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Fighting for a Kingdom of God?
The Role of Religion in the Ivorian Crisis

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the role of religion with regard to the violence experienced during the past 20 years in Côte d'Ivoire. It seeks to explain the differences in the level of violence over time by focusing on religion as an identity marker and as a social force that is mobilizable by religious and political actors. Religious identities were part of the growing in-/out-group mechanism utilized in Côte d'Ivoire in the 1990s, while the political elites tried to politicize religion. In reaction to the violence and politicization, the religious elites founded an interreligious organization in the 1990s, and were successful in preventing a religious war.

Keywords: religion, violence, peace, conflict, Côte d'Ivoire

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Article Outline

1   Introduction

Even though religion is a central component of many civil wars, the actual mechanisms of religious violence have long been unexplored. The so-called Ivorian crisis—that is, the period from 1990 to date—has often been defined as having religious connotations. On the one hand, the religious connotations of the crisis are based on the discourses by the political actors in the country, who often referred to religion: President Laurent Gbagbo and his wife viewed their own role as being legitimated by Jesus and the Bible (Raynal 2005; Miran 2006: 88), and their fight against the rebels as part of the War on Terror (Miran 2006: 108-109; Konaté 2005: 40). One of Gbagbo's main political rivals, the newly-elected President Alassane Ouattara, stressed his Muslim identity as being a reason behind his political exclusion in the 1990s (Konaté 2005: 42). If we take this argumentation from both sides in the conflict seriously,

then the crisis has a religious dimension. On the other hand, some studies also mention the dimension of religious identity existing between the civil war parties: the rebels based in an overwhelmingly Muslim North against the predominantly Christian South (Bassett 2003; Svensson 2007).

The argumentation of the political elites and the identity characteristics of the conflict parties seem quasi-automatically to suggest that the Ivorian crisis is, then, a violent religious conflict. Surprisingly, however, the actual acts of religious violence are relatively few (Basedau/Vüllers 2010: 45-53; Miran 2006: 92, 110-111). Also, in the recent clashes since November 2010, a religious undertone to the clashes between supporters of Gbagbo and Ouattara was not immediately obvious. This raises the following questions: How much religious violence has effectively occurred in Côte d'Ivoire in the past decades? What has the impact of religion on the crisis been? What mechanisms can explain the influence of religion in the Ivorian crisis?

To address these questions, this paper will first discuss the mechanisms that link religion and violence. While acknowledging that different aspects contributed to the crisis (such as the decline of the economy, political power struggles, tense political transformation, influences from neighboring countries), I will focus on the impact of religion on the crisis because the literature concentrates on religion in general (for example, Miran 2005; Yao Bi 2009); and only a few studies link religion and violence in Côte d'Ivoire (for example, Basedau 2009; Bassett 2003).

I will not explain religious violence due to diffuse religious connotations or the demographic characteristics of religious groups. Rather, I will make the argument that for an understanding of religious violence then the reciprocal influence of the societal and elite level is important: the social relations of the various believers, as well as the actions of religious and political elites, can fuel interreligious relations and politicized religious identities. To understand the dynamics of these processes, a more precise identification of religious violent acts is also necessary.

In a second step, I will analyze four phases of the Ivorian crisis with regard to their level of religious violence and the influence of the societal and elite levels. To estimate the impact of religion, this paper will utilize particularly several interviews with representatives from the various religious communities and Ivorian experts, who were met during field research carried out in Côte d'Ivoire from March to April 2010.[1] Finally, an intrastate comparison of the four phases will demonstrate the impact of religion on the crisis. In particular, it will show that the politicization of religious identities can result in violent acts by believers at

specific times and locations, but it does not necessarily lead to clashes between the religious communities per se in the country. These findings from the Ivorian case contribute to the more general debate on the role of religion in armed conflicts, on the political roles of religious actors, and on the dynamics of identity conflicts.

2 Mechanisms of the Religious Impact on Violence

The definition of what religion is, and what influence religion has on a conflict, are disputed issues in the literature (for example, Toft 2007: 99; Ter Haar 2005: 8). This paper concentrates solely on the political science analysis of religion in violent conflicts. It understands religion in a stricter sense as a "social organization" and distinguishes two levels of religious factors—the societal and the elite level. Nonetheless, it accounts for the impact and for the diverse means of influence of religion as part of a social identity. This includes an influence of religious norms and ideas on both levels.

Religion is an integral part of every society. One of the tasks for political science research is to identify the mechanisms and conditions that can explain the impact of religion on violent conflict. As studies show, the theological norms of every religion can support either conflict or peace, which results in the so-called "ambivalence of the sacred" (Appleby 2000). Moreover, the likelihood that the call leads to action increases if the call is legitimized by the religious elites with the incitement of existing religious ideas (De Juan 2009).

Religion does not lead to violence per se. In fact, specific mechanisms explain the influence of religion. These mechanisms are based on the understanding of religion as a social organization, as well as the dependence of these mechanisms on specific social conditions for the mobilization of religious identities for violence. Authors often distinguish between mechanisms on the societal and on the elite level.

The mechanisms on the societal level are based on the social–psychological concept of the in-/out-group distinction (Seul 1999; Anderson 2004: 271). Groups tend to define themselves in contrast to others, and in most cases this implicates a valorized self-understanding and a devalorizing of the out-group members. Like ethnicity, religion is one possible identity marker; religion can simplify the complexity of reality and can offer answers to feelings of insecurity based on sets of religious norms (Seul 1999: 559). To be an influential social identity marker, religious identities must be relevant on the societal level.

The relevance of a religious in-/out-group distinction is connected to religious identity structures. These include every attribute of the religious demographic structure and the self-identity of the religious communities. As some studies indicate, specific demographic constellations are more conflict-prone than others (for example, Basedau et al. 2011; Reynal-Querol 2002). In particular, changes in the demographic structure in favor of one religious group are likely to have the most direct impact on violence. The winning group can—depending on its relative size to the second-largest group—dominate religious politics and

demand changes in the constitution favorable to its particular faith. The relatively shrinking group, on its part, can demand guarantees for its members' common social position (Slack/Doyon 2001; Muzaffar 2005: 65). The new constellation in the religious demographic structure can support the in-/out-group distinction, and culminate in violence when the religious groups do not trust each other anymore. Additionally, this in-/out-group mechanism can be amplified through parallel religious and ethnic group boundaries. These mechanisms are comparable with those identified in the literature on ethnic groups (Fearon 2006; Roe 1999).

