ABSTRACT: The anthropology of war has provided intimate analyses of how communities deal with hardship in violent conflicts. These clearly affect such communities’ social fabric, but exactly how is little understood. This article uses the lens of trust and distrust to analyze the effects of violent conflict on social relations. Through an ethnographic case study of a nurse during the 2002–2011 violent conflict in Côte d’Ivoire, I show how his trust in social norms, political opponents, and strangers in general became transformed into distrust. He stopped saving names in his phone to protect himself and people in his phone. The case highlights how experiences of duress can create distrust and how distrust can prolong conditions of duress by hindering the rebuilding of social trust.

KEYWORDS: Côte d’Ivoire, distrust, insecurity, trust, violent conflict, wartime social life

Ever since I first arrived in Côte d’Ivoire in 2008, Uncle Yoro has fascinated me. He was the one who told me that I was accepted into the family after a period of observation that I was unaware of. It was not a prescribed ritual, but he did it in the way he often adopted in his role as the nephew of my husband’s family. Despite the fact that my husband has many nephews, Uncle Yoro somehow excels in playing that role owing to his personality and skills acquired during childhood from close observation of his father, the chief of Kpanpleu in the Man region in western Côte d’Ivoire. His French is full of direct translations from his mother tongue, a southeastern Mande variety, interspersed with cultural expressions and sayings. He often refers to norms from the village in family meetings in Abidjan. For instance, he would say, “This is not how my father told me to do it,” or, “It is said that we are born and we will die, but what we have come to do in this world, we need to accomplish!”

Yoro is in his fifties now, tall and portly, with a big, warm smile often covering his face. He was trained as a nurse and today has a responsible position at a major state-led hospital in Abidjan. For more than a decade, he has been active in the trade union of the health service, and he often says that he wants to run for election in the region of his hometown. He never comes alone to see my husband and me. He is always with people. People are his wealth. His house in Abidjan is a full of people from the village. Often, we laugh and say Uncle Yoro’s house is the headquarters of Kpanpleu in Abidjan. When you enter the inconspicuous house, you find yourself in a long, extended living room with well-worn turquoise walls and two upholstered (three-piece) suites. Everyone is grouped in front of a TV that is never switched off. There are no windows, and the two large ventilators air the room with little success in humid Abidjan. But I love sitting there, jammed in between others, which makes me feel part of a big family.
During the violent conflict, sleeping places had numbers in the living room. “I will sleep at position three tonight,” was how youngsters squatting in the house talked among themselves. At the beginning, I often found it astonishing how he managed to feed all the people, pay for their transport and health care, send them to school, or find them work. As time went on, I realized that an important amount of his funds came from his work in the trade union. The kitchen behind is always busy. His wife is very calm and loving. She is from central Côte d’Ivoire and met Uncle Yoro in Bouaké, where he was on duty before the outbreak of the civil war in 2002. Together, they fled the rebel-held town on foot during the first weeks of open conflict. Since then, they have lived in Abidjan, where their children have grown up.

One thing had always puzzled me about Uncle Yoro. Whenever his phone rings, the screen shows numbers but no names, as it seems he never saves any contacts to his phone. Family members occasionally make fun of his phone without names: “How can you memorize all these numbers? Now that the crisis is over, you can save names again, can’t you?” Through these conversations I learned that the rebels had once discovered the names of members of President Laurent Gbagbo’s party stored on Uncle Yoro’s phone when searching him at one of their checkpoints—a dangerous situation for someone sympathizing with the president’s party. The rebels must have threatened him so much that he decided never to save any names again in his phone. Even now, seven years after the end of the conflict, he sticks to this routine he developed during the violence.

Even if Uncle Yoro’s experience is subjective and particular in the many ways I describe, he was far from being the only one to develop an attitude of distrust. For instance, a man in his late forties said in a conversation in 2011 that the behavior of both armed and non-armed people that he observed during the days of war had changed his view of humankind in general and that he would never trust his fellow citizens in the way he had trusted them before. Furthermore, incidences related to mobile phones were mentioned several times during our research project on transformations of trust in the Ivoirian conflict (Förster et al. 2007). As they contain sensitive personal information about our social relations, people’s phones were searched for contacts and recent calls to find out more about their political orientation.

