

# Power through trees. State territorialization by means of privatization and ‘agrobizforestry’ in Côte d’Ivoire

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## ABSTRACT

International pressure related to deforestation in the context of climate change and national issues concerning the sustainability of cocoa production have become increasingly prominent on political and media agendas. In 2018, Côte d’Ivoire, the world’s largest cocoa producer that has experienced high deforestation rates, adopted a new forest policy willing to transform its more than 75% degraded gazetted forests into agroforests. According to state law, cash crops are prohibited in gazetted forests that are dedicated to logging but most have been ‘illegally’ occupied by people, encouraged by national economic development policies. The new legislation that created the agroforest concept, now authorizes agriculture but only in the form of agroforestry in gazetted forests as a way to regain forest cover. Agroforests must preferably be developed by private companies. This article is part of an analysis of environmental policies related to reforestation and agricultural transition, from a political science perspective. It suggests instrumentalization of socio-environmental issues and agroforestry for political and economic purposes. The article analyzes how and why agribusinesses are designated as being the best placed to implement a socio-ecological transition and the social and ecological consequences of the designation. This privatization is part of a context of disavowal by a state institution responsible for the management of gazetted forests in a neoliberal context, but in no way represents a withdrawal or loss of power by the state. The Ivorian state is using private intermediaries to regain control over these gazetted forests, contested territories over which it lost control.

## 1. Introduction

Côte d’Ivoire epitomizes the global nature of sustainability challenges. The country is the world’s largest cocoa producer and cocoa production is the main driver of deforestation there [39]. In 1880, Ivorian forestlands were estimated to cover 15.8 million hectares and had decreased to 11.8 million in 1956 [32]. A recent inventory undertaken by the *Office National des Forêts français International* (ONF International), suggests a 2.7 million ha forest cover today [34]. According to the same study by ONF International, this corresponds to a mean 2.8% annual deforestation rate since 1986, one of the highest in the world.

Deforestation has always been a concern for political authorities. In the colonial era, the colonial administration was already concerned about deforestation in West Africa and in Côte d’Ivoire [2]. Forests had to be preserved not for local social or ecological reasons but to guarantee the long-term economic exploitation of the colonies [15]. Thus, in Côte d’Ivoire, the first gazetted forests were created during the colonial

period, at the beginning of the 20th century, and were reserved for logging for the benefit of the French colonial empire. Since independence in 1960, gazetted forests have been owned by the Ivorian state. The colonial logic was to protect the gazetted forests from people who were consequently excluded from them and agriculture was prohibited [15]. Gazetted forests are defined as forest incorporated in the State forestry domain by virtue of a regulatory act defining its limits and allocation [27]. The creation and maintenance of gazetted forests is also part of the territorial control and related expansion strategies that are characteristic of modern states attempting to control space and people through state territorialization [35,42,43]. State territorialization refers to the process by which ‘states attempt to control people and their actions by drawing boundaries around a geographic space, excluding some categories of individuals from this space, and proscribing or prescribing specific activities within these boundaries’ [42].

Ironically, the gazetted forests were already partly cleared by farmers, encouraged by the post-colonial land policy that targeted

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economic development through deforestation and agricultural production [32]. According to the ONF International study, today only 13.3% of forested areas are located within Ivorian gazetted forests. About one third of Ivorian cocoa comes from these gazetted forests [18] and cocoa is one of the country's most important economic resources. The most degraded gazetted forests had mostly been transformed into cocoa plots, even though cash crops were - and still are - prohibited in gazetted forests by state law. At the national level, Côte d'Ivoire is facing the limits of an agricultural model based on the exploitation of a forest rent [37] and of the workforce, who are often migrants [8]. Moreover, given the various international initiatives, especially those in Europe (the main outlet for Ivorian cocoa), aimed at banning "imported deforestation", the fact that such a large proportion of cocoa comes from gazetted forests jeopardizes one of the main drivers of economic growth. In this context of reputational risk attached to Ivorian cocoa, the country is leading the Cocoa & Forests Initiative whose objective is 'to halt deforestation and promote forest protection and restoration within the cocoa sector' [9]. Côte d'Ivoire is also a member of the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100), a pan-African and country-led effort to restore 100 million hectares of land across Africa by 2030. These initiatives support Côte d'Ivoire's commitments to the objectives of the 2011 Bonn Challenge and the 2014 New York Declaration on Forests.