Another empirical indicator to measure a given in-/out-group distinction is the quality of the interreligious relations. These relations can be estimated with regard to three poles: firstly, amicable relations characterized by, for example, a high number of religious mixed marriages or the common celebrating of religious feasts; secondly, relations in which the religious groups ignore each other and no exchange takes place between believers; thirdly, disharmonious relations characterized by distrust, rejection of other religions, and by the segregation of the various believers in their daily lives. Of these three types of interreligious relations, only the disharmonious type has the potential to add to a religious in-/out-group distinction. On the contrary, the other two poles make such a distinction less likely, due to a common base and trust between the religious believers (amicable relations) and the non-importance of the other believers—and perhaps the low degree of importance of religious identity in general (ignorant relations) (Harpviken/Røislien 2008: 358). These mechanisms on the societal level lead to the following initial hypothesis:

> Religious violence will be more likely if a clear in-group identification and social separation between the religious groups are present.

Besides religious demographic factors, the elite level is also relevant to explain the impact of religion. The religious elites can influence the impact of religion and its direction in the conflict; they depend, however, on the religious ideas and on the organizational setting of their religious community. Based on the understanding of religious groups as social organizations, religious elites have personal and organizational interests—such as securing their influence through autonomy in financial, ideological, and organizational matters from state regulations (Miller 2002; Iannaccone 1995).

Two mechanisms are prominent with regard to the religion/conflict nexus: mobilization framing and religious outbidding. The framing concept emphasizes that religious elites must convince their followers to take action because the believers will not automatically follow their religious elites.[2] The role of religious elites becomes evident, for example, when they

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2   In fact, many studies seem to take their following as a given fact, without taking account of the multiple identities of the believers: they can simultaneously be members of a religious group, an ethnic group, or a conflict party. Furthermore, focus group discussions in Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Tanzania indicated that believers (and their elites) link the influence on the specific situation and the actual demanding of the religious elites. The findings reject any automatism.

frame a real or perceived change in the religious demographic structure as a threat to the survival of the religious community as a whole. This framing can lead, in an indirect way, to violence. In the end, the elites can mobilize their followers against other believers or non-believers to secure the position of their religious group in the country—and, concomitantly, secure their own influence. Furthermore, the acceptance of a framework by the religious elites depends heavily on the actual religious norm set in the religious group. A claim for violence will hardly be successful if the believers have an understanding of their religion as peaceful and harmonious (Appleby 2000: 173-177). Additionally, the authority of religious elites and their institutional background, in particular, have to be taken into consideration (Wiktorowicz 2004; De Juan/Hasenclever 2009: 182-188).

Moreover, to analyze the impact of religion on conflict, the behavior of political actors also has to be analyzed. These actors work alone or in an alliance with religious elites; from the perspective of the former, "religion" can be a rational mobilization and legitimization source. Toft argues, for example, that political elites will tender religious bids if religious legitimacy is viewed as a rational source to secure their own survival through the generation of internal and external support (Toft 2007: 102-107). Another perspective argues that successful mobilization requires that both sides have an interest in it (De Juan 2009). In any case, both mobilization framing and religious outbidding imply that religious elites convince their believers of their religious interpretations—which are more likely under specific (non-) religious conditions, such as the quality of the existing interreligious relations.

These elite mechanisms can be summarized in the second hypothesis:

Religious violence will be more likely if religious elites have personal and organizational interests in violence and are able to convince their followers to act. This mechanism will be likelier if the interests of religious and political elites are congruent.

3 Religion in the Ivorian Crisis

To analyze the role of religion in the Ivorian crisis, the article will use a diachronic intrastate comparison (Munck 2004; Bennett 2004: 20-30). The benefit of an intrastate comparison is that the bulk of non-religious contextual factors can be held (relatively) constant over time; a change in the religious factors or changes in the interaction with other factors can be an explanation for the variances on the dependent variable ("religious violence"). In this study, the empirical comparison does not aim to explain the whole conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, but will rather concentrate solely on the role of religion. Nonetheless, it must be considered that religious factors are connected to other factors determining the crisis and thus a reciprocal influence cannot be excluded. Religion is a social phenomenon and therefore part of the overall development of a society and (re)active with regard to the present societal circumstances (Appleby 2000: 32-40; Kastfelt 2005: 12-15).

The literature distinguishes between "religious civil wars" and "religious violence." In the quantitative studies, two factors define a civil war as "religious": the conflict parties should differ in their religious affiliations, and/or religious ideas should be an issue in the conflict (Svensson 2007: 936-937; Toft 2007: 97; Basedau et al. 2011). According to this definition, the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire should be seen as religious due to the different religious affiliations of the conflict parties: the predominantly Christian government (respective to the South) versus the predominantly Muslim North.[3] However, this distinction seems insufficient for the attribution of a central role to religion in the explanation of the civil war and as identity marker in the whole crisis because it does not account for the religious commitments of the conflict parties. Therefore, the dependent variable is religious violence in order to identify only the direct religiously-inspired violence. Two indicators are relevant to identify an act of religious violence: firstly, every fatality with a religious connotation will be counted—for example, if the perpetrators refer to the religious identity of the victim or if the perpetrator is a leading member of a religious group. Secondly, assaults on believers with a religious undertone are collected, such as the shaving off of Muslims' beards in prison. It should be noted that this definition allows us to identify both acts by religious actors as well as acts against religious persons, which can indicate a relevance of the religious identities in the conflict.[4]

The indicators on the societal and on the elite levels will be measured to evaluate the impact of the religious variables on the level of religious violence. On the societal level, it will be assessed for each period if a strong in-/out-group distinction exists: firstly, the religious demographic structure and its illustration in the public will be discussed, and, secondly, the quality of the interreligious relations. On the elite level, the personal and organizational interests of the main religious and political actors will be investigated. The indicators, therefore, are the organizational strength of the main religious groups and the public statements of the relevant religious and political elites.

