

African Miracle, African Mirage

*Transnational Politics and the Paradox
of Modernization in Ivory Coast*



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Contents

List of Illustrations	ix	
Preface and Acknowledgments	xi	
Selected List of Abbreviations	xvii	
Introduction	1	
PART I	THE POSTWAR YEARS	21
<i>Chapter 1</i>	Becoming an Attractive Colony	23
<i>Chapter 2</i>	Triangulating Colonial Modernization	44
PART II	THE DECADE OF DEVELOPMENT	67
<i>Chapter 3</i>	(Re)Framing Postcolonial Development	69
<i>Chapter 4</i>	Energizing the Economic Miracle	95
<i>Chapter 5</i>	Tapping the Riches of a “Backward” Region	116
PART III	THE FATE OF MODERNIZATION	139
<i>Chapter 6</i>	Investing in Modernization’s Last Frontier	141
<i>Chapter 7</i>	Crushing Dreams of Modernity	163
Conclusion		183
Notes		191
Bibliography		257
Index		291
		vii

Introduction

So before we encounter what was or was not modern we are left with an initial problem of specifying what it is or was that could at any point be regarded traditional. If that is defined, as it has been by some, as involving continuity, repetition and relative lack of choice, we would have to conclude that there had never [...] been such a moment or such a place in that extensive West African History for which we have anything like substantiated evidence. That which might appear to be traditional to an uninformed stranger was and is firstly subject to incessant change and it was also the product of generations of imaginative cultural bricoleurs.

—Richard Rathbone, “West Africa” (2002)

WHAT COULD BE MORE FITTING in opening a book on (post)colonial modernization in Africa than the reflections of Richard Rathbone, one of the doyens of African studies of our times? Rightly as the British Africanist puts it, there is a rather long tradition of people’s engagement with modernity in the history of West Africa.¹ It would seem even more appropriate to flesh out such a claim in this introductory chapter and show, for instance, the many micropolitics of domestication of the modern in this part of the world that seemingly sits (and has always lived) outside the realm of modernity; to substantiate that Africans indeed are key agents in the transformation of their societies; to demonstrate that the people of the African continent were present at the birth of modernity. However, I have chosen to proceed with a different vignette—one that emphasizes not only the significance of the mid- to late twentieth century in the history of modernization worldwide but, more importantly, the pervasiveness of American factors and the frictions they raised in the unfolding of developmentalism in Francophone Africa. Perhaps a brief foray into the memoir of David E. Lilienthal, one of the omnipresent faces of the American modernization paradigm in the twentieth century and a character whom we shall meet episodically in this book, will highlight this point succinctly.²

In March 1961, the American Lilienthal, a man whose name was intimately associated with the world-acclaimed Tennessee Valley Authority

(TVA), paid a visit to Abidjan—capital of the newly independent state of Ivory Coast. Unlike most Americans who had ventured to Africa before decolonization and immediately thereafter, Lilienthal was neither on a safari nor on a scholarly field-trip expedition. Rather, the man, then past his sixties, had come to the West African country to add the finishing touches to a contract that the Ivorian government was negotiating with Development and Resources Corporation (D&R), the transnational firm that he had set up when he retired from the public sector. Although consulting for the mineral development of the country, Lilienthal—as former director of the TVA—could not help but visit Ivory Coast’s first hydroelectric dam. And in the March 18 entry of his journal, the assiduous diary keeper noted:

Visited the [Ayamé I] dam about noon—a medium-sized concrete gravity and earth fill, total capacity about 30,000 kw; only one of the two generators now being required. When we arrived the only person on duty was an intelligent young African, at the power-control board. The French technicians, quite a group, some of them students, were at the canteen having an apéritif. After lunch, with the engineer in charge, a Frenchman, we returned to the power station; again the only man around the place was a tall, friendly, handsome Ivorian.

Said the homesick French engineer: “We can’t trust the Africans with so complicated a thing as a dam and powerhouse; they must always have someone watching over them.”

Nuts.

While he was saying this he and his quite beautiful bride of three months (from Nancy in Lorraine) were giving us an elaborate and delicious luncheon, served with elegance in the heart of the forest. Down in the powerhouse the men “who couldn’t be trusted” and had to be “watched every minute” were tending to the production of electricity. A sense of indispensability and superiority is an essential of being a good colonialist.³

Few readers of Lilienthal’s memoirs would have missed his invective against the French. In the United States, where he published his multivolume opus, France was indeed increasingly seen as an anachronistic colonial power that refused to abide by the principles of a postcolonial new world order. With the war in Algeria still raging, public opinion in America was ripe for French bashing and mudslinging. In this particular context, and despite its

hyperbolic tone, Lilienthal's critical observation on Franco-Ivorian relations struck an important chord with the American reading public.⁴

Even without the history and legacy of French bashing in the United States, not many scholars would question the claim that French-style decolonization was like a drama without an epilogue: while the collapse of the empire had forced the French authorities to redirect their disciplinary gaze toward the "colonization of everyday life" in the metropole, France designed its departure from many of its overseas possessions so as to perpetuate their dependency.⁵ In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, this was all the more possible since historically and epistemologically the makers of French foreign policy remained convinced that black Africans were "inherently inferior." More specifically, they considered that their former colonial subjects characteristically and permanently needed to be "dependent on France for their survival."⁶