Negative forms of trust soon became a core focus of my study on social life in the Ivoirian violent crisis for which I conducted research between 2008 and 2011 (Heitz-Tokpa 2013). My data show that distrust functioned as an attitude that permitted one to stay safe. Consequently, a key tactic for assuring one’s safety was to identify whom not to trust. In some cases, this included colleagues and neighbors. This had a negative impact on social life in general, as people became more reserved, particularly about their political views (see also Le Pape and Vidal 2002).

Trust and distrust are notoriously difficult to capture and analyze (Lyon et al. 2012). Distrust in society generally means that people do not engage as spontaneously and openly with other people as they would if there were trust. In Côte d’Ivoire, for instance, research participants repeatedly told me that they changed their behavior in public bars. They described how they would check who was around before talking or would avoid certain topics in public altogether. Distrust has the effect that certain social interactions do not take place; it hinders exchange and inhibits social and economic activities (Bjørnskov 2012; Govier 1997).

The way in which research participants described how they refrained from acting in public as they did before the conflict resonates with what Mirjam de Bruijn and Jonna Both describe in the introduction to this special section: “People are influenced and take decisions they would probably not take if the long exposure to conflict and war, to oppression and the absence of hope, was not part of their lives.” The authors link this to the notion of duress, a concept meant to capture the enduring impacts of persistent hardship, constraints, and/or violence (see also de Bruijn 2012; Stoler 2016). How duress impinges on the social fabric remains an important
question for empirical investigation. In this article, I argue that distrust is both a product of and reason for duress in societies, which experience political violence and conflict. As Uncle Yoro’s attitude of distrust involved a visible change of practice that persisted into the post-conflict phase, I will use his experience as a way to analyze the emergence and persistence of distrust as a form of duress. For this article, I asked Uncle Yoro what happened at the checkpoint and why he stopped saving names in his phone.

The main narrative in research on trust in violent conflict says that trust in the social sphere is reduced to interpersonal relationships between individuals who know each other personally (Rotberg 2003; Widner 2003). More recent empirical research in contexts of violent conflict has shown that (a) interpersonal relationships are more complex and not trustworthy per se (Förster 2009; Heitz-Tokpa 2013; Kalyvas 2006), and (b) social life in areas of violent conflict is much more ordered and routinized than previously thought (Arjona et al. 2015; Förster 2015, 2010; Koloma Beck 2012; Oldenburg 2010; Richards 2012; Vigh 2008), which allows basic trust building at the societal level. People use public spaces, for instance, to go to the market and thereby place trust in unknown others with whom they have no personal relationship (Förster et al. 2007). To analyze how trust is transformed in violent political conflicts, I will distinguish four types of trust that have proved particularly relevant in the context of violent political conflicts: personal, institutional, normative, and basic social trust. First, I will briefly describe the methodology used, after which I will introduce trust and distrust, and the violent political conflict of Côte d’Ivoire (2002–2011); I will then analyze the experience at the checkpoint. Finally, I will show how distrust persists in post-conflict society.

**Methodology**

As an object of study, trust poses several challenges to social science research. As an invisible state of mind and emotion, trust is accessible for study only when it is externalized in either talk or interactions (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 49–51). The most common methods of trust research are different forms of questioning in which people are directly asked to what extent they trust their neighbors, the government, and so on (Hardin 2006: 35; Lyon et al. 2012; Möllering 2006: 141). However, trust also has an unconscious, embodied dimension that is not expressed in talk by subjects. These more implicit forms of trust are embedded in social practice (Förster et al. 2007) and become manifest and indirectly “observable” in social interactions (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 49–51). Hence, observation and subsequent interpretation of people’s social practices is an important method to learn whether someone trusts in a particular situation.