For the diachronic comparison, four relevant phases of the crisis can be identified: 1990-1993 (first democratic elections and death of Houphouët-Boigny), 1993-1999 (Bédié government), 1999-2002 (Gueï and Gbagbo government), and 2002-2010 (civil war and reconstruction period). Crucial for the identification of the phases were important political changes that resulted in a new political situation in Côte d'Ivoire. In the first two phases, a change in the government marked a turning point in the country's history. The turbulent and highly competitive politics in the years 1999 to 2002 constitute the third phase. The last phase captured the civil war as well as the post-conflict period, up to the elections in November 2010. De-

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3   This distinction holds true for the complete period under investigation. In the 1990s the political fault line was between the (predominantly Christian) *Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI) under Bédié versus the (predominantly Muslim) *Rassemblement des Républicains* (RDR) under Ouattara.

4   The coding of the variable "religious violence" is based on the reports of independent and state organizations: Human Rights Watch (HRW), Human Rights Country Reports (HRCP), International Religious Freedom Reports (IRFR), and Economist Intelligence Unit Country Reports (EIU).

spite some changes in the power-sharing arrangements between the conflict parties, the overall political fault line—President Gbagbo versus the *Forces Nouvelles*—remained in place throughout the last phase. These events have been identified independent of changes in the religious (in)dependent variables. The next section discusses and explains the phases in the following order: first a brief historical overview; second, the assessment of the dependent variable; and, third, the discussion of the religious independent variables.

1990-1993: The First Multiparty Elections and the Last Years of Houphouët-Boigny

Since Independence in 1960, Houphouët-Boigny had governed the country with an incorporation of the various ethnic and religious groups as well as a flourishing economy. The third wave of democratization resulted in the first multiparty elections in Côte d'Ivoire. The presidential *Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI) won the elections with many manipulations at the end of 1990. Finally, the father of the nation, Houphouët-Boigny, died in April 1993.

In this first period no acts of religious violence were reported. The religious demographic structure did not change significantly in the last years of Houphouët-Boigny's rule, but it was characterized by a strong immigration from north to south due to the economic policy of the state. For the public, these demographic shifts were controversial due to growing tensions over land between indigenous people and strangers (Crook 1997: 222; Badmus 2009: 49). At that time, however, the conflict had no strong religious connotation—rather, it was a genuinely political conflict. For example, Gbagbo, leader of the opposition party *Front Populaire Ivoirien* (FPI), refused the possibility of foreigners from member countries of the *Commission Économique des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* being able to vote in the national elections in 1990 (Römpel 2007: 434). Interreligious relations in this period were without tensions, but the first signs of the later conflict did exist (Bassett 2003: 14). In fact, the Boigny regime supported the Muslim community during its last decades in power, for example by financing numerous mosques. Despite that, the majority of Muslims felt discriminated against, but these feelings were alleviated by the democratic changes (Miran 2005: 48, 2006: 88; LeBlanc 1999: 504).[5]

Religious actors were more important in this period than seems to be have been the case before in the country's history. In 1990 the visit of Pope Johannes Paul II was an important political event due to the forthcoming first multiparty elections. This was reflected by the intense debates in the hierarchical ranks of the Catholic Church and between the Church and society groups over the financing and the possible political instrumentalization of the Pope's visit. Therefore, a significant minority of the Catholic bishops was against the visit, whereas the politicians—especially President Houphouët-Boigny—supported the visit. In the Church, the secularist character of the state and the relationship with the government were contested issues. The bishops, for example, rejected the public interpretation that an assassination attempt

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5   Imam Aboubacar Fofana, for example, stated in an interview of 1990: "Is the state still secular or is it choosing a religion?" (quotation in Miran 2006: 88). This was a response to the state financing of numerous mosques and the three papal visits to Côte d'Ivoire in ten years.

on the Pope was motivated by political purposes as the ruling PDCI had stated (EIU 1990). Furthermore, a pastoral letter of the bishop conference underlined their independence from the regime in March/April 1992 (Yao Bi 2009: 128-130; EIU 1992). The bishops warned of a possible outbreak of civil war and denounced human rights violations. With this announcement, they distanced themselves from the ruling PDCI and demonstrated their openness to a democratic society.

In the same period, an internal power struggle changed the structure of the Islamic community. The majority of Muslims, in fact, challenged the close contact of the long-dominant Muslim organization *Conseil Supérieur Islamique de Côte d'Ivoire* (CSI) with the PDCI. The Muslims argued that the CSI should take care of Muslims' belongings and not be a non-controversial supporter of politics (Gomez-Perez et al. 2009: 203; Launay/Miran 2000: 75-76; Miran 2006: 98). Before 1990 initial meetings had occurred to prepare the foundation for a new national Muslim organization. The transition period of the Islamic community ended in January 1993 with the official foundation of the *Conseil National Islamique de Côte d'Ivoire* (CNI) by the overwhelming majority of Muslims and their social organizations. From its inception, and in ideological differentiation to the CSI, the CNI has had as one core characteristic its apolitical self-understanding. The CNI neither wanted to get involved in politics nor to have politics be involved in Muslim affairs (Gomez-Perez et al. 2009: 190; LeBlanc 1999: 504-505).

1993-1999: Bédié, Ouattara, and Ivoirité

After the death of Houphouët-Boigny in April 1993, Bédié won the power struggle against then prime minister Ouattara in the PDCI. Hereafter, loyal followers of Ouattara founded the party *Rassemblement des Républicains* (RDR) in 1994. Due to the growing discussion over the citizenship concept of *Ivoirité*, and to his disputed citizenship, Ouattara could not challenge Bédié (Crook 1997: 225-228). Even though the opposition parties RDR and FPI boycotted the elections due to violent excesses in October 1995, the subsequent victory of the PDCI was based on the improvement of the national economy (Crook 1997: 232-237). Under the presidency of Bédié, the discussion over *Ivoirité* had started and finally resulted in major legal changes: in 1998 a land reform stated that only Ivorians, the state, and local authorities would be able to hold land, and the fees for foreigners to remain increased dramatically (Römpel 2007: 437).

