the dissolution of the government and the CEI [Independent Electoral Commission]. Many challenges remained to be overcome in order to reach the goal of the exit elections that was the sole objective of the new government. (p. 246).

The continuing crisis of the Ivorian postcolonial state is that the country has not been able to hold *credible* national democratic elections for over a decade. Paradoxically, this excruciating crisis has given rise to an exemplary visionary African political leadership of Laurent Gbagbo which is characterized by uncommon moral rectitude forged under the most trying circumstances.

The continual postponement of national elections in the country across several years eventually came to end with first round of elections held on 31 October 2010 and the second round between the former Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara coming from the predominantly Muslim part of the country in the north and President Laurent Gbagbo coming the Christian majority in the south were held approximately a month later on 28 November. The election results immediately became contentious with United States imperial hegemon, the French imperial power and the European Union, supported by African states like Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Togo, Mali, declared Ouattara the winner, and progressive African countries who had undergone a national liberation struggle of one kind or another such as Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and South Africa declared Laurent Gbagbo the winner. Several issues representing the conflictive intersection of global imperatives and national interests need to be indicated here. First, in the aforementioned Chapter 6: The Ghosts of Linas-Marcousis and the Presidential Elections, Ademola Araoye shows through forensic and systematic analysis that continual postponement of the elections was due to the Muslim north of the country attempting one irregularity after another in the effort to rig the national elections. The postponement of the elections was wholly due to the undemocratic machinations of the Ouattara forces. Second, this chapter superbly calibrates the divisions within the postcolonial African state between the progressive nationalist forces in the mode Gbagbo and the retrogressive reactionary forces represented by Ouattara. The fact that the United States imperial hegemon and French neo-colonialism have vested their interests with Ouattara speaks for itself. What is clear is that Ouattara represents the resurgence of French neo-colonial interests in Côte d'Ivoire which Gbagbo had held in check and frustrated. The imposition of Ouattara is a revamping of the tragedy that visited Africa in the 1960s in the form of Houphouët-Boigny and Moïse Tshombe. It was the secret military forces of United States and France which ousted Gbagbo in black forces. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* has not exhausted its historical lessons in our postmodern times in the era of globalization.

The Epilogue: Still the Struggle of the Wretched of the Earth, poses a critical question to African people, especially to African intellectuals: was the election of Barack Obama on 4 November 2008 as the first African American president or the first black president a negative or positive thing regarding the fundamental interests of Africa? One thing in this context that should not be forgotten is that in his Victory Speech or Acceptance Speech at Grant Park in Chicago, which in effect was his first address to the world, made one point unambiguously clear: he would defend American imperial interests by any means necessary to the point of killing those who would oppose them, albeit veiled in a diplomatic language. One thing that can be said for him is that he is a man of absolute integrity and endowed with enormous intelligence. One thing that turns always in Barack Obama's favor is that when one believes that one is not underestimating his indomitability it seems always that one has inadvertently done so. Through Barack Obama, for the first time in history in truly a real sense, has emerged a challenging historical question: though there are symmetries in the interests of African Americans and Africans as black people given historical oppression and domination, when do they irreconcilably diverge from each other given the *singularity* of our political histories as Africans and African Americans. This gravitational unity and disunity is largely determined by American imperial hegemony, in all its wide implication, America political power and militarism. These for the first time have been embodied in a black person supported by the majority of white Americans and endorsed by the American ruling class given that he reflects the latter's values given his Harvard University pedigree.

The *Epilogue* tabulates the far-reaching dire consequences effected by the intervention of United States imperial hegemon and by the French neo-imperial military force (in the guise of black 'freedom fighters') with these conceptual observations: the refusal of a particular segment of the international community led by France to allow 'Ivorian democratic institutions to adjudicate' the political crisis and constitutional impasse; the debilitating contemptuous attitude of these two imperial entities towards the continental leadership of the African Union which led to its weakening; the subordination of Ivorian constitutionalism to the dictates of United States and French militarism; the construction of a 'condition sanitaire' around Africa by Western countries to prevent the intrusion of new competitors for African raw materials by Brazil, India, and especially China; the vassalization of African political leadership by the United States imperial hegemon which has had the effect ideologically partitioning the continent; the implantation of a new form of neo-colonialism in accordance with the imperatives of postmodern