My methodology consisted chiefly of gaining a deep understanding of social life, actors, and situations through participation in everyday life. This allowed me to accompany different people and to learn where they felt safe, whom they trusted, and what places and people they avoided. Based on my reading of theoretical works on trust, I analyzed the social situations I had observed. The background knowledge for this article was obtained during 13 months of field research conducted between 2008 and 2012 in western Côte d’Ivoire, mainly in the town of Man but also in Logoualé. I have included random samples from the wider Man region and a few from Abidjan, some of which I mention in the text to contextualize the case study of Uncle Yoro. Following an inductive approach outlined by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), the sample covered identity markers that proved relevant in relation to security and trust. My research participants during this fieldwork consisted of people with categorical affiliations including different ethnic, religious, professional, and political backgrounds. Since 2014, I have regularly revisited research participants in Abidjan and Man.
As mentioned, I have known Uncle Yoro since 2008. Since then, I have participated in many spontaneously occurring situations, in which I learned about his attitudes of trust and distrust. To add more detail to my knowledge about the event in Logoualé and to learn about Uncle Yoro’s reflections about it, I arranged a meeting with him in Abidjan on 7 July 2017 that took place at his office after work. At first, I asked him what happened in Logoualé as an invitation to tell me about the event. In a second step, I asked questions for more detail, background, and his thoughts in relation to trust and distrust. I did not ask to record the conversation, but I took some notes that I wrote down right after the end of the exchange.

**Trust and Distrust**

People often think that distrust is something negative and that trust is positive per se. However, we benefit from a trustful attitude only if the situation at hand is trustworthy. Particularly in violent conflict, misplaced trust may be fatal (Govier 1997; Hardin 2006). Hence, in many contexts of political violence or situations of enduring socioeconomic hardship, it is advisable to adopt an attitude of distrust—despite the negative consequences for society as a whole, as mentioned earlier.

Trust is generally defined as the confident expectation that others will act in a benevolent way (Govier 1997; Hardin 2006; Möllering 2006, 2018). One of the most productive ways of thinking about trust goes back to the German philosopher Georg Simmel. He described trust as a state between knowing and not knowing. If we knew “everything,” there would be no need for trust, but in a situation where we “know nothing” at all, we have no reasonable basis for trust either ([1908] 1992: 393). This means that trust requires knowledge about the trustworthiness of other actors and entails a judgment about the likelihood that they will act in a trustworthy manner in the future. The future, however, remains unknown to us. But at the moment we trust, it feels as if the future is known to us. Trust imbues us with a feeling of safety and certainty that our expectations will come true. In other words, trust allows us to block out doubts at the moment we trust (Möllering 2006). Perhaps this is the most peculiar aspect of trust.

Another interesting feature of trust is that it is often strongest when not talked about or reflected on. For instance, under normal circumstances, we take it for granted that we are safe when going outside and that unknown others will do us no harm (Govier 1997), which is basic social trust, one of the types we distinguish. Generally, social life is shaped by social roles and routinized ways of interaction that make us feel confident about what to expect from other people’s actions. This allows us to anticipate how others will act, at least to a certain extent. At the onset of a violent conflict, routines of social interaction are partially suspended, and people must familiarize themselves with a new political situation that brings with it new roles (e.g., rebels) and changes in existing power relationships (Heitz-Tokpa 2016). Trust in other actors can no longer be habitually assumed, and shifts into a more reflective mode. As Adam Seligman rightly points out, if you can no longer rely on culturally defined role expectations, there is a greater need for trust in social interactions than under normal circumstances (1997: 38–41).

Distrust is generally considered the opposite of trust: an expectation that others will act in a malevolent manner (Govier 1997; Hardin 2004). This concept of distrust presumes that actors can anticipate insecurity and take precautions. Distrust is not a bad attitude per se; it helps us to be cautious in contexts where misplaced trust may have disastrous consequences, particularly in violent conflicts. As a matter of caution, people often seek signs of trustworthiness before they trust. Trust and distrust have a dispositional quality, functioning analogously to a filter and shaping how we perceive things (Govier 1997: 4). If our trust in a person is strong, we are
inclined to perceive and interpret them in a positive light. The same is true for distrust, which also guides our perceptions of people and situations. If we are distrustful, our perceptions are selective and focus on negative aspects, so we tend to see everything in a negative light. This may lead to a negative downward spiral to the point where we are likely to overlook positive signs because of our lack of trust (Govier 1997). Hence, by being too distrustful, we may inhibit the realization of social and economic projects.

As mentioned, I distinguish four types of trust—personal, institutional, normative, and basic social trust—to analyze Uncle Yoro’s experience (Förster et al. 2007). Such distinctions are frequent in empirical trust research (Möllering 2006: 129–135). The subcategories generally reflect the research interest and the empirical cases at hand. The typology used here was developed in the context of post-conflict Côte d’Ivoire and Namibia (Förster et al. 2007).