It was in this orientalist context that various bilateral defense agreements (*accords de défense*) were signed with countries like Senegal, Mauritania, Madagascar, Togo, Central African Republic, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Congo, Chad, and Dahomey. The neocolonial design of the French state in Africa was further entrenched when its Fonds d'Investissement pour le Développement Economique et Social (FIDES) and the Caisse Centrale de la France d'Outre-Mer (CCFOM) were transformed into the Fonds d'Aide et de Coopération (FAC) and the Caisse Centrale de Coopération Economique (CCCE). With largely cosmetic legal changes, these institutions emerged as France's prime channels for assistance to its former colonies. In fact, while the French government resorted to other conduits for its cooperation with Africa, the FAC and CCCE remained by far the most effective means to perpetuate a French colonial type of developmentalist governmentality.⁷

In light of perceived Franco-African geopolitical intimacy that smacked of paternalism and neocolonialism, Lilienthal's critique thus hit right on target—especially with reference to Ivory Coast and President Félix Houphouët-Boigny, whom the Martinique-born scholar and activist Frantz Fanon had dismissed as early as 1958 as the "traveling salesman of French colonialism."⁸ Other observers pinpointed the same issue, including French artist-scholar Michel Leiris, who visited Ivory Coast in 1962. He, too, highlighted how the country had remained French, despite the formal proclamation of independence: "In Abidjan," the surrealist poet/ethnographer noted, "no street has been renamed," adding deplorably, "One can still read on numerous plates the names of [French] governors."⁹ In regard to the denunciation of France's relations to the Ivorian people, then, Lilienthal was in good company.

The lingering hegemony of the French in postcolonial Ivory Coast did not appall only the former TVA executive or the French surrealist poet. From US career diplomats to American investors and journalists posted in Abidjan, most American visitors seemed to be agreed on the view that Houphouët-Boigny's country was indeed in French hands.¹⁰ And there was much truth in these perceptions. Yet it is part of my argument that French control in postcolonial Ivory Coast was not all-encompassing. Beginning in the postwar period, the United States and other global forces had begun appearing in unoccupied interstices. Consequently, they were transforming what had been a largely bilateral Franco-Ivorian relationship into something akin to a multilateral encounter. While colonialism had been replaced by a "neocolonial" postcolonial world," especially in the aftermath of French-style decolonization, I suggest that such a world was increasingly a globalized ecumene where the allure of American-inflected modernity loomed large, and accordingly it attracted many enthusiastic modernizers in extant or soon-to-be postcolonial nations in the Global South.¹¹

African Miracle, African Mirage is an attempt to substantiate this point as it focuses on the transnational struggle to turn Ivory Coast into a showcase of capitalist modernization. The narrative strategically immerses readers in the euphoric years that, in the words of one scholar, raised Ivory Coast to the semiperiphery of the world system.¹² Such a relatively privileged position attracted many footloose historical actors, including development experts, social scientists, and foreign job-seekers anxious to tap into the exceptional wealth of the country. In this book, I explore the making and ultimate unmaking of Ivory Coast's Thirty Glorious Years, the country's postwar economic boom that spanned the period of the 1950s to the early 1980s.¹³

Unlike much of the recent scholarly work on Third World development in the post-1945 era, the book underscores that the struggle to provide Ivory Coast with foreign aid and developmental assistance was not between American and Soviet ideologies. Although the global Cold War was never off the radar of some of the historical actors, I argue that the main struggle in the arena of late colonial and postcolonial development in this particular African setting was, in many ways, among French development workers, American modernizers, and Ivorian enthusiasts for rapid social change. In numerous chapters of this book, I elaborate on the contours of this struggle and other related issues in the entangled geographies of Ivorian modernization.

For now, I want to offer some contextual background, beginning with a discussion of the establishment of Ivory Coast and the early history of capitalist development in the colony before the Second World War. I follow this overview with an analysis of the triangulated nature of the politics of

development in the late colonial and postcolonial periods, in a section that reviews and problematizes the rise and eventual crisis of the Ivorian economic miracle. Then I define what emerged in the 1950s as a French policy of dubbing American-inflected modernization practices, tracing the origin of dubbing as a sociocultural practice to contain the rise of the American Century—defined here as the informal US empire of the twentieth century. Next, I provide an epistemological discussion of the method and sources that I used to write a transnational history of the Ivorian modernization drive from the end of the Second World War until the late 1970s. In the last section, I outline the main articulations of the book as a whole.

FOUNDING A MODERN IVORY COAST

Ivory Coast officially became a French colony in March 1893. In anticipation of this development and hoping to outcompete their British rivals already present in the nearby Gold Coast, the French had gradually signed “protectorate treaties” with a number of chiefs in the coastal communities from Assinie (East) to Grand-Bereby (West).¹⁴ As in many parts of Africa before the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, these treaties meant little to the local societies. Regardless, the French military and navy officers used them to extend France’s influence in the region. As a result, their offensive provided France with a number of forts and outposts in Ivory Coast. In a process that echoed historical development in other parts of Africa, however, it was only after the Berlin Conference that the French would consolidate their control over the territory. By the end of the First World War, the “pacification” of the last remaining resisters to a French imperial takeover had been achieved under the iron fist of Governor Gabriel Angoulvant. Thereafter, the colonial state began the policy of *mise en valeur* (development/exploitation) under the doctrine of the *pacte colonial* (neo-mercantilism).¹⁵