### 1.1. Socio-political issues underlying the Ivorian government's attempts to return to forest cover

In 2019, faced with national challenges regarding agricultural production and international commitments, the country adopted a new national strategy for forest preservation and rehabilitation [28] and a new forestry code [27], targeting 20% forest cover by 2030. This legislation is intended to transform the more than 75% degraded gazetted forests into gazetted 'agroforests' (GAF), thereby legalizing agriculture but only in the form of agroforestry in these forests. However, the GAF are still owned by the state. The objective here is to 'preserve and reconstitute the forest heritage' [26] through agroforestry. Agroforestry can be defined as 'the inclusion of trees in farming systems and their management in rural landscapes to enhance productivity, profitability, diversity and ecosystem sustainability' [45].

According to the legislation, 'gazetted agroforests' will preferably be developed by private companies through new management plans and concessions [26]. The new forestry policy and code therefore give a privileged role to private companies even if, in theory, concessions can be created by any legal person, including communities or local authorities. In practice, applications for concessions have been made by private companies that will be the main developers of these agroforestry concessions. Partnership agreements have already been signed between the Ministry of Water and Forests and agribusinesses and concession contracts are under study.

The companies will be allowed to pursue their economic activities provided they practice agroforestry in their 40 to 50-year concessions. The first pilot project to test agroforestry systems is currently being implemented by a rubber company in the Anguédédou gazetted forest. The privatization of management of the rehabilitation of gazetted forests is part of a broader process of state privatization [17]. Here, privatization does not mean property transfer but delegation as 'concomitant processes of the use of private intermediaries for a growing number of functions previously devolved to the state and of redeployment of the latter' [17]. The present article analyzes the ongoing privatization process involving the management and rehabilitation of gazetted forests: how and why are private companies designated as the best placed to take over and manage forest landscape restoration in gazetted forests? What are the social and ecological consequences of this privatization?

This article shows that delegation is taking place in a context of disavowal by a state institution, *Société de Développement des Forêts* (SODEFOR), which is deemed incapable of fulfilling its mandate in a

neoliberal context. We also demonstrate that the government uses private intermediaries and redefines spaces to regain control over these gazetted forests that had largely passed 'out of its control'. The main issue is coercion through the imposition of agroforestry systems and control of migration in these areas. Finally, this article analyzes the process of unburdening the state's responsibility or 'discharging responsibility' [17] onto private companies and the role of farmers in this process.

### 1.2. Theoretical and methodological frameworks

This article uses the analytical framework of Béatrice Hibou on 'state privatization' and the 'discharge' process [17]. This theory is based on a non-normative definition of the state. What the state is, is not assumed beforehand. Thus, in order to understand the state, 'one must understand the people in power, their strategies and their historical practices' [17]. Hibou shows that these privatizations do not imply withdrawal of the state, because the use of private intermediaries remains controlled and could be a way of exercising power. Concession regimes are characteristic of this situation.

Drawing on Hibou's theory of state privatization, this article contributes an original view by focusing on the discharge attempts and negotiations. During the discharge process, how do the negotiations take place and what do they tell us about state privatization? The data used in this article were collected between 2021 and 2022 during the period the agroforest policy implementation was being drawn up. To our knowledge, few scientific articles have focused on the discharge process and related negotiations arenas so far. Indeed, most scientific articles use Hibou's theory to reflect on new forms of government and to analyze the attributes of a state [3,13,24,33] but focus less on the negotiations that take place during the discharge process and what they tell us about state privatization.

The originality of the present article also lies in the analysis of the promotion of agroforestry in public policies as a blurred concept that is presented as a 'win-win' situation that could conceal the cocoa-based economy and a forestry revival that could be used to seize carbon benefits under REDD+ or other deals. REDD+ is a mechanism that allows countries in the global North to provide financial incentives to countries in the global South to shift their public policies toward forest conservation [31]. Scientific research on agroforestry has been marked by 'an era dominated by studies focused on biophysical aspects and the technical management of agroforestry' [29]. The social science literature on agroforestry has mainly focused on the perception and the factors driving the adoption of this agricultural technique by farmers in the African context [5,20,21,36,38]. Some scientific research has also shown the ecological and/or social effects of agroforestry schemes on farmers [1,10]. Nevertheless, governance and power issues involved in agroforestry dissemination schemes remain little studied. This article thus contributes to a better understanding of governance and politics related to the promotion of agroforestry in forest cover preservation and restoration schemes.