“Personal trust” refers to trust in an individual whom we know well. This can be a family member, friend, neighbor, a market vendor from whom we regularly buy fish, and so on. Hence, personal trust is based on a personal relationship with a history of interaction characterized by familiarity. In contexts of political violence and pillaging, the people we know personally may be the only ones we trust. However, people who know us personally may also use the knowledge they have about us against us. Therefore, personal relationships may also constitute a particular threat to us (Heitz-Tokpa 2013).

Another type of trust is “basic social trust”—that is, trust in anonymous others we do not know personally (Förster et al. 2007). Anonymous others can be those who happen to use the same social space, for instance, when going to the market. They take no particular notice of us, and neither do we of them; and we trust—unconsciously most of the time—that our co-citizens will not do us any harm. Sometimes, a specific stranger may initiate a direct interaction with us—for instance, asking us for a lift when going in the same direction. Trudy Govier refers to this as an “impersonal yet interpersonal relationship” (1997: 127). Although we may have only a superficial feeling about a stranger’s trustworthiness, we may need just a low level of trust in the stranger to master the situation at hand (126).

In yet another instance, the unknown other person may be recognizable as a representative of an institution that we consider trustworthy (e.g., a nurse) or untrustworthy (e.g., an armed fighter). In this third example, trust building is mediated by “institutional trust” or distrust, the third type our project distinguished (Förster et al. 2007). The fourth form of trust affected in times of violent conflict, “normative trust,” is trust in norms to do with how society functions, what counts, and how we interrelate with each other. These four types of trust must be conceived of as ideal types, in the sense of Max Weber (1964), and often overlap in real-world situations.

Côte d’Ivoire’s Violent Political Conflict

In the 1960s and 1970s, Côte d’Ivoire was one of the most prosperous and stable young nations in West Africa. The relative prosperity was co-constructed by citizens from neighboring states, particularly from Burkina Faso and Mali, who migrated to Côte d’Ivoire and found work there. During the economic boom years, and under the leadership of the charismatic yet autocratic first President Félix Houphouët-Boigny, foreigners were welcomed and the country enjoyed political stability. However, in the 1980s, with the dramatic drop in cash crop prices, the country’s economy experienced a severe setback, resulting in widespread impoverishment.

When the charismatic “father of the nation” died in office in 1993, a fierce competition among possible successors for the presidency ensued and gradually split the country into dif-
different political camps. One rhetoric tool that emerged in the political struggle was *ivoirité*, an ethno-nationalistic ideology of Ivorian citizenship. It privileged so-called autochthonous populations over populations that had immigrated later, and it attempted to write this logic into the constitution and electoral laws with the aim to exclude eminent candidates from taking part in elections.\(^\text{11}\)

In the elections held in 2000, Laurent Gbagbo, a historian from the south who had created the Ivorian Popular Front (Front Populaire Ivoirien—FPI), came to power. One of the excluded candidates was former Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara, an economist from the north. His supporters immediately took to the streets and demanded new elections. Units that were loyal to the new president suppressed the protests violently. More than 50 bodies were found in the largest neighborhood of Abidjan, Yopougon, most of whom were supporters of the opposition (Le Pape and Vidal 2002). About one hundred Ivorians, many of whom were of northern descent and active in either armed units or in the political opposition, went into exile in Burkina Faso, where a small group had already gathered because of persecutions under the previous regime (Beugré 2011: 18–19). The group that gathered in Burkina Faso formed the core group of the rebel movement that became known as the Forces Nouvelles de Côte d’Ivoire. In the night of 18–19 September 2002, the group attacked. Even though the coup failed in Abidjan, the insurgents managed to occupy the largest town of the north, Korhogo, and the second-largest town in the country, Bouaké, in the center of Côte d’Ivoire.

As a nurse, Uncle Yoro was taken by the rebels to their camp, where he had to treat injured rebel fighters. He was not permitted to leave the camp for fear he would flee. After several days, when a friend from the hospital arrived with the ambulance, they convinced the rebels on guard at the entry gate that they would quickly go home to take a shower. As soon as they left the camp, Uncle Yoro told his friend that he would not return. They left the ambulance on the side of the road and fled with their families to the south. A week later, the insurgents killed more than 50 gendarmes and some of their family members, allegedly in revenge for the killing of Ouattara’s supporters in 2000 (Le Pape and Vidal 2002). Fighting and peace agreements between the government-loyal troops and the insurgents followed suit. By the end of 2002, the rebels had also conquered parts of the west, including the region around Uncle Yoro’s village. For almost a decade, the country remained divided in two, with a rebel-held north and a government-controlled south. International peacekeepers established a demarcation zone between the two conflicting parties and set up regional offices in the major towns in both halves during the time of the conflict.

