

Gender relations in the Ivorian crisis : a case study from Western Ivory Coast

Western Ivory Coast is one of the areas most deeply affected by the civil war which started in September 2002. As an immediate consequence of the outbreak of the war, local economies, based on dual labor organization along the gender divide and dominated by male cash crop earnings, underwent some radical changes. The breakdown of the markets, followed by the collapse of income-generating activities of both the male and the female part, the latter based on selling gardening produce on local markets, led, specifically among the Tura, a mountain dwelling people north of the city of Man, to a situation where the generalized production of brooms from oil palms, traditionally considered a stopgap solution for poor women, became the key to collective survival. In this highly dynamic situation of accelerated, exogeneously induced socio-economic change, the renegotiation of traditional male-centered gender roles and relations, as reflected in local discourse and spontaneous behaviour by male and female actors, is one of the foci of ongoing field research carried out throughout the period of crisis by local researchers under the direction of a researcher from the University of Zurich and in co-operation with the Swiss Center of Scientific Research in Abidjan as part of the LAGSUS project, sponsored by the Volkswagen Foundation (« Language, Gender and Sustainability » ; www.lagsus.de). Currently available results indicate that while the dynamics of crisis itself, and, as the economic deadlock is easing off, of crisis resolution, contributes to making traditional role relationships more negotiable, and while the temporary inversion of the balance of economic strength favors the quest for female autonomy, the traditional order with, at its core, an explicit notion of female dependency remains, paradoxically, a major reference and a factor of societal cohesion – not least, surprisingly or not, in the peri-urban diaspora of Greater Abidjan, virtually cut off from the rural home area by the still prevailing political bipartition of the country.

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Bearth, Thomas (dir.), 2007. *Dynamiques du genre : le cas toura. Stratégies de survie en temps de crise*. Abidjan : Editions Livres Sud (EDILIS). Avec des contributions de Joseph Baya, Thomas Bearth, Rose Marie Beck, Mohamed Doumbia, Douoh Honorine Guéli, S. Jacques Silué, Geneviève Singo, Lydie Vé Kouadio. Préface François A. Adopo. 286 p. + iv planches couleur.
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