We used a cross-referenced method including qualitative interviews, field observations, a literature review and analysis of a concession contract [11]. The method included 49 qualitative interviews conducted between March 2021 and December 2022, sometimes multiple interviews with the same institutions or actors. These qualitative interviews were conducted with four cocoa companies, three rubber companies and one oil palm company that were collaborating with the government, six state institutions based in Abidjan (Ministry of Water and Forests, Ministry of Economy, Agriculture and Rural Development Ministry, SODEFOR, REDD+ Secretariat, Conseil Café Cacao), the World Bank, the World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF) and the World Cocoa Foundation. A concession contract under study provided by a private company applying for a concession was analyzed. Field observations were also conducted in the Anguédédou gazetted forest, where a pilot agroforestry project is being implemented in partnership between the

Ministry of Water and Forests and a rubber company. Finally, field observations and seven qualitative interviews were conducted with farmers settled in the Diambarakro gazetted forest, which is part of the more than 75% degraded gazetted forests likely to be transformed into agroforests. Qualitative interviews were also conducted with five local SODEFOR agents in charge of the management of the Diambarakro gazetted forest. This article is based on data collected during the period of conceptualization and early implementation of this agroforest policy. The research therefore relates to the design and implementation process rather than actual implementation (legal creation of agroforests by decree following the validation of management plans), which is not yet complete, with the exception of the above-mentioned pilot project which is more about testing agroforestry systems.

## 2. The disavowal of a public institution, SODEFOR, justifying privatization in a neoliberal context

Created in 1966, the company for the development of forest plantations was originally a public institution in charge of the management and development of gazetted forests. Since 1986, 'SODEFOR has been entrusted with the mission of rehabilitating the gazetted forests and managing their sustainable exploitation' [22]. It became *Société de Développement des Forêts* (SODEFOR), when it was transformed into a state company by decree n°93-206 on February 3, 1993. This change aimed at giving more financial autonomy to SODEFOR, and pushed it to engage more actively in commercial activities. SODEFOR is currently in charge of the management and development of the 234 gazetted forests in Côte d'Ivoire. The 1993 decree specifies that the institution's objective is to participate in the design and implementation of the government's policy in terms of enriching the national forest heritage. To this end, SODEFOR is responsible for a) designing and implementing management models for the execution of forestry plans and b) implementing or enforcing the restoration of the gazetted forests. We will see that the key role assigned to SODEFOR will probably be endorsed by private companies in degraded gazetted forests, in line with the objectives of the new forest policy and code.

Despite SODEFOR's assigned role in preserving and rehabilitating gazetted forests, since 1966 Côte d'Ivoire has experienced high deforestation rates including in gazetted forests. Between 2000 and 2015, annual deforestation rates in gazetted forests were higher than those observed at the national level. Annual deforestation rates in Côte d'Ivoire in this period were  $-2.69\%$  while they were  $-4.2\%$  in gazetted forests [39]. Thus, 76 gazetted forests are more than 75% degraded and are likely to be partially or fully transformed into agroforests [28]. Faced with these high levels of degradation and deforestation in the gazetted forests, SODEFOR has undertaken rehabilitation actions, sometimes seeking the collaboration of the farmers who live in these areas through the Peasant-Forest Commissions (CPF), 'a body for dialogue, conciliation and proposals'. Thus, in the early 1980s, the state mandated SODEFOR for the reforestation of 400,000 hectares of forest per year [15]. The 1988–2015 forestry plan also had the objective of reaching 20% forest cover by 2015, [15] and it is worth mentioning that the objective of 20% forest cover was reaffirmed in the new national forest policy of 2018. Therefore, SODEFOR did not achieve the reforestation objectives that were assigned to it [15]. Thus, the concept of agroforestry has been put forward by SODEFOR for all these years, through attempts to reforest agricultural landscapes with farmers settled in the gazetted forests by suggesting that farmers who cultivated crops in gazetted forests plant forest tree species in their fields in exchange for tolerance of their 'irregular' presence. However, reforestation and the re-creation of forest cover was often perceived by settled farmers as a way for the state to re-appropriate the space and to dislodge them once the trees had reached maturity [15]. Accordingly, they often made sure the trees they planted on their farms did not reach maturity. SODEFOR's failure to reforest gazetted forests with settled farmers may explain the use of private companies to bypass this issue, or to get rid of it using coercion

by making agroforestry mandatory in the new agroforests.