In both parts of the country, the population faced many challenges in terms of insecurity, persecution, and economic hardship. Politically active opponents had a difficult time in the rebel-held parts, and most fled to the south and came back only after the Ouagadougou peace agreement in 2007. Suspicion was rampant, and so-called informers pointed out homes of alleged political opponents. Political violence mixed with personal requitals poisoned social life in many neighborhoods, but acts of friendship and solidarity also saved many from worse treatment (Heitz-Tokpa 2013).

For the population in the rebel-held west, a difficult time set in. The economy was in disarray, petrol was lacking, and the health and education services remained closed or partly abandoned. Many houses and farms with livestock were looted. Initially, the Ivorian insurgents established checkpoints at every hamlet along the main axis and at the entrances to even the tiniest villages. This considerably hampered transport and trade. Only when the rebel governance system was improved and pressure from trade associations and the UN increased did checkpoints disappear and security and the population’s wealth increase.\(^\text{12}\)
At the Rebels’ Checkpoint in Logoualé

In June 2004, Uncle Yoro’s mother died in the village Kpanpleu, near Man. For the first time since his flight from the rebel-held zones in Bouaké, Uncle Yoro decided to take the road to Man. He traveled with two women members of the family. His elder brother stayed behind. The two brothers did not travel together for security reasons. They were their mother’s only children, and if something happened to them, no one would be left to take good care of the family. For neither of them to participate in their mother’s funeral rites was, however, not an option. Other family members had lived with the rebels since the start of the war. So, the wish for one or the other to pay respects to their deceased mother outweighed the risks of traveling.

When they reached Logoualé, the first town in the rebel-held area, the rebels stopped and searched them and all vehicles arriving from Abidjan. Everyone had to show their identity cards. The rebels did not take much notice of the women’s cards; everything was fine. But Uncle Yoro’s identity card was scrutinized and eventually taken to the second counter—that is, to the next step up the hierarchy, so to speak. Tall and well built, Uncle Yoro had the classic statue of the gendarmes, an armed unit associated with the government. Several research participants mentioned that such stereotypical characteristics raised suspicion among the rebels or were used as a pretext to either extort money or recruit the person on the spot (see Heitz-Tokpa 2014).

The rebels asked him many questions: Who was he? Where was he going? Why? He said he was a nurse, had worked in Bouaké, and wanted to go to his native village for his mother’s funeral. They did not trust him. Uncle Yoro said the rebels thought he had come to spy on them and to inform the government in the south about the rebels’ positions. They searched him and took his phone. In his phone, they discovered the name of Michel Amani N’Guessan. N’Guessan was a minister in Gbagbo’s government at the time and a long-time member of the president’s party, the FPI. In 2002, Uncle Yoro had been elected general secretary of one of the union’s branches. He later came to head several unions in the health service. Because of his position as a mediator in wage negotiations, he had the numbers of several ministers in his mobile phone and of some other FPI members.

The rebels led him to a third counter, where he was left to sit alone for a while, until a rebel turned up and asked in astonishment: “Grand-frère, what are you doing here?” The rebel was from a neighboring village. They had played football together in their youth. Uncle Yoro was no less astonished to see that his friend was a rebel and explained that he had been asked to wait at this counter. The friend quickly led him away from this third counter, explaining to his fellow men in arms that Uncle Yoro was his brother from the village whom he had known for years. The rebels trusted their comrade’s judgment and let Uncle Yoro go. His friend took him back to the minibus and explained that the third counter was the last station before you got killed. Generally, people did not return from the third counter. Uncle Yoro was shocked when he realized how closely he had been to being executed. But he did not want to frighten his women companions. His childhood friend gave him his number so that he could contact him if he needed to. Uncle Yoro went back into the vehicle, and the minibus drove off in direction of the village, where they arrived safely without further incident.