In this phase of the crisis, a low level of religious violence existed. Some minor incidents happened in 1994 and 1995—for example, turbulent identification controls that resulted in the arrest of 11 Muslims (HRCP 1994), two attempts to kidnap Imam Idriss Kodouss Koné, then CNI chairman, were reported (EIU 1995), and, in June 1997, four soldiers had attacked an imam in a mosque (HRCP 1997).

The political debate on *Ivoirité* led to a politicization of the various identities in the country. Foremost, the differentiation between northerners—as citizens with questionable national identities—and southerners—as Ivorians—dominated the xenophobic public discourse

(Bah 2010: 601-602; Römpel 2007: 436).[6] *Ivoirité* was primarily an ethnic concept. The ruling Akan ethnic group in particular was classified as the quasi-natural ruling class, which resulted in massive removals of members, especially from northern ethnic groups ("Dioula"), from major positions in all sectors (Cutolo 2010: 536; Badmus 2009: 51-52). Among the public, religious demographic identities became an important issue in the discussion. Two reports from state institutions indicated that the Christians outnumbered Muslims only when the national Ivorians were taken into account.[7] These reports painted a picture of a dangerous shift in the religious demography due to the influx of immigrants, who make up 25 percent of the people living in the country and over 70 percent of whom were Muslims (Bassett 2003; Basedau 2009: 164). According to the first version of *Ivoirité*, Christianity was seen as one fundamental source of identity for the country (Akindès 2004: 28-29). Moreover, the reports stated that non-Ivorians took away all jobs of the market, and were responsible for the highest crime rate, and therefore represented a danger to national Ivorians and to the peace and prosperity of the country.

Beside this politicization based on the religious demographic structures, religious identities became disputed in politics. In particular, the PDCI regime characterized the RDR as a northern regionalist party and highlighted the religious identity of the RDR. At the beginning, this was a quasi-automatic assumption because the north and the religious identity of most northerners (the majority are Muslims) would be the home base for this new party (Crook 1997: 225; Akindès 2004: 35). However, furthermore, rumors stated the existence of an anonymous *Charter of the North*. The charter supposedly claimed the full recognition of Islam, the support for the economic development of the northern regions, a greater influence on national politics by the north, and the end of the old regime (Crook 1997: 226). In fact, the Charter was not part of the RDR program but the public debate led to a gathering of most northerners and Muslims behind the RDR (Crook 1997: 226; Akindès 2004: 22). This development, however, cannot be explained by the strong Muslim and northern identity of the RDR leader Ouattara, because he never was seen before as a legitimate representative of the Muslim community or the north by the public at large (Launay/Miran 2000: 79).[8] Instead, the RDR and Ouattara framed themselves, in contrast to the PDCI, as reformers, and as the true successors to Houphouët-Boigny. Only later did they begin to refer to a Muslim identity; for example, Ouattara stressed his Muslim identity as being a reason behind his political exclusion during the 1990s (Crook 1997: 227; Konaté 2005: 42). The rumors and the framing of the

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6   A nationalist discourse was not a new phenomenon. Since independence, some violent excesses against foreigners had resulted in deaths (Launay/Miran 2000: 71; Kirwin 2006: 45). Moreover, President Houphouët-Boigny had reacted to the demands of educated Ivorians against a felt threat of being disadvantaged, as compared to foreigners. In 1978 he founded the Ministry "*du Travail et de l'Ivoirisation*" (Cutolo 2010: 529-530).

7   The reports were from the *Institut National de la Statistique* and the *Conseil Économique et Social* (for excerpts of the reports, see: *Politique Africaine,* 2000: 70-74).

8   The CNI has never had any special relations with the RDR or Ouattara. In fact, they still have contacts to every political party but try to be apolitical (Interview with CNI representative, 24 March 2010).

RDR in politics as northern/Muslim contributed, though, to the politicization of religious identities in the whole of Côte d'Ivoire. Coincidentally, the politicians of every party tried to generate support from the Muslim community. Not to lose his backing among the Muslim community, Bédié financed, for example, the grand Plateau Mosque in Abidjan, as a sign of the belonging of Muslims to Côte d'Ivoire (Launay/Miran 2000: 80).

Beside the efforts of political actors to mobilize religious identities, the developments in the Muslim community equally contributed to these changes. Historically, the CSI as a strong supporter of the ruling PDCI had not stated Muslim demands publicly. But, the CNI did articulate Muslim demands in public—such as having the option to choose Arabic as a foreign language at middle and high school levels, or the challenging of the state law that *madrasas* had to teach in French to be officially recognized (Miran 2006: 89). The political stance of imams in public was a new phenomenon for Ivorians and, moreover, the public power struggles between the two key Muslim organizations heated the atmosphere. The CSI, for example, stated that the CNI was an Islamic fundamentalist organization with links to radicals. According to the new situation, some parts of the society indeed saw the CNI as Muslim fundamentalists who tried to Islamize the state (Miran 2006: 99, 101; Gomez et al. 2009: 190-193; LeBlanc 1999: 494-499). On the other side, many Muslims felt barred from national politics and developments.

For the overwhelming majority of religious actors, the rapid politicization of religious identities was a great surprise. The first minor acts of religious violence—and the efforts by some politicians to mobilize their followers with their religious identities—were new phenomena in the history of Côte d'Ivoire. Many society organizations saw this development as a threat to peace in the country. In 1995 an Ivorian NGO invited religious representatives to a workshop on the current political situation. Based upon existent informal interreligious contacts at every level, the goal of the gathering was that the religious representatives should appease the tense political situation (Miran 2005: 46, 2006: 87).[9] In fact, at that time the actual influence of the religious actors was marginal and the political elites did not react to their request.[10] However, this first meeting resulted in informal contacts on fundamental goals and working relations of ten religious organizations. Finally, in 1998, the involved religious organizations founded the interreligious organization *Forum des Confessions Religieuses Côte d'Ivoire* (Forum). The founding members were the main Christian communities, the main African traditional churches, and the Islamic CNI. The CSI, due to its political association, and some militant evangelical churches, because they refused any contact to (especially) Islamic organizations, did not participate.[11]

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9   In the political arena, and since the regime of Houphouët-Boigny, Cardinal Yago and Imam Tidiane Bâ have been part of mediation committees to resolve conflicts between religious actors. They lost influence after Houphouët-Boigny's death, and themselves died in the late 1990s (Konaté 2005: 43).