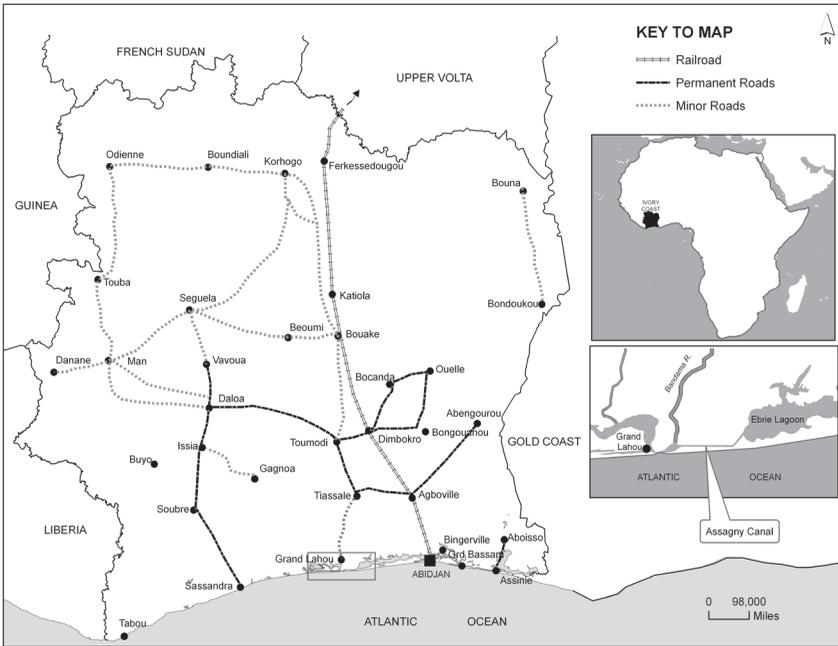
While France carved up Ivory Coast’s administrative space that eventually became enshrined in international law, modernity (and the logics of cosmopolitanism that came in its wake) did not come with the French. During the early modern period when the world became encompassed through global trade and the movement of people, the communities of numerous coastal zones of the future Ivory Coast were active in Atlantic exchanges. In providing food, manual labor, and occasional slaves to transatlantic ships plying the Gulf of Guinea, many of these polities acquired in return foreign commodities and ways of doing that they ultimately domesticated. As a consequence, their cultures were already a dynamic mix of foreign and domestic elements before the French presence became hegemonic.¹⁶ Thus,

at the time of the creation of the colony, for instance, the area extending from Assinie to Tabou was far from a tabula rasa where the French came to inscribe the first modernist signs. Such precolonial modernity also existed in other parts of the territory. In the northern and midwestern regions, for instance, many polities had been involved in long-distance trading activities that connected the forest zones to the savanna, the Sahelian corners of West Africa, and even to the Mediterranean world. In the Southwest, there had equally existed numerous transregional exchanges that resulted in innovative cultural changes and technological advances.¹⁷

To argue the existence of this precolonial modernity does not mean that the arrival of the French in the area was inconsequential. In fact, the extension of France's imperial control went hand in hand with a vast program of infrastructural development that expanded the zone of interactions among groups as it made the movement of people and ideas within the borders of French West Africa much easier.¹⁸ No sooner did effective occupation and colonization become the option for the imperial state than the French began constructing wharves, roads, and a south-north rail line.¹⁹ In 1900, planning began to equip the colony with a reliable seaport. In the meantime, the building of the railroad (see map I.1), which had started in 1904, reached such localities as Agboville (1906), Dimbokro (1910), Bouaké (1912), Katiola (1923), and Ferkessédougou (1928). Finally, the Assagny Canal was dug in 1929, to link the Ebrié Lagoon to the estuary of the Bandama River and the Grand-Lahou lagoon network, in an effort to make coastal trading more efficient.²⁰

As in other parts of the empire, French concerns for the development of the natural resources of Ivory Coast were almost coeval with the project of imperial expansion. While the systematic exploitation of woods, ivory, and wild rubber began as early as the late nineteenth century, the limitations of such an extractive economic approach soon became evident and a need for a remedy emerged. Thus, in the early twentieth century, through trial and error, French colonial authorities experimented with European plantation agriculture and later embarked on the promotion of native-run commercial agriculture. These experiments had initially mixed results. The end of the First World War, however, marked a turning point in this new approach. In the aftermath of the war, the new agricultural policy that centered on the natives became articulated as a legitimate governmental policy when the minister for the colonies, Albert Sarraut, conceived the doctrine of *mise en valeur*.²¹

In a bid to make colonialism pay for itself, but also in an explicit effort to curb perceived communist-led agitation in France's colonial possessions, Sarraut indeed argued that "economic development was essential to limit



MAP I.1. Ivory Coast and French infrastructural development, ca. 1930. Cartography by author.

the popular appeal of leftist ideas to colonized peoples.”²² Equally premised on the interwar ideas of developmentalism and *politique indigène*—the conceit that a new policy that paternalistically respected indigenous culture(s) was essential to lead the natives into progress—Sarraut’s doctrine envisioned a renovated colonial governmentality as the surest road to secure the welfare of the colonial subjects.²³ More critically, however, *mise en valeur* was designed to help France revive its economy after the First World War. This was all the more necessary since the war had left metropolitan France crippled and its citizens demoralized.²⁴