SODEFOR is sometimes even accused of having encouraged deforestation in gazetted forests through the complicity of certain forestry agents in illegal logging, the sale of forest plots, or unauthorised clearing [25]. SODEFOR is thus the designated scapegoat responsible for deforestation and degradation: as if deforestation in gazetted forests had progressed simply because SODEFOR failed in its mission to protect and restore forests. However, such a simplistic vision denies the complexity of deforestation, which is a multifactorial and historical phenomenon, at the crossroads of social, economic and political issues at several different scales. Massive deforestation in Côte d'Ivoire can easily be explained by coloniality through the country's colonial exploitation and post-colonial history and its place in the global economy, with cocoa production concentrated in one country that produces nearly 40% of the world's cocoa mainly for export. It can also be explained by the development ideology that guided post-colonial economic policies [32]. SODEFOR is an institution created to preserve the forest heritage in gazetted forests, but at the same time the Ivorian state promoted deforestation as a policy for economic development through agricultural production [7,32,44].

In this context, the space given to private agribusinesses in these new agroforest management plans is to the detriment of SODEFOR and is associated with a disavowal or even a sanction of the public institution. This disavowal of SODEFOR is apparent in its role in the development of new GAF. Agribusinesses will be responsible for the development and implementation of the management plans. This situation calls the very role of SODEFOR into question, as theoretically, it is also responsible for the management plans of gazetted forests. The qualitative interviews we conducted with SODEFOR, the Ministry of Water and Forests and with the agribusinesses involved show that the role of SODEFOR in the development of these new GAF has not yet been clearly defined. This situation is experienced by some SODEFOR administrative staff as an exclusion from the process in favor of agribusinesses. Finally, questions persist at the political level concerning the rationale and existence of the institution, opening doors for its reconfiguration or dissolution.

These agribusinesses are thus considered by some government institutions as being more capable of achieving the objectives of rehabilitating the degraded gazetted forests than SODEFOR. This privatization is justified by the alleged limited resources of the Ivorian state. The use of private intermediaries would reduce the cost of reforestation of gazetted forests for the state, which has other priorities including education and health. Indeed, these public-private partnerships are often viewed by the government as a 'route through which additional financial resources might materialize' [19]. Privatization is also justified by the belief that private companies are more efficient. SODEFOR indeed lacked the means to monitor and follow up on its reforestation and agroforestry dissemination actions among farmers, which did not live up to expectations [15]. Whereas, in the GAF, since the forest trees will be planted in the concessions of agribusinesses, they are required to monitor these trees until they reach maturity. Therefore, the qualitative interviews revealed the belief that 'in today's world, no African state functions without private companies. We can no longer perform without them'.<sup>1</sup> As Hibou notes, the arguments in favor of privatization often find a favorable echo in neoliberal discourse [17]. According to Gonzalbo, neoliberalism is a 'theory on how to transform the state so that it guarantees the functioning of the market, extends the logic of the market and creates new markets' [14]. Humphreys [19] and Gonzalbo [14] put forward an enhanced role for the private sector as one of the core principles of neoliberalism. Humphreys mentions situations in which although 'natural resources remain under state ownership, the private sector should nonetheless be centrally involved, for example in partnerships with the state' [19]. GAF in Côte d'Ivoire embody these types of partnerships. Thus, the belief that the private sector is more efficient than SODEFOR reflects neoliberal assumptions 'that government has a

<sup>1</sup> Qualitative interview conducted with a state institution, 2021.

tendency to be bureaucratic and cumbersome, whereas the private sector is efficient, rational and cost-effective' [19].