10 Interview with member of the Forum, Abidjan, 24 March 2010.

11 Interview with member of the Forum, Abidjan, 25 March 2010.

1999-2002: The Regime of General Gueï and the Gbagbo Regime

The declining economy and the tense political situation resulted in the "Christmas coup" by young army officers, in December 1999. Finally, the increasing internal and external pressures to legitimate the new regime of General Robert Gueï resulted in a new constitution and elections in 2000. The newly-approved constitution still included the disputed paragraph that only persons with both parents coming from Côte d'Ivoire were allowed to participate actively and passively in the elections. On 06 October 2000, Ouattara and nineteen other presidential candidates were disqualified by the Supreme Court due to their disputed ancestry as well as for other reasons. Gueï lost the election but kept trying to hold his position by presenting manipulated results (Basedau 2009: 163). After bloody clashes between followers of Gueï and the winning candidate, Gbagbo, Gueï had to leave the country. Only a few days later, the RDR requested new elections due to the disputed disqualification of Ouattara from the elections (HRW 2001: 14). Nevertheless, Gbagbo was sworn in as president. This led to further bloody clashes, this time between followers of Gbagbo and RDR sympathizers. Furthermore, violence occurred during the parliamentary elections of December 2000 (HRW 2001: 36-56). The opposition party RDR, however, participated in the peaceful local government elections on 25 February 2001, and won the majority of seats. In April 2002, as a reaction to the alleged manipulated election victory of the RDR, the government started an identification process of the whole population. The registration process was accompanied by harsh personal controls and by assaults on foreigners or Ivorians with northern names (Römpel 2007: 441).

In the period under investigation, violence escalated in October and December during the elections and escalated to a high level of religious violence. On 26 October 2000, violence occurred between FPI and RDR protestors while thousands of RDR sympathizers took to the streets. In Abidjan, FPI militants together with the security forces—or with their quiet allowance—attacked any man suspected to be from the north and a supporter of the RDR: mosques were set on fire and Muslims were arrested without warrant.[12] RDR militants, on the other hand, attacked others for ethnic–religious reasons: they tried to set churches on fire and they desecrated bibles and other religious symbols. Yet, the security forces protected Christians in most of the cases. Undoubtedly, the violent confrontations had an ethnic–religious connotation (HRW 2001: 21-23; Bassett 2003: 24). The symbol of the violence became a mass grave in the Abidjan district of Yopougon, where the bodies of 57 assumed RDR supporters and Muslims executed by the security forces were discovered on 27 October 2000 (HRW 2001: 29-32).[13]

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12 As one Muslim reported: "We saw the mob was also armed with iron bars, machetes, rocks, knives, wood and they were yelling 'no more RDR, no more Dioulas, we've come to kill you, it's time to finish with the Muslims' " (HRW 2001: 22).

13 The October violence in Abidjan has resulted in the death of some 155 RDR supporters and some 60 FPI supporters (HRW 2001: 18).

In reaction to the Supreme Court decision against Ouattara in November 2000, the RDR decided to boycott the elections and the tense situation soon turned into violence. The RDR supporters stood against the alliance of FPI militants and security forces (HRW 2001: 41-42; Akindès 2004: 19). At that time, the violence related to the assumed RDR support for Muslims became more organized. For example, Muslim believers were captured and arrested by the security forces in some mosques in Abidjan due to rumors that they were hiding weapons. In prisons, Muslims were forbidden to pray and had to watch the desecration of the Quran (HRW 2001: 54-56).

During this phase of the conflict, the religious demographic structures and the religious identities became secondary factors; more important now was the behavior of the religious actors. It is hard to estimate the impact of the different public statements made by various religious elites.[14] Nevertheless, some should be presented here to illustrate the interference by some religious elites in politics. While some evangelical clerics supported Gbagbo, imams showed public support for Ouattara (for an overview of statements see Konaté 2005). Prior to the elections in 2000, the Catholic bishops issued a statement in Yamoussoukro in which they requested that every candidate who might cause trouble step down. Some Ivorians interpreted this statement as targeted solely at Ouattara (Konaté 2005: 42; Basedau 2009: 166).[15] Whereas some rumors suggest that the Catholic Church was more effectively involved in the turbulences between 2000 to 2002, Cardinal Agré rejected any responsibility—for example, for the death of General Gueï in St. Paul's Cathedral in Abidjan, in 2002 (Miran 2006: 91; Agré 2010: 230-245).[16] Besides the Catholic Church, the Muslim elites also raised their voices with regard to the violence in 2000 and 2001. For example on 11 June 2001, Imam Koudous (CNI) claimed that the hands of the Gbagbo regime were stained with the blood of the Islamic martyrs of the Yopougou mass grave (Konaté 2005: 41).

Despite these controversies, the majority of religious organizations worked closely and harmonically together in the interreligious Forum. In June 2000, the Forum publicly criticized the new constitution and complained about a report in a FPI journal that characterized the Gueï regime as the revenge of Muslims against Christians. Prior to the riots in October

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14 In fact, the vast majority of my interview partners from every religious community as well as the experts indicated that they did not know about these statements.

15 The interpretation of the bishops' statement was explicitly rejected in interviews by Catholic representatives (Abidjan, 01 April 2010); the interviewed representatives of other religious communities similarly rejected such an interpretation (Abidjan, March-April, 2010). Imam Fofana (CNI) has responded to these demands with the following statement: "We have no complex in saying that the Islamic community supports Alassane Dramane Ouattara. If anyone in the community thinks that he is the best candidate he may support him. Nobody will blame the Baulé when they support Henri Konan Bédié; in the same vein, no one will blame the majority of Bété people when they support Gbagbo. What we ask is an equitable treatment for all the candidates" (quotation in Konaté 2005: 43).

16 Moreover, many politicians asked Cardinal Agré for his opinion on the political developments. According to an interviewee, Agré stated his view and tried to calm the political tensions, albeit not in public (interview with representative of the Catholic Church, Abidjan, 01 April 2010).