The implementation of *mise en valeur* echoed the practices that the British were deploying in their own empire. Thus, in the French colonies as much as in the British ones, the gradual accumulation of practical knowledge on the colonial subjects, on their mores, their lands, and their agronomic practices, proved essential.²⁵ Minister Sarraut made such doctrine clear when he suggested that science, a systematic imperial division of labor (between metropole and colonies), and the notion of comparative advantage should guide France in a rational development of its empire.²⁶ Although the

trend had started in an early decade of the twentieth century, the ministerial sanction of rational exploitation did accelerate the transformation of the various botanical and trial gardens (*jardins d'essais*) into science-backed experimentation centers geared toward finding and creating improved seeds and plant breeds for colonial agriculture.²⁷ In addition to merging the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Agriculture Coloniale and the Jardin Colonial into an Institut National d'Agronomie Tropicale (INAC) in the metropole in 1921, the imperial decision makers worked to change agronomic institutions in the colonies. In this drive, the Dabou and Bingerville botanical gardens in Ivory Coast that had been created at the beginning of French rule were upgraded to become experimental stations charged with studying cocoa, coffee, cola nuts, and other tropical crops. New agronomic stations were also set up in the colony after 1920, including the Bouaké station, which was charged with studying cotton; a station at La Mé meant to focus on oil palm tree research; and the Man station, which specialized in both coffee and cinchona.²⁸

While these early investments in applied research and infrastructural development boosted the local economy, it was ultimately the actions of the colonial subjects in Ivory Coast that set the stage for what would become an agricultural revolution in the territory. Well before the incorporation of the Ivorian territory into the expanding French West African Empire, some people in the southwestern regions of Ivory Coast had developed coffee and later cocoa plantations. However, the coming of the French and their focus on the southeastern seaboard led to the decline of this first experiment in tree cropping.²⁹ Some decades later, cash cropping resumed in the colony, this time with white colonists whom the colonial state supported and on the eastern border as its geographic base. By the 1920s, however, African farmers—in a move that echoed the choices of planters in the nearby Gold Coast—had emerged as the leading producers of coffee and cocoa.³⁰ Thus, on the eve of the Second World War, some of the key ingredients for the eventual boom of the Ivorian economy had been clearly, if modestly, set in place. These included not only the construction of a network of roads, a rail line, and lagoon water lanes to make movement easier, but also the expansion of African-initiated cash cropping in the forest regions—a development that relied on the manual labor of the northerners, many of whom had migrated or were made to migrate to cocoa and coffee plantations in the southern half of the territory.³¹

The first signs that the Africans would defend their interests against the colonists were also visible. For instance, in an article that he wrote in 1932, Félix Houphouët-Boigny—an African doctor, a cash-crop planter, and the

future independence leader who ultimately came to dominate politics in Ivory Coast—denounced the exploitative practices of the French import-export firms and their associated colonial trading houses, and called for a fair price for the products of the African farmers.³² The postwar era would amplify these historical trends. Even more, the rise of the American Century and the onset of the global Cold War would interact to complicate the story of Ivory Coast's bid for development. For if the process of social change since 1893 had largely been the outcome of Franco-African interactions, after the Second World War, the United States and other global forces would insert themselves into the Ivorian visions of modernity. As will become clear, this new conjuncture would decidedly renew the problematic of Ivory Coast's postwar economic growth.

PROBLEMATIZING THE “IVORIAN MIRACLE”

The Ivorian method and efforts toward achieving a capitalist modernity in the twentieth century have always been subject to impassioned debates among scholars and development practitioners alike. Many analysts have specifically underlined the benefits of implementing flexible planning measures, the creation of parastatal corporation, or the use of the mechanism of a Budget spécial d'investissement et d'équipement (special budget for public investment and infrastructural development, or BSIE). Even though some experts criticized French hegemonic control of Ivory Coast's economy from the late 1950s through the early 1980s, almost all those who assessed the postwar evolution of the African country concluded that its socioeconomic achievements were indeed impressive.³³ The completion of a deep-sea harbor in the capital city of Abidjan in 1951 marked the beginning of an economic boom that soon helped the country to displace Senegal as the most successful of France's colonial possessions in West Africa. After independence in 1960, Ivory Coast continued its capitalist-induced growth. With the availability of “free” land in the western part of the country, coupled with an “open door” policy to attract cheap labor from neighboring countries like Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea, the nation indulged in an extensive cash-crop cultivation that soon turned the country into the world's largest producer of cocoa and the third-biggest producer of coffee. By the late 1960s, these two primary products, together with timber, provided 70 percent of the government's earnings and 40 percent of its national budget. Even more, with an annual growth rate of 7 percent in the 1950s, domestic growth reached the double digits in the early 1970s. By the late 1970s, however, the Ivorian miracle had turned into a mirage, an economic illusion whose reverberations still inform people's

reading of the country's current sociopolitical predicament. How can one make sense of this dramatic shift and of the historicism that it begot? What role can a serene historical analysis play in such a quest for meaning? What was the role of local Ivorians and transnational forces in shaping the so-called Ivorian miracle and its eventual decline?

In the wake of political commentators and activists, scholars have long underscored the role of France in the making of the Ivorian economic miracle. If anything, the presence of an exceptionally high number of French expatriate and immigrant communities in Ivory Coast since the 1950s has provided undeniable evidence of the "privileged" relations between Ivory Coast and France with regard to the politics of Ivorian development. In particular, William Zartman and Christopher Delgado have supported this point by showing that postcolonial Ivory Coast had the "highest number of French technical assistants in Africa, the highest number of students in French universities, and the highest number of large French firms in any African country."³⁴ Other scholars have rightly demonstrated how Ivory Coast's political economy crystallizes the drawbacks of neocolonial Franco-African relations, especially the power of the infamous *Françafrique* on the Ivorian economy.³⁵

