

Nations at war in Côte d'Ivoire:

The Kingdom of God vs the Kingdom of the Law

Abstract:

This paper examines the bloody collision that occurred in Côte d'Ivoire between two diametrically opposed conceptions of nationhood. For ten years (2000-2010), a civil war pitted supporters of a nation based on the primacy of soil against those who aspired to erect the nation solely on the pedestal of blood. The second group was largely supported by the Ivorian evangelical community. Evangelical preachers and prophets took up the cause, extolling a spiritually inspired nationalism. "Blood" and "faith in Christ" became interchangeable categories. The natives of Côte d'Ivoire were largely equated with God's chosen ones while "foreigners" were branded as impious and enemies of God. The war of conceptions of nationhood was explicitly transformed into a war between the Kingdom of God's defenders and the Kingdom of Law's subjects. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that, in an African context marked by strong religiosity, certain interpretations of the Bible run the risk of being radical and essentialist. As a result, they fuel conflict by legitimizing violent actions carried out by political actors. In a religious space such as Côte d'Ivoire, where evangelical Christianity has the wind in its sails because of its rapid expansion, the positions taken by religious leaders sometimes contribute to stiffening the political lines of certain government officials. This paper also aims to prove that the nationalism defended by Ivorian evangelicals was a response to the radicalism of liberal nationalists who took up arms to defend an open and strictly legal conception of the nation. In Côte d'Ivoire, the war of nations was waged by radicals on two sides: armed legalists and aggressive autochtonists.

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