Having experienced the onset of the conflict in Bouaké and as a government sympathizer, Uncle Yoro distrusted the rebels as armed political opponents. But he was not actively involved in the party and expected, therefore, to be safe in rebel-held areas at this point in the peace process and to be treated as an ordinary traveler. After all, he said, he did not have it written all over his face that he personally supported Gbagbo. Hence, he expected to be safe with strangers, even if they were rebels, and to be able to trust them. Drawing on the different forms of trust
distinguished earlier, we can say that Uncle Yoro had enough basic social trust in anonymous others in the rebel-controlled areas to undertake the journey. Moreover, he trusted the rebels’ institutions to provide enough public security to travel, at least at this stage in their institutionalization. But the experience in Logoualé shattered his attitude of trust. From research on trust, we know that at such a moment, trust switches into a more reflective mode. People start to question what they had taken for granted and develop a distrust that easily extends to other areas of life. Uncle Yoro, also, began to see his social environment in a different, much more negative light.

The event increased his distrust in the rebellion as an institution and the security situation in the rebels’ zone of control. As he said, he developed a strong distrustful attitude toward other unknown people in general and toward those he identified as supporters of the opposing political camp in particular. The form of trust that was strengthened, however, was personal. It was a friend from a neighboring village who saved him, even though he belonged to the enemy camp. The case of the rebel-friend showed Uncle Yoro that personal relationships are trustworthy and surmount political cleavages. Another form of trust that was affected by the event is normative. Even though he did not verbalize it in the conversation with me, the event clearly also shattered his sense of normative trust in how one deals with political opponents and other human beings.

I have based my analysis thus far on what we know from the literature about the loss of trust. Next, I will analyze what Uncle Yoro did at a practical level and show what consequences the development of distrust had for his social practice.

A Phone without Names

Uncle Yoro told me that, after the event in Logoualé, he did some serious thinking. To die only because you had the wrong names in your phone was crazy. He decided that he had to make sure that he would not get into such a situation again. He told me that he had managed once to escape in Bouaké in 2002 and then a second time in Logoualé in 2004. He stressed that there was a saying in their language that after two narrow escapes, you need to avoid such a situation at all costs—for the third time will be fatal. Uncle Yoro had always been good at memorizing numbers. His political enemies would not be able to “pierce his brain and see inside,” he said. So, he decided not to save any names ever again in his phone. He saves the numbers, but without any names.

When we were talking, his phone rang, and a number lit up on the screen. He took the phone and looked at the screen for a while, reading the eight-digit number carefully. Then, a smile went over his face: “C’est le grand-frère,” he said, and he answered the phone. After the call, I asked in astonishment: “You really know all our numbers by heart?” He nodded and began citing my number, then my husband’s, then his wife’s, his brother’s, his half-brother’s, the village chief’s. I stopped him, laughing. He said that when someone gave him a new number, he would recite it several times, and then he was able to memorize it.

Although none of his family members were linked to politics, it is noteworthy that he did not save their numbers with their names. As he calls them often, he knows their numbers by heart anyway. Nevertheless, it was a way of protecting them at the same time, because, sadly, family members of political actors were often targeted in the Ivorian conflict (Le Pape and Vidal 2002). Uncle Yoro did say, though, that he saved a few numbers with names, particularly if they were people he would rarely call or distant contacts whose names would not be associated with politics or the trade union.

Once Uncle Yoro had erased the names of his contacts, he felt reassured. By respecting his self-imposed restriction not to save any names, he was able to continue his life almost “as usual.”
However, it might be argued that the rebels could still discover who the people behind the numbers in his phone were if they really wanted to. For instance, they could compare a list of government numbers with his numbers. Nevertheless, Uncle Yoro believed in his strategy, and it allowed him to regain enough trust to pursue his rhythm of everyday life without lowering his sights. In this case study, therefore, distrust functioned as an adaptive tool to deal with political constraints and duress.