There is no denying that the scholarship on Franco-Ivorian relations within the frame of *Françafrique* has added much to our understanding of the Ivorian miracle and its immediate beneficiaries. Still, much has been obscured by an excessive reliance on an unpacked paradigm that downplays the power of forces outside French and African elite decision makers. In contradistinction to such a view that casts France as the unchallenged foreign power in post/colonial Ivory Coast, *African Miracle, African Mirage* argues that Ivorian leaders wittily contested the hegemony of Paris by appealing to the United States to become involved in targeted areas of the Ivorian politics of development. While they never pushed for a dramatic break from the former colonial power, Houphouët-Boigny and his companions also repeatedly wooed Washington to provide development assistance. These overtures to the Americans created triangulated relationships whose frictions, together with the structure of the world system, opened and shut many possibilities for the Ivorian post/colony.³⁶

Using a multiarchival and international history approach, *African Miracle, African Mirage* revisits these frictions along with the contested trajectory of Ivory Coast's modernization up to the early 1980s. Focusing on the multi-stranded interactions among Ivorians, French, and Americans, the book narrates the course of the unusual, if short-lived, success story of an export-led economic growth in Africa. In the study, I attempt to complicate and explain

historically why the Ivorian economic miracle of the 1950s and 1960s turned into a mirage by the late 1970s. The book also inquires whether the Ivorian failure to modernize along the path drawn by modernization theorists was really due to the inherent fragility of the national economic system. Should part of the blame be put on the shortsightedness of the local bourgeoisie, as suggested by dependency theorists? If this is the case, what role did US support of the autocratic Ivorian regime play in the unfolding of the Ivorian miracle? What role did common Ivorians, especially farmers, play in this fantastic story of modernization gone awry?

In tackling these questions, this work breaks new ground in the study of development in Africa and, especially, in Francophone West Africa's leading country. Samir Amin's seminal opus on capitalism in Ivory Coast had concluded in 1967 that an Ivorian economic miracle was unsustainable; in fact, it was a classic case of "growth without development" since foreign capital and extrinsic factors were the driving engine of expansion.³⁷ This thesis would have a lasting impact on subsequent discussions on the merits and demerits of the Ivorian model. Not only did the Ivorian government itself try to engage the Aminian ideas, but other scholars also came up with their own readings of the economic experience of Ivory Coast. For instance, in a frontal rebuttal of Amin's fundamental claim, Henrik Marcussen and Jens Torp argued in 1979 that Ivory Coast was well on its way toward self-sustained development. Writing almost a quarter of a century after the Egyptian Marxist economist's initial pronouncement, John Rapley also challenged both Amin's conclusions and the very premises of his argument. Analyzing data he collected during fieldwork in Ivory Coast in the 1980s, he offered that "Ivoirien capitalism is healthy and dynamic." Taking the counterpoint of Amin's thesis, Rapley claimed that "the growth of capitalism in Côte d'Ivoire [Ivory Coast]—which nobody questions, even if they often doubt its prospects—would arguably not have occurred had it not been for Ivoirien capital."³⁸ Other analysts and scholars, including experts at the World Bank, Elliot Berg, Bonnie Campbell, Yves-André Fauré and Jean-François Médard, Moustapha Diabaté, and a new crop of young social scientists, have participated in (and continue to contribute to) the debate over the nature, sources, and limits of the country's model of exceptional economic expansion.³⁹

It seems, though, that the scholarly confrontation over Ivory Coast reached a stalemate a long time ago, mostly because the ultimate fate of the Ivorian model of development is like a moving target whose end appears always projected into a never-ending future. So, while I partake in the discussions on the origins and destiny of the Ivorian experiment in modernization

in the aftermath of the Second World War, I do so in order to bring a historian's perspective into a largely economics-centered debate. Engaging with the economists but also using them as historical subjects who performatively participated in the (re)making of the Ivorian model, I deploy a historical sociology of knowledge and insights from (post)colonial studies to shed light not only on policy making and its consequences, but also on the discursive postures that social scientists adopted to name and challenge what ultimately is best labeled as Ivory Coast's "Thirty Glorious Years." Such epistemology and interdisciplinary historical approach have the advantage of bringing to the fore the idea that not only did local actors shape the politics of development in Ivory Coast, but transnational agents such as France's Ivorianist social scientists and American financial institutions were key forces in the rise and eventual crisis of the Ivorian miracle.

A TANGLE OF PLAYERS:
TRANSNATIONALISM AND STATE-LED DEVELOPMENT

The protagonists of the story of Ivorian development were many: peasant farmers and cash-crop planters, colonial bureaucrats, diplomats, corporations, experts, radical students/intellectuals, and more. Ideals regarding the good life and their translations into policy actions could also be seen as part of the cast of characters. In emphasizing their entangled geographies across nation-states, I place the history of Ivory Coast's modernization in a transnational perspective. That is, in a vista that looks at "processes which can no longer be clearly assigned either to *states* or—as suggested by the model of 'inter-national politics'—to the area *between* states."⁴⁰ Unlike the assumption of certain authors, this recognition of the power of transnationalism need not imply that state actors were no longer important. It does mean, however, that in explaining national histories, one has to take into account the "direct horizontal transactions between societal actors of different nation-states, transactions which bypass the institutions of government but strongly affect their margin of maneuver; the various forms of mutual penetration of formally separate entities; and the growing activities of a number of nonstate actors."⁴¹

Revisiting the era of the 1970s and 1980s, when there emerged a debate on the significance of multinational corporations (MNCs) in the development process of Third World countries, sheds a new light on this point. In the academic dispute that pitted dependency theorists against neoclassical economists, liberal economists had claimed that MNCs were great conduits for development since they not only provided needed foreign investment, but also because their presence in a country resulted in intended and

unintended knowledge spillovers that usually accrue to the host countries.⁴² In contrast, neo-Marxists argued that the activities of foreign large corporations in the developing world led to a mix of economic retardation, unequal development, and the furthering of underdevelopment. Ultimately, MNCs only extended the reach of global capitalism while it perpetuated the peripheral status of host countries.⁴³