diktats of globalization against an exemplary figure such as Laurent Gbagbo who was in actual fact 'the father of multi-party democracy in Ivory Coast'; the imprisonment of Gbagbo and his wife Simone Ehiwet Gbagbo on the instigation of French neo-colonialism is similar and in certain ways related to the imprisonment of Patrice Lumumba in the Congo in 1960 by Belgian neo-colonialism which led to his assassination on the direct instigation of United States imperial hegemon which falsely and ironically posits itself as a beacon of democracy; the economic and political coercion by United States and France of various conservative African governments to submit to the neocolonial agenda in opposition to nationalist and pan-Africanist progressive governments; the restoration of Ouattara by the French has had the effect of pitting his neocolonial compromisers in a mortal struggle against Ivorian patriots; Ouattara represents a recolonization of the country in the interests of imperial domination; in outsourcing military intervention France expressed the outmost contempt of the African Union and this could not have so easily happened without the participation of African quislings; and lastly, French intervention in Ivory Coast in the early years of the twenty first century is directly connected to its attempt to suppress the Algerian Revolution in the middle of the twentieth century. This analysis and indictment clearly demonstrates that Ademola Araoye is a serious student of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*.

President Barack Obama has shown an astonishing absolute resoluteness in support of French imperial and neocolonial project in Ivory Coast. His remarkable achievement from the onset of his presidency, in contrast to the abject failure of the presidency of George W. Bush, is the political dexterity and historical acumen with which he has won the full endorsement of the European Union in pursuance of United States imperial policies in all corners of the world. This has not gone unnoted by the American ruling class which propagates the view that he represents an achievement of 'post-racial' America. There is a deep symmetry between this ideological appendage and the success of American imperialism under his leadership. This has been at the center of the recent controversial contention between him and some outstanding African American intellectuals such as Cornel West, Kente Molefi Asante, Henry Louis Gates, who represent different ideological perspectives among themselves: the effect of American imperial policies in Africa and his conservative stand regarding social policies within United States itself. The fundamental question for these intellectuals is the damaging political costs to black American people in the post Barack Obama presidency if they do not confront his imperial policies in the world and his social con-

servatism in politics on the home front. Indeed, for whom does the bell toll! It needs to be mentioned here that if the former president can claim unalloyed victories in Africa, in spite of the imperial policies he enforced there, it is the birth of a new African country the Republic of South Sudan on 9 July 2011 and the huge foreign aid he gave to Africa to fight AIDS.

Since this book is about Ivory Coast, and by implication Africa, we confine ourselves to these matters. Given the overwhelming support of African Americans for President Barack Obama, rightfully so given the tragic history of slavery and the continuation of virulent white racism, combined with a refusal to criticize his international imperial policies, his presidency may become a historical watershed in breaking the 'historical innocence' of the relationship between Africans and African Americans. While up to the present blackness has automatically served as an emotional emblem of historical unity between the African Diaspora and Africa (i.e., Pan-Africanism), the imperial presidency of Barack Obama has ruptured this symmetry by revealing two fundamental issues: a 'black president' is as likely as a white president, however seemingly inadvertently, to continue the tradition of white ideological and racial domination over black people internally within United States; and externally that an African American president can be more effective and deadly than a white American president in pursuing American imperial policies against the fundamental interests of Africa, however much its African vassals may support it.

This confrontation between progressive Africa and imperial United States over the tragic drama in Ivory Coast may have particular resonance in my country where the New Negro modernity of African Americans was an enabler in the construction of New African modernity in South Africa, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century: the New Negro Movement gave many historical lessons to the New African Movement. This symmetry across the Atlantic Ocean which seems to have historically exhausted itself in the present is by no means a denial of the historical fact that it was the Europeans or whites who brought modernity to Africa or to prevaricate from the reality that it was the European (white) missionaries who largely made *modern* Africa possible. The contention between the black world and the white black has always been about the *politics of oppression* that have accompanied the making of modernity. Tragically, President Barack Obama, the black president of United States, has endorsed the politics of oppression on Africans by his calamitous intervention in Ivory Coast.

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