The Internalization of Distrust

After a lengthy peace process, Côte d'Ivoire finally held presidential elections in late 2010. The second round was between sitting President Laurent Gbagbo and Alassane Ouattara. Ouattara, with his northern origins, won the runoff according to the national election commission and international observers. Gbagbo, however, did not want to relinquish power. He appointed a government and organized his inauguration. Shortly afterward, Ouattara was sworn in as the new president and head of government at the Golf Hotel in Abidjan. Consequently, Côte d'Ivoire now had two presidents and two governments (Bassett 2011). Given the stalemate, the country experienced another wave of violence. On 28 March 2011, so-called pro-Ouattara forces, composed of the former rebel forces and parts of the regular army, launched an attack in Abidjan with international help that ended in Gbagbo's arrest only two weeks later (Fofana 2011; Piccolino 2012). During that time, neighborhoods of Abidjan experienced politically motivated violence mixed with acts of personal revenge. Civilians erected checkpoints and killed alleged supporters of the other camp (Banégas 2011; Kone 2011).

When the former rebels, the pro-Ouattara forces, took Abidjan, Uncle Yoro stayed at the hospital for most of the time, as he feared being identified as a pro-Gbagbo supporter. When he went home from time to time, he wore his white coat, in which he felt safer outside the hospital. A doctor's white coat diverted attention away from his political position. After Gbagbo's arrest, the violence ended, but Uncle Yoro remained distrustful. For instance, in public restaurants or bars, he hushed family members if they started talking about politics. For fear that someone would listen and use the information against us, he did not allow the family to discuss political issues outside home for some time. Being familiar with the different political milieus and having had the bad experience in Logoualé described earlier, Uncle Yoro has remained distrustful toward unknown others and people he does not collaborate with closely.

To conclude his account, and knowing that I was interested in trust, Uncle Yoro said: “You have to be mistrustful in life. Mistrust is good. Mistrust does not mean fear.” 13 I nodded, and it crossed my mind that it probably takes a long time to gain his trust and that he might also have heard such advice in the context of witchcraft and sudden deaths in the village (Geschiere 2013). 14 Propped up on his elbows, Uncle Yoro explained:

We don’t know what is in store for us. To make progress in life, we have to watch those who don’t like us. They may try to lure us into a trap. Unlike the children of the rich and powerful, who have parents everywhere, we as orphans have to walk carefully. There is no one to help us out.

He used a rhetorical style as if he was giving advice, which is something he actually often does. The expression “to be an orphan,” or its opposite, “to have parents,” is a way of referring to the availability of social capital—that is, to have powerful connections or not—in rural and urban neopatrimonial contexts. What he expressed was that mistrust in the sense of a healthy dose of skepticism was a good attitude to have in life in the politicized social environment
he experienced. His reasoning reveals that the event in Logoualé had changed his normative understanding of how society functions and how we relate to people belonging to opposing political parties, and to strangers in general. On another occasion, he mentioned that a woman he did not know approached him at work, asking him to help her get a nursing diploma. From the way he described the exchange, it was clear that he would have had to bend the rules to help her and risk getting caught. He found her request suspicious and asked himself whether this was a trap. Thus, his level of distrust has also increased in the competitive environment at work.

Conclusions

Violent crises pose a particular challenge for people's trust. In our example, Uncle Yoro approached the rebels with trust, a mixture of basic social trust and institutional trust. Even though he had a few reservations, he expected to be safe in the territory held by the rebels and to be able to attend his mother's funeral. But the rebel-strangers were much more distrustful. They expected to find government spies among the passengers, and actively searched for them. Their distrust turned mere sympathizers into enemies whom they had to combat. The distrust that Uncle Yoro was confronted with unleashed distrust in himself in return. Hence, as is all too familiar in trust research, distrust produced more distrust.

As this case study shows, an attitude of distrust helped Uncle Yoro to be cautious in a context where misplaced trust might have had disastrous consequences. He dealt with the experience in a pragmatic way by deciding to hide his political allegiances better in the future. His new practice of saving only numbers and not names allowed him to continue engaging in social life. Both changes of practice, with the phone and when he wore the white medical coat outside hospital for his own protection, illustrate that predictable insecurity can be navigated with certain tactics (McGovern 2010; Utas 2005; Vigh 2006).

The downside of attitudes of distrust is that people and situations in general are judged in a negative light. In other words, distrust may prevent us from seeing positive signs where trust would be warranted. This is how distrust constitutes to be an obstacle to social interactions and social cohesion. The effect of lower levels of trust or distrust tout court is difficult to estimate, and a more quantitative analysis was beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, the microanalysis of Uncle Yoro's subjective experience provides us with insights into how such experiences may also have created distrust in other people. Other people may still save the names of their contacts in their phones but refrain from sharing openly their views, take longer before they trust someone, and so on. Once trust is lost, distrust is difficult to overcome, and some levels of trust may no longer be attained after severe breaches of trust. A lack of trust has often been mentioned as a major obstacle to reconciliation in today's Côte d'Ivoire (Piccolino 2017).