This is not the space in which to review the voluminous literature on the debate between the two schools—such task having been undertaken by other scholars. Suffice it to suggest, however, that in spite of their ideological opposition, both sides seemed to agree on the fact of the transnationalism of MNCs as a historical force in the political economy of postcolonial countries. By the same token, one can argue, the movement of multinational corporations across the borders of nation-states in the Global South emerged as a historiographical category.⁴⁴

Unfortunately, empirical studies that historicized the operation of the MNCs were scarce, and the focus on their activities did not usually go beyond financial or industrial organization theories. This was particularly true for MNC studies that brought attention onto Ivory Coast.⁴⁵ It is insightful, then, that many of the academic participants in the debate on multinational firms missed the opportunity to assess the performative acts of their peers and colleagues as agents of transnationalism in the saga of development and modernity in the Global South. Yet academic knowledge production was never an end in itself. In fact, scholars, their research, and the eventual circulation of the knowledge that they manufactured in the form of expertise usually acted as a transnational force whose power was mobilized by various constituents of the Ivorian postcolonial state. This was not unlike the relationship between knowledge producers and the colonial state or international institutions that aspired to act as purveyors of global governance. For instance, in the postwar period, as Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard have suggested,

the problem of development gave rise to a veritable industry in the social sciences, with a complex and often ambiguous relationship to governmental, international, and private agencies actively engaged in promoting economic growth, alleviating poverty, and fostering beneficial social change in “developing” regions of the world. From Oxfam to the United States Agency for International Development to the World Bank to rice research institutes in India to the World Health Organization, a diverse and complex set of

institutions—funded with billions of dollars—has focused on research and action directed toward development.⁴⁶

As will become clear in subsequent chapters, the activities of France's Société d'Etudes pour le Développement Economique et Social (SEDES) and, especially, the work of the Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique Outre-Mer (ORSTOM) admirably illustrate this entangled process in Ivory Coast. Set up in the early 1940s to help coordinate the activities of French applied scientists working in the overseas territories in the midst of a changing world, the latter quickly evolved to become an indispensable institution whose power helped France to maintain its dominance over various parts of the Francophone world.⁴⁷

In Ivory Coast, it was partly the maneuvers of the French state that resulted in ORSTOM's eventual hegemonic presence in the West African country. But the transnationalization of knowledge production and circulation need not always flow through state officials. This is particularly poignant in recent historical studies on the circulation of the Tennessee Valley Authority's notion of regional planning, which show the significance of nonstate actors like philanthropic foundations in spreading the TVA model of modernization in Asia and beyond.⁴⁸ We shall further elaborate on the Ivorian ramifications of this circulation of the TVA idea in chapter 4 and show how it illustrates the pertinence of a transnational history approach to understand Ivory Coast's bid for a US-inflected postwar modernity. In other instances, as we shall discuss in chapters 5 and 6, the circulation of developmentalist ideas was realized because of an intricate interaction among experts, diplomats, bureaucrats, and scholars who ultimately acted as brokers of modernization.

The players in the saga of state-led development in Ivory Coast were therefore numerous, and their actions were not always in the headlines. This is partly so because the implementation of modernization ideas did not necessarily produce titanic encounters. In this sense, French socio-anthropologist Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan's insight that "interactions between the developmentalist configuration and African populations do not occur as dramatic confrontation" could not be more on target. In fact, the developmentalist encounters operated through "discreet passageways, relays, extended or restricted networks of transmission, interfaces." To be sure, this means that modernization was, "fundamentally, a process that relies on mediation, which proceeds through a wide range of multiple, embedded, overlapping, intertwined mediations."⁴⁹ The story of ORSTOM's Ivorianists, between 1947 when the institution's Ivory Coast branch was inaugurated and the 1980s when

part of the institution's asset was Ivorianized, sheds an intriguing light on one aspect of this mediation. Even more, as will be developed later in the book, the ORSTOM developmentalist foray into the West African country complicates the traditional narrative on the transnational circulation of knowledge since the beneficiaries of the Orstomian knowledge spillover were not exclusively the Ivorians. A critical engagement with the multiple sites and archives of Ivory Coast's modernization élan will make this ever more evident.

METHOD, SOURCES,
AND VISIONS FOR A NEW HISTORY

With the present trend to internationalize the historical study of Africa, a resort to multiarchival research to explore the Ivorian miracle should not come as a surprise. The interactive global context of Cold War development projects analyzed in this book also makes my study a multisited and translocal endeavor. In a sense, this should be obvious, especially if one remembers that US relations with Ivory Coast had ramifications for US relations with France. The triangular (and even multilateral) character of US relations with former French colonies in a Cold War context has been aptly demonstrated. More specifically, historically minded scholars who have embraced an international history approach to study postwar developmentalism have revealed that US-led modernization efforts in the Global South antagonized the interests of the European (colonial) powers.⁵⁰

Departing from this scholarly literature on postwar modernization and Americanization that largely focuses on Latin America and Asia, I argue that the export of American developmental precepts affected (post)colonial Francophone Africa as well, even though the process itself was mediated through France. I show that the promise of American-style modernization provided an opportunity for anticolonial nationalists to triangulate the relationship between Ivory Coast and France beginning in the late 1940s. The ensuing politics of triangulation allowed the Americans to insert themselves into the seemingly tight filial bond between Ivory Coast and France. This new trilateral political configuration contributed to the delegitimization of the French colonialist mission, forcing colonial officials and scholars, and later French postcolonial diplomats, development workers, and social scientists, to resort to what I call "dubbing," the process by which American-inflected models of development were seemingly translated into French ideas and policies. While it opened new spaces for negotiation, the competition between the French and the Americans also produced a schizophrenic dynamic in the implementation of modernization projects during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.⁵¹