2000, the Forum held a meeting with representatives of the political parties and called for peace. However, the unity of the religious organizations in the Forum should not be over estimated at this point due to internal discussions over the right of religious representatives to take a political opinion in public.[17]

Yet, in this period the politicization of religious identities was evident due to the behavior of the politicians. In contrast to his previous announcements to "clear the house" of corrupt elites and to dismiss the notion of *Ivoirité*, Gueï revised the national citizenship concept to exclude Ouattara (Cutolo 2010: 527). This time, the concept *Ivoirité* not only included the Akan group but also, further, the ethnic groups in the south, center and west of Côte d'Ivoire; northern ethnic groups were, however, still excluded from Ivorian citizenship (Akindès 2004: 29). Moreover, under the presidency of Gbagbo weekly prayer sessions were held in the national assembly, organized by the first lady. This was disputed by some politicians who referred to the secular identity of the Ivorian constitution (Konaté 2005: 41). On the other hand, the ruling politicians addressed some of the Muslims' demands. The Gueï regime, for example, asked for a membership of Côte d'Ivoire in the *Organization of Islamic Countries*; under Gbagbo full membership was accepted. Furthermore, Côte d'Ivoire became a member of various international Islamic organizations. Gbabgo followed a practical course to win new foreign donors because of his complicated relation with the former colonial power, France. He allowed, for example, the Arabic states to open new embassies and to give the Muslim community—and to some degree also the state—financial contributions (Miran 2006: 91).[18] However, the CNI, as the major national Muslim organization, did not actively push for these developments; certainly, though, they also did not reject or criticize them. But the apolitical philosophy of the CNI was once more underlined as the CNI tried to protect the secularity of the state through establishing its own *Observatoire de la laicité* (observatory of secularism) in 2001 (Miran 2006: 101-102).

2002-2010: The Civil War and the Post-Conflict Period

In August 2002 political reconciliation efforts succeeded and the disputed political parties formed a government of national unity. The situation changed dramatically when, on 19 September 2002, some dismissed northern soldiers attacked certain cities in the north and the south. The rebellion was supported by rumors that the demobilization program of the army was based on *Ivoirité*. The rebels were not able to capture the economic capital Abidjan in the south, but took control over most of the north within a few days. The main goal of the *Forces Nouvelles* was the discharge of the Gbagbo regime and elections without the *Ivoirité* law (Bah 2010: 604). In January 2003 the international community tried to put an end to the violence. While the first attempts to mediate between the rivals failed, in March 2007, finally, the Ouagadougou Agreement put an end to the civil war and the conflict parties agreed on some

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17 Interview with members of the Forum, Abidjan, March 2010.

18 Interviews with experts, Abidjan, March 2010.

power-sharing arrangements (Bah 2010: 605-609; Mehler 2009: 465-468). However, the planned elections were repeatedly delayed for various reasons. Due to international pressure, the presidential elections were held in November 2010 but the country has remained in a tense situation. After a power struggle between the two presidential candidates Gbagbo and Ouattara, the widely internationally-acknowledged President Ouattara took power in April 2011.

The religious connotations of violence were evident at a minor level during this phase. While the majority of violent acts in the civil war do not have a clear religious connotation, some examples of religious violence should be given: in late June and October 2002, mosques and churches were burned by militants of both parties near Daloa, in the western region. The FPI militants attacked Muslims due to their supposed RDR affiliation; these attacks resulted in some 100 deaths (HRW 2003: 9, 14-17; IRFR 2003). In the aftermath of the onset of civil war, the tensions escalated, however, against religious elites and institutions. In the south, for example, Muslims were beaten and some were killed (HRP 2002; IRFR03). Moreover, the rebels also attacked churches and Christians in the north, but on a smaller scale (Miran 2006: 109).[19]

On the societal level, religious identities became less politicized during this phase. On the actor level, the civil war and the following peace process have highlighted the internal fragmentation of the Christian community. The majority of churches has supported peace activities and has acted neutrally. Yet, some minority militant churches have openly supported Gbagbo's regime and have framed the war as being a religious one (Basedau 2009: 166). The growing number of short-lived evangelical churches, especially in Abidjan, has resulted in a separation of the main Christian churches from the smaller ones. In fact, the smaller churches have only minor influence due to their incapacity to establish a working national umbrella organization.[20]

Two different developments have occurred in the Muslim community. Firstly, the two national organizations—CNI and CSI—have slowly started to establish working relations in reaction to the outbreak of civil war and a related change in the CSI behavior.[21] Secondly, a new Sunni radicalism has emerged among the Muslim community. Due to generational differences—such as Arabic teaching and knowledge of Arabic—the dissensions were of theological nature and not politically motivated. Moreover, representatives of the Sunnis have also advocated for peace in the country (Miran 2006: 109; Gomez-Perez et al. 2009). Furthermore, the de facto segregation of the north from the south was a major challenge, especially for the nationwide Muslim organizations. The CNI has tried to hold close contact with the northern regions; nevertheless, new Islamic communities were established at the grass root level due to the difficult interactions (Miran 2006: 111).

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19 In the recent events of December 2010, minor attacks against mosques—especially in Grand Bassam and
     Abobo (Abidjan)—were reported (http://www.cosim-ci.org/spip.php?article100 (09 March 2010).

20 Interviews with experts and members of evangelical churches, Abidjan, March-April, 2010.

21 Interview with member of the CNI, Abidjan, 24 March 2010.

Despite some fringe evangelical churches, the main religious institutions underlined the non-religious nature of the civil war from its inception. Cardinal Agré and Imam Koudouss Koné (CNI) called for calm and denied that there were any religious connotations to the civil war (Bassett 2003: 24). In the same stance, the Forum was and still is active. Moreover, its representatives were often guests of the conflict parties and tried to negotiate between them while not supporting any of them. The Forum runs many activities to contribute to amicable interreligious relations in sensibilization campaigns.[22] Together with other social organizations, under the leadership of the organizational body of the *Collectif de la Société Civile pour la Paix*, founded on 19 October 2002, religious representatives took part in conflict resolution efforts at the grass root level (Miran 2006: 110).[23] Prior to the 2010 elections, the religious elites worked for a peaceful political solution. In April 2010, for example, some religious elites and civil society leaders of Côte d'Ivoire attended a workshop in Washington D.C. They agreed on the "Washington Appeal", in which they demanded greater recognition for themselves in the peace process (Bekoe/Bartoli 2010).