Fourteen years after the event in Logoualé, Uncle Yoro still does not save any names in his phone. On a societal scale, where anonymous others share a public space, the case study illustrates how the spread of distrust has damaging effects on the social fabric. The mutual distrust during the conflict, which led to the incrimination and death of innocent people, was part of the hardship and duress that people experienced and internalized, and some people continue to reiterate it in their lives in post-conflict Côte d'Ivoire. Outright distrust and diffuse skepticism or mistrust mentioned have rendered many people more cautious, particularly but not only in the political sphere. Trust, often described as the glue of society, has been weakened, adding a layer of enduring duress to Ivorian social life.
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NOTES

1. “Uncle” is a respectful address for adult men. In this case, Uncle Yoro, the nephew, is older than his uncle, my husband. Yoro is a pseudonym. The village name is also a pseudonym.
2. The nephew has an important ritual and social role; on the Dan in Liberia, see, e.g., Bedert (2016).
3. The southeastern Mande languages spoken around the towns of Man, Biankouma, and Danané are different varieties of Dan—also called Yacouba in Côte d’Ivoire—and Tura (Toura in French).
4. Z., forties, Yacouba-speaking, civil servant, interview in Man, June 2011.
5. Among armed groups, contact lists and phone logs were used to determine which faction someone belonged to. When the rebels’ zone commander was attacked in Man in early 2009, family members of arrested suspects told me that the phones of their loved ones were taken and searched to check who had been in contact with whom (perhaps to plot). When some rebels fell out of favor with the rebel hierarchy, civilians quickly indicated their distance from these rebel contacts and deleted their numbers from their phones, asking them not to call any more (Bauer 2011).
7. My research draws on a sample I made from a corpus of more than three hundred people encountered during my fieldwork. Out of these diverse contacts, I examined about one hundred informants more closely for my PhD dissertation (Heitz-Tokpa 2013).
8. Trust also has dimensions that are more future-oriented (Govier 1997). In this article, however, I will look at trust and distrust in the context of predictable insecurity, where the knowledge about the trustworthiness of actors and situations is key.
9. Following Dewey ([1929] 1990) and Beck (1992), I clearly distinguish insecurity and calculable security risks from uncertainty. I understand uncertainty as unpredictability due to a lack of knowledge, and insecurity as subjectively predictable threats (see also Zinn 2008). In line with this distinction, I understand distrust as an attitude to address predictable threats (insecurity), whereas mistrust is closer to uncertainty, an attitude we adopt when we subjectively lack knowledge to decide whether to trust. In this article, I explore political insecurity and distrust.
10. Trust in money is another example for normative trust (Förster et al. 2007; Simmel [1900] 2011).
11. For literature on the background to the Ivorian conflict, see, e.g., Akindès (2004); Bamba and Adou (2008); Dozon (2011); Marshall-Fratani (2006); McGovern (2011).
12. The rebels lived side by side with the civilian population, living in houses of displaced persons in the major towns and villages. In other rebel movements—in Sierra Leone, for instance—rebels lived in bush camps.
13. “Il faut être méfiant dans la vie. La méfiance est bonne. La méfiance n’est pas la peur.” I used “mistrust” here in my translation, as this term comes closer to skepticism than distrust, highlighting an attitude of critical observation rather than retreat from engagement.
14. Witchcraft is a recurrent topic and subject of fear for people in Côte d’Ivoire, other African countries, and some parts of Europe (Geschiere 2013). Uncle Yoro and his brothers talk frequently about witchcraft. Out of fear of witchcraft, travel dates and personal projects are kept secret. Recently, two adults from Kpanpleu were charged with witchcraft and imprisoned after their trial in Man. See van Gijsegem (2006) for more on Man and witchcraft trials there.
15. A group of men said that socializing in bars had changed in Facobly, November 2008: André, forties, Wé-speaking, civil servant; Jacques, thirties, Wé-speaking, FPI activist; Gérard, fifties, Wé-speaking; Aka, forties, Akan-speaking, barkeeper, maquis.

REFERENCES