My resort to a multisited approach is motivated less by the dynamics of the international situation (or even the triangular nature of my project) than by the way I conceive of development—the phenomenological object/process of my inquiry. Specialists in various fields of the social sciences have defined the concept in terms of national prosperity, alleviation of poverty, and increased purchasing power for individuals; all of which points to what has been aptly called the “secular telos of material redemption.”⁵² Without discarding this materialist perspective altogether, I want to regard development as a nexus of moral discourses and a set of social practices traversed by multiple temporalities. There were certainly at stake the material objectives of increasing capital investment, transferring technology, and achieving economic well-being through the “rational” exploitation of the environment; goals in which the perceptive observer can see the influence of the so-called European Enlightenment to which postwar development is discursively linked through colonialism.⁵³ But one might also see the temporality of American modernization theory, which, as a particular variation of and a carrier of a distinctive vision of modernity, was mobilized to achieve eco-social changes as well as checkmate the spread of communism. It was largely this variation of modernity/development (along with the tools to achieve it) that was institutionalized in the World Bank and other agencies of the post-1945 new world order.⁵⁴ Finally, one can see in the developmentalist ethos of the late twentieth century the temporalities of local politics that have so well been mapped out in the critical ethnographies of development.⁵⁵

Building on the pioneering works of historians of development and the insights of such anthropologists as Arjun Appadurai, Emily Martin, and George Marcus, I posit development packaging as a commodity-like object whose social/cultural life should be explored at the various sites of its production, mediation, and consumption.⁵⁶ Much like Martin in her analysis of immunity in American culture, I have deliberately crossed “back and forth across the borders between the institutions in which scientists produce knowledge [...] and the wider [Ivorian] society,” which was supposed to receive the benefits of progress in the form of modernization.⁵⁷ This translocal approach complicates our understanding of the US Cold War development initiatives toward Ivory Coast, for it demonstrates that development was much more than the material and supposedly moral transformation of a society according to a hegemonic French or American model. In fact, it suggests that it is through the mapping and analysis of dialogues among experts, diplomats, bureaucrats, local brokers, and the general population that we will come to a more profound understanding of late twentieth-century modernity.⁵⁸

As part of my effort to make this translocal research approach more efficient, I interviewed people who planned, enforced, witnessed, and underwent the discipline inherent in the implementation of development projects. These oral histories enabled me to “read” written sources, both archival and published, in new ways. In fact, I used a mass of diplomatic records and official policy papers for an appreciation of the moral/ethical foundation of policy making, and the press and academic literature for the formulation of opinions, then and now. Opting to use news stories and scholarly articles as performative speech acts along with official records and oral interviews finds its justification in the ubiquitous presence of these journalistic, scholarly, and even popular sources in the archives and personal papers of many a policy maker.⁵⁹

These uses of written and oral sources, and the deployment of an interdisciplinary approach, have allowed me to provide a fresh perspective on the history of developmentalism in the wake of the Cold War. In the last decade or so, there has been an explosion of historical studies that focus attention on American involvement in modernization efforts in various parts of the world to undercut the appeal of Soviet internationalism. Others have shown that the Soviet Union and even communist China attempted similar transnational modernization efforts to make friends.⁶⁰ By zooming in on the case of America’s role in Ivorian modernization drives, the book reminds us that places receiving US-inflected modernization packages were hardly blank slates. Rather, they had a long history of engagement with modernity—whether in its precolonial manifestations, colonial guise, or otherwise. The narrative recounted here suggests that local actors in Ivory Coast constantly used the unwritten script of such a longer history of engagement with cosmopolitanism, along with their embodied memories of the modern, to “domesticate” foreign development assistance in the twentieth century. Here, then, as never before, the “glocal” characteristics of modernity become manifest.

MAIN ARTICULATIONS OF THE BOOK

To substantiate the claims sketched out above, I have divided *African Miracle, African Mirage* into three parts that are largely (but not exclusively) chronological and thematic. Titled “The Postwar Years,” part 1 (chapters 1 and 2) focuses on the years between 1946 and 1960. It is set in the context of the rise of the American Century, the emerging Cold War, transformations in the colonial rule of European powers, and decolonization. It highlights the roots/routes of the Ivorian miracle by underlining the importance

of the African-led cash-crop revolution in its unfolding. This section also demonstrates the role of the postwar modernization drive and how such socioeconomic phenomenon was informed by an American-inflected modernization theory. Part 2, “The Decade of Development” (chapters 3–5), sheds light on the changes that followed the cascade of independence proclamations in the 1960s. It demonstrates the difficulty for the leaders of the newly independent Ivory Coast to overcome the legacy of late colonialism and the appeal of postwar modernization theory, even as they initiated a nation-building strategy based on regional planning. To support this point, the section fleshes out, among other things, two modernization projects that crystallized the pervasive presence of American ideas in the Ivorian modernization drive. Part 3, “The Fate of Modernization” (chapters 6 and 7), brings the story to the 1970s when signs that the Ivorian model had been built on shaky ground became visible. It also places the last years of the Ivorian miracle in the global context of the oil shocks of the decade—a conjuncture that paved the way for the emergence of recession and subsequent structural-adjustment programs.