On the political actor level, the picture is somehow different. Politicians used religion to mobilize internal and external support at the civil war's onset. Gbagbo tried, for example, to frame the rebels as Islamic fundamentalists due to his search for international support. In Washington, his ambassador attempted to convince the US government that Côte d'Ivoire needed protection against the Islamic threat. The rebels were characterized by governmental newspapers as agents of Al Qaeda and part of the world wide axis of evil (Konaté 2005: 40; Miran 2006: 82; Raynal 2005). This inflammatory language from the governmental side, however, never resulted in a clear fight among the different religious communities. Moreover, for most Ivorians the militant evangelical circles surrounding Gbagbo have been the only religious radicals (Miran 2006: 108-109).[24]

The rebels never stated religious goals or framed themselves as Muslims. The main motivation of the whole rebel organization was the claim for the equal recognition of citizenship; that is, the final rejection of *Ivoirité*. Connected to this concept, further causes for the rebellion were the marginalization and discrimination of the north. Furthermore, the non-religious connotations become obvious if we look at the elites. The rebel leader, Guillaume Soro, for example, is a northern Catholic and the overwhelming majority of rebels are Muslims (Basedau 2009: 164-165). This support for rebellion by Muslims is based first and foremost upon their regional location and their ethnic belongings.[25]

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22 Interviews with members of the Forum, Abidjan, March, 2010.

23 Interviews with members of the Forum and experts, Abidjan, Man, and Guiglo, March-May, 2010.

24 Interview with expert, Abidjan, 22 March 2010.

25 Interviews with experts and religious representatives, Abidjan, March-April, 2010.

4   Assessment of the Religious Factors

The former section demonstrates that religion played a role in the Ivorian crisis. It is obvious that religious violence occurred only in politically tense situations. No religious violence happened in the period 1990-1993, while for the second period (1993-1999) only minor instances were reported. In contrast, the two more recent periods show a higher level of religious violence, but in restricted episodes. In the years 1999-2002, acts of religious violence at a higher level took place in the context of the turbulent elections of 2000. The religious violence was part of the clashes between FPI and RDR supporters in October and December 2000, and in July 2002. In comparison to this period, marked by a high level of religious violence, the level declined in the last phase (2002-2010) when incidents of religious violence were reported primarily during the onset of the civil war, in 2002.

But what factors can explain these cases of religious violence at specific times? Both stated hypotheses are supported to some degree. With regard to the societal level, religious violence in the two most recent periods was the result of the politicization of religious identities during the 1990s. While in the first phase interreligious relations were still harmonious and not politicized, in the second phase religion eventually became politicized. The cause behind the identity politicization was the power struggle between political elites over the successor to Houphouët-Boigny, and was therefore not religious in its origin. The identity construction of the in-/out-group was further accentuated by the public statements of state institutions and acting politicians. The reports on the demographic shifts and the distinction between nationals and autochthons—with reference to *Ivoirité*—created a picture of an increasing foreign Muslim population that would threaten the harmonious (religious) balance in the country. Furthermore, politicians on every side fuelled the political debate with reference to the Christian/Muslim distinction. In the period from 1993 to 1999, political agitations were successful because the identity groups (southerners vs. northerners) were strongly linked to religious affiliations (Christians vs. Muslims). The religious identity groups were quasi-synonymous with the political identities—wherein ethnic identities seem to be more relevant than the following religious identity (Roubaud 2003; McCauley/Posner 2007). Nonetheless, only minor incidents of religious violence were reported, due primarily to the still non-violent political power struggle. This changed in the third phase (1999-2002), wherein the political struggle turned violent. Furthermore, the politicized religious identities were one part of the political clashes between FPI and RDR sympathizers. The conflict parties, moreover, identified the out-group members and potential targets according to their religious images and this resulted in a relatively high level of religious violence. The politicization of religious identities as well as the level of religious violence decreased in the last phase (2002-2010). At the civil war's onset, the religious identity markers played a minor role and were not relevant during the fights and the post-conflict period, due to the more political goals of the conflict parties. The decreasing politicization in the last phase can also be explained by the behavior of the religious elites.

At the elite level, the internal divisions in the religious communities and the neutrality of the main religious organizations in the conflict explain why the civil war did not turn into a war between religious communities or one fought over religious ideologies. If we look at the Christian churches in the first two phases of the crisis, on the one hand, the churches were relatively calm and not involved in the growing politicization of the religious identities; on the other, however, they did not reject the religious tainting of the political conflict by politicians. Even the Catholic Church was relatively quiet in the first two phases, but publicly supported in full the claims for peace and separation between religion and politics in the last two phases. Another reason behind the rather limited influence of the Christian churches on and against the politicization of religion was their internal organizational struggles due to the gaining of ground by the small evangelical communities (Launay/Miran 2000: 79; Newell 2007: 468). There existed no close link between politicians and the main Christian organizations since the holding of power by the FPI. Certainly, Gbagbo and his wife tried from time to time to unite the evangelical communities during the third and fourth phases, but the small churches have not been able to establish a common representation or a common stance in the political debate. Despite the open support of marginal evangelical churches, the overwhelming majority of the Christian churches had no strong ties with the Gbagbo regime. On the one hand, the Christian churches became more recognized in public during the period analyzed. The Catholic Church, for example, openly criticized the Ivorian government in the early 1990s. On the other hand, the main churches never openly challenged a government of Côte d'Ivoire or supported publicly a specific political party. Furthermore, this explains why only minor incidences of religious violence occurred during the civil war onset. Despite the attempt of the Gagbo regime to frame the rebels as an Islamic threat, the majority of Christian believers did not follow him because they were not convinced by it. The good relations between the religious elites, the organizational challenges in the Christian community, and the decreasing politicization of the religious identities since the violence of the early 2000s de-legitimized his attempted framings.