### 3. 'Agrobizforestry': a 'win-win' partnership model between the government and agribusinesses

The privatization of the management of gazetted forest management is a process that began with Decision No. 471/MINEF on September 10, 2003, making the management of gazetted forests' accessible to private timber companies [25]. The objective of this decision was to 'make timber companies accountable and involve them in activities related to the management plans of the gazetted forests in which they work' [25]. However, private timber companies have partnership rather than concession contracts. This process continued with the 2018 National Forest Preservation and Rehabilitation Policy and the 2019 Forestry Code. Two major developments can be mentioned here regarding the agroforestry policy:

- 1) The companies involved are now responsible for designing and implementing agroforestry management plans [25]. The issuance of concession contracts to agribusinesses acts the creation of agroforests.
- 2) The companies involved are mostly active in agribusiness, given that practicing agriculture in the form of agroforestry is favored in agroforests. Previously, the companies involved in the management of gazetted forests were timber companies that were already working in these areas. Agribusinesses were not involved in the management of gazetted forests. These new partnerships with agribusinesses take different forms depending on the areas concerned and the institutions involved.

#### 3.1. Two agroforestry models depending on population displacement and cash crops

Two agroforestry models are defined depending on the role farmers will play in the implementation phase and the cash crops involved. The first model is the original model proposed by the Ministry of Water and Forests, which divides the agroforestry into a permanent agroforestry, where some settled farmers will be grouped, and a temporary agroforestry where agribusinesses will expand their activities in the form of agroforestry. Industrial plantations of coffee, cocoa, cotton and cashew nuts are prohibited in agroforestry concessions.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the companies that apply for agroforestry concessions are mainly active in the rubber sector and some in oil palm. Farmers will be clustered in 20% of the GAF, named 'permanent agroforestry',<sup>3</sup> and henceforth will be legally authorized to settle provided they practice agroforestry. They will be supervised by the concession holder to be sure they implement agroforestry schemes according to state-defined standards. The remaining 80% of the territory of these GAF, named 'temporary agroforestry', would be granted as concessions to agribusinesses. Permanent agroforests can accommodate infrastructure and social amenities, whereas temporary agroforests will only include amenities related to the operation of the concessions. It should be noted that the 20%–80% ratios adopted represent the ideal standard to be reached, but may vary depending on the agroforestry concerned. This model consequently involves displacing inhabitants.

<sup>2</sup> According to the legislation 'Présidence de la République de Côte d'Ivoire. 2021. Décret N° 2021-437 Du 08 Septembre 2021 Fixant Le Cadre Général de La Gestion Des Forêts Classées Du Domaine Forestier Privé de l'Etat, Éligibles Au Régime de La Concession.'

<sup>3</sup> According to the legislation 'Présidence de la République de Côte d'Ivoire. 2019. Décret N° 2019-979 Du 27 Novembre 2019 Portant Modalités d'aménagement Des Agro-Forêts, d'exploitation Des Plantations Agricoles et de Commercialisation Des Produits Agricoles Dans Les Agro-Forêts.'

Settled farmers, currently scattered across several areas, would be grouped in the permanent agroforestry. However, since the permanent agroforestry only represents about 20% of the territory, not all farmers would be able to be relocated.

The remaining 80% of agroforestry area attributed as concessions to agribusinesses will host large scale agroforestry in the 'temporary agroforests'. A concession that will potentially be granted to a rubber company will be approximately 10,000 hectares in size. These companies will be granted 40 to 50-year concessions for industrial agroforestry plantations. After 40 to 50 years, agribusinesses should theoretically have completed the exploitation of their plantation, and the remaining concession investments including forest trees, will belong to the state. Profits from the harvesting of mature forest trees could be shared between the state and those companies that have planted and monitored the forest trees during the concession period. In the Anguédédou pilot project developed with a rubber company, the model used in the concession is as follows: 79% rubber trees and 21% forest species. Rubber trees are not mixed with the other forest trees but rather grown in blocks. Six rows of rubber trees are planted next to one another, followed by one or two rows of other forest trees, followed by six more rows of rubber trees and one or two rows of forest trees and so on (see Fig. 1).