Chapter 1 focuses on the infrastructural development boom in postwar Ivory Coast. Tracking the logic of late colonial developmentalist efforts, I reveal the continuity between the policy of *mise en valeur* that was implemented in the interwar period and postwar modernization ideology. The chapter also uncovers the role of colonial agronomic research and, more importantly, the agency of African farmers in turning this once-backwater territory of French West Africa into a model colony that attracted investors beyond metropolitan France. Such conjuncture illuminates the interest of the United States in socioeconomic processes in Ivory Coast.

Chapter 2 is an examination of the ways in which French colonial administrators responded to the implicit critique that modernization theory raised against their rule in French Africa. In particular, I highlight the logics that informed the French policy of dubbing modernization discourse. Increasingly aware of the threat that the coming of the American Century posed to the maintenance of French rule in Ivory Coast and other parts of the *outré-mer* (overseas territories), French colonial authorities opted to translate American-inflected modernization concepts into the language of a rejuvenated *mise en valeur* of their “dependent” territories. Such a move was all the more clever since it secured the steady flow of American Marshall Plan funds into the French Empire while providing a timely answer to the politics of triangulation that some nationalist leaders had just begun to articulate. As it turned out, the reappropriation of modernization theory proved

insufficient. In fact, most of France's colonies, including Ivory Coast, gained their independence by the end of 1960.

Chapter 3 investigates how the coming of independence provided an opportunity to reframe development planning in Ivory Coast. I begin this chapter by looking at the dilemma faced by the Ivorian leadership in the field of human resources. Decolonization had meant for many nationalists just an Africanization of the staff that managed a largely Euro-American type of bureaucratic state in an African setting. But meeting the demand of filling vacancies led the Ivorian leaders to resort to international cooperation as a viable alternative to what some of them called “cut-rate” Africanization. Having proved themselves a reliable source of expertise, French researchers from the Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique Outre-Mer came to dominate the design of Ivorian postcolonial modernization. Furthermore, they attempted to bring regional concerns—styled after the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)—into Ivorian development planning. Rejecting a sectoral understanding of development, the Orstomians would reintroduce spatial analysis as a central parameter in any postcolonial nation-building effort undertaken by the Ivorian authorities.

In chapter 4, I examine the first large-scale postcolonial development project in which the United States was involved, namely, the construction of the Kossou Dam in Central Ivory Coast and the expansion of the Ivorian electricity grid. Looking at the inflow of both US financial capital through the Export-Import (Exim) Bank and American expertise through Kaiser Engineers, I demonstrate that the making of Kossou was a truly transatlantic process. This was all the more so since the ideology of integrated regional development that informed the Kossou operation had not only been (re)articulated in the American experiment in the valley of the Tennessee River, but had also transited through the region of Languedoc-Roussillon in southern France. I also demonstrate that some of the architects of the Kossou project, including key French development experts, had been inspired by the projects of the TVA.

In chapter 5, I tackle another key postcolonial project directly affected by the United States: the dual incorporation of the Ivorian Southwest into the fold of modernity and the Ivorian nation. By examining the Ivorian activities of David E. Lilienthal, I underline the significance of the United States in the Ivorian leadership's dreams of modernity. This is demonstrated through an examination of the consulting work of Lilienthal and his partners at Development and Resources Corporation. Through this work, Lilienthal became one key player in the scheme to develop the southwestern part of Ivory Coast. The chapter explains that such a role was all the more possible

since the Ivorian authorities had initiated in the mid-1960s a policy of diversification that was informed by a TVA-like outlook on nation building. But the cost of an American-style modernization of the Southwest was not easy to shoulder. This reality eventually forced the Ivorians to fall back on French mediation, including the ever-needed expertise of ORSTOM's social scientists. Even more, the modernization of the Ivorian Southwest revealed the all-important role of grassroots actors in rearticulating the elitist visions of postcolonial development.

The fate of the Ivorian modernization in the 1970s is the focus of chapter 6. Responding to the performative actions of various interest groups, including university students and school leavers, the authorities created numerous parastatals to employ job-hungry graduates who had appropriated the discourse of Ivorianization of the economy. At the same time, Houphouët-Boigny (commonly called Le Vieux) furthered the fight against the perceived regional disparity in the country. The launching of the sugar production estates and associated mills answered to both of these policies. Set in the northern savanna provinces of Ivory Coast—seen as the poor relation in the Ivorian growth and the “last frontier” of the Ivorian modernization drive—the program relied largely on foreign capital to reinvigorate the diversification of the Ivorian economy. The chapter brings into relief the key consequences of a high-modernist investment in the Greater North.

In the last chapter, I analyze the end of the boom years of the Ivorian economy in the late 1970s. In particular, I pay attention to some of the environmental consequences of the modernization drive of the previous decades. I then look at the ways in which both French and American diplomats and experts viewed the collapse of the economic miracle. The chapter equally explores the responses of the Ivorian authorities to the flagging economy, including their self-initiated internal structural-adjustment program. Finally, I resuscitate the voices of Left-leaning Ivorian intellectuals who, throughout the years of the boom, had cast doubts on the Ivorian model, arguing in the wake of economist Samir Amin that the Ivorian miracle produced “growth without development.”

The conclusion of *African Miracle, African Mirage* will suggest that the fate of the Ivorian development and modernization drive is best mapped out through a critical reading of local and translocal sources, as well as a keen engagement with the vicissitudes of a world system in transition between French (and European) colonialism, US neocolonialism, and (neoliberal) globalization. Ultimately, it is through a historical approach, which pays close attention to both local and transnational forces, that we may find the answer to the riddle of how a miracle becomes a mirage in an African postcolony.