If we look at the Muslim community during the first phase, it was splintered and has since tried to (re-)organize itself. Also, Muslims still had to struggle with their organizational transformation; in the second phase the CNI, the dominant Muslim organization since 1993, was publicly active in and demanded more recognition for Muslim wishes. However, the CNI never had a clear political stance toward one of the political or conflict parties during the last three phases. Therefore, two things are important: firstly, that the CNI was founded by social Muslim organizations, in contrast to the CSI and their close connections with the ruling PDCI. The apolitical self-understanding of the organization is evident, even though this does not mean that it renounces its calls for an improvement of the life conditions for pious Muslims in the country, and this did not change during the period analyzed (Miran 2006: 101). Secondly, none of the conflict parties had an Islamic agenda. The RDR as well as

the rebels understood themselves not as defenders or supporters of only Muslim interests, and never mentioned any claim, for example, of an introduction of the Shar'ia.

With regard to the hypotheses, it can be stated that an in-/out-group distinction between ethnic groups with a clear religious dimension did exist during the Ivorian crisis. This resulted in a growing politicization of religious identities in the 1990s, especially after the death of Houphouët-Boigny. Therefore, this development explains the low level of religious violence in the first two periods due to the relatively new phenomenon of the religious division in the concept of *Ivoirité*. The outbursts of religious violence in 2000 and 2002 were not a clash between religious communities as such, but first and foremost a result of the politicized in-/out-group distinction (northerners vs. southerners). Moreover, it was only with the outbreak of political violence in the country that a high level of religious violence emerged, based on the highly politicized religious identities at the time. The assessment of the factors on the elite level indicates that, in a rational way, the main religious groups had nothing to gain by supporting one political side or the other. Being more sophisticated, the CNI had no interest to get into daily politics, a sentiment shared by the Catholic Church and the traditional churches as well. Moreover, politicians attempted to mobilize religious identities directly, but never tried to get into an alliance with one specific religious group and no conflict party ever claimed a direct benefit for one of the religious groups after its victory.[26] While these factors can explain why there was only religious violence in specific political circumstances, they do not explain what additional issues have been relevant to the avoidance of a continually high level of religious violence.

The institutionalization of interreligious connections is a key further explanatory factor. Despite some previous loose personal contacts between the various religious actors, no regular exchange had existed before 1995. Therefore, no common position among the religious organizations was stated publicly against the use of religious identities by politicians. The establishment of the Forum in 1995 was a reaction to the politicization of religious identities. As my interview partners explained, the domination of religious interpretations by political elites has been seen as a threat for the country by the religious representatives.[27] The Forums' activities are numerous and have had a calming effect on the populace. Certainly, the effectiveness of the Forum is hard to evaluate but empirical evidence underlines the potential of the organization. In the turbulent events of 2000, believers of both the Christian and Muslim faiths set churches and mosques on fire and the situation seemed to end in a clash between the different religious communities. As agreed in the Forum, an imam and a priest went together to the warring religious communities and successfully demanded that they calm down. Moreover, the Forum was one dialogue partner for both conflict sides, and its representatives preached for calm and fair elections in their religious communities in the 2000s.[28]

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26 Interview with expert, Abidjan, 25 March 2010.

27 Interviews with experts and religious representatives, Abidjan, March-April, 2010.

28 Interviews with representatives of the Forum, Abidjan, 24 and 26 March 2010.

5 Conclusion

This paper evaluates the role of religion in the Ivorian crisis. The distinction between the societal and the elite level helps to identify the mechanisms of religious impact. The paper goes further than the normally-used account of religious violence. The precise time and location of violent acts help to understand the dynamics in the interplay of the various (non-)religious factors. Moreover, the intrastate comparison underlines the importance of the micro foundation of violence and religious factors to explain the dynamics of religious politicization and religious violence.

The analysis of the Ivorian case has revealed that, on the societal level, the incorporation of religion in the new and disputed national citizenship concept *Ivoirité* led to a politicization of religious identities. In Côte d'Ivoire, religious identity was not the main conflict identity marker but was an important part of the conflict identities nonetheless. More surprisingly, no core religious community supported directly and openly the citizenship concept. This can be explained, firstly, from a normative perspective: the behavior of the (main) religious groups was in line with their tradition of non-involvement in politics and their support of the secularist state concept; secondly, from a rationalist perspective, the main explanatory factor would be the lack of an alliance between religious and political actors. In fact, no main religious group had something to gain from forming an alliance with one of the political, and later conflict, parties. The politicization of religious identities was, therefore, part of the political power struggle and it was mainly undertaken by the political elites.

The religious elites underwent a learning process during the Ivorian crisis. In the beginning, they were surprised by the politicization of religious identities and the danger of violent confrontations till the mid-1990s. The religious elites have not been heard of in the public debate at that time, which led to the foundation of the interreligious Forum. The Forum has been the place in which religious groups could find a common voice against religious politicization by politicians, and also conduct activities for peace. Moreover, the Forum helped to avoid conflict between the religious elites in public, which could have intensified the already-existing distinctions between religious identities. In fact, the calm handling of the political involvement of some of the religious elites in 2000 shows that such an interreligious organization can help to avoid public conflict between religious organizations. But the wider impact of the Forum has to be seen critically. The Forum does not have, for example, any direct influence at the regional level, mainly due to financial constraints. However, the regional religious elites seem to have prevented a religious charging of the conflict in their cities due to their personal contacts and their engagement for peace.[29]

Together, these factors explain the occurrence of religious violence in 1997, 2000, and 2002, and that the civil war had no dimension of religious incompatibility even though the parties differed in their religious affiliations (Christians vs. Muslims). The identity dimen-

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29 Interviews with religious representatives, Man and Guiglo, April, 2010.

sion, nevertheless, had no mobilizable effect, except for the short period at the onset of the civil war. The acts of religious violence were part of politically violent confrontations, and indicate that the religious identities were part of the conflict identities at the time. From the within case comparison of events in Côte d'Ivoire, the conclusion can be drawn that religious elites can potentially play an important role in actively opposing political mobilization based on religious identity markers. In this regard, the institutionalization of interreligious connections can help to prevent problems between the religious communities and can help to give the religious elites a common voice against the religious charging of a conflict. This is true even though, as seen in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, they could not ultimately stop the violence as such.

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