The second model will first be implemented as a pilot project funded by an international donor in several gazetted forests. Due to the social safeguards required by some international donors, in theory, population displacement should not take place. However, farmers would be subject to a deadline to sign a contract stipulating the obligation to practice agroforestry under defined standards. Farmers who do not wish to practice agroforestry would have to leave the gazetted forests. Thus, in practice, imposing agroforestry could lead to population displacement and territorial control. The concession holders will be cocoa companies

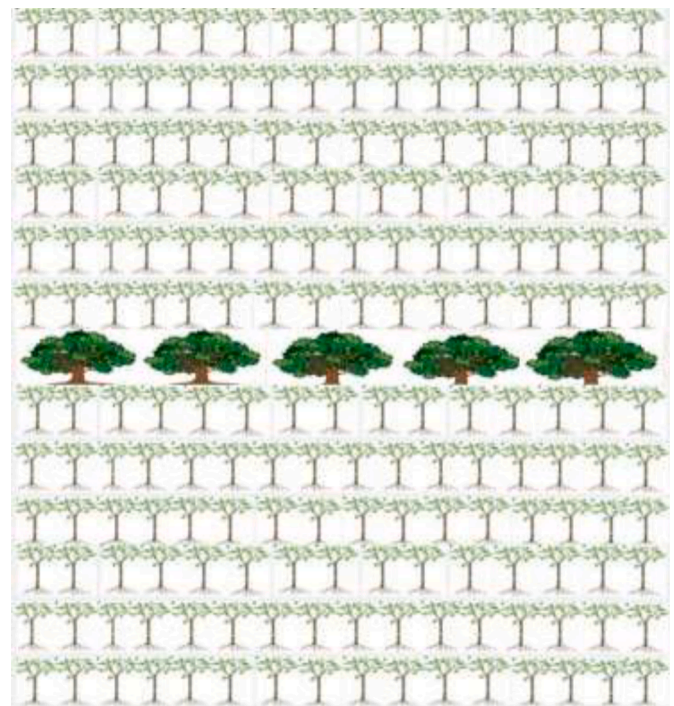


Fig. 1. Agroforestry scheme in a pilot project – Rubber trees and forest trees.



**Forest trees** **Rubber trees**

that will be responsible for supervising farmers to be sure they adopt and respect cocoa agroforestry standards. As the expansion of industrial cocoa plantations is prohibited in agroforests, in practice, the companies will only supervise the farmers. Cocoa companies will provide technical assistance, agricultural inputs and monitoring. In return, they would be able to secure exclusive rights to the purchase of the farmers' cocoa harvest.

### 3.2. Promoting agroforestry through 'agrobizforestry' and economic incentives

It is important to recall that agroforestry is not a new agricultural technique. On the contrary, it is an old technique that was already practiced by farmers in Côte d'Ivoire when cocoa trees were introduced at the end of the 19th century. Until the 1950s, cocoa agroforestry systems dominated as clearing was selective and cocoa plantations were established on forested land [37]. From 1960 on, cocoa agroforestry systems were gradually abandoned by farmers because the state promoted a hybrid cocoa variety that could survive in full sun, i.e. did not require shade trees [37].

According to the typical agroforestry ideal defined by Ollinaho & Kroger, the agroforestry model that will be applied in the concessions can be described as 'agrobizforestry' [30]. Ollinaho & Kroeger (2021) characterize 'agrobizforestry' as a form of commercial or industrial-scale agroforestry that entails only very limited intercropping. According to these authors, 'agrobizforestry' is detrimental for two reasons: 1) exotic species such as eucalyptus are often used in areas that cannot tolerate their impact, for example in terms of groundwater pumping, 2) it promotes an agrarian extractivist project that concentrates land and income. The social and ecological effects of agroforestry models promoted in concessions in agroforests can thus be questioned. It is worth mentioning that the industrial-scale agroforestry model that will be applied in the concessions originates from the Ministry of Water and Forests. The visions and definitions of agroforestry at the government level depend on the different administrations and their objectives and are not the same.

The Ministry of Water and Forests is promoting agroforestry through economic incentives: revenue sharing from the sale of wood with agribusinesses, carbon credits that could be earned from planting trees and sustainability certifications. The qualitative interviews we conducted reflected this logic and showed that the agroforest policy is part of a context where trees have 'enhanced economic value and are new green gold'.<sup>4</sup> Forests are seen as new green gold primarily for the benefits expected from carbon credits in the context of climate change mitigation. However, it is highly unlikely that GAFs, which will mostly comprise agricultural plantations, will be able to generate many marketable carbon credits. The high transaction costs (measurement, verification, considering the risk of non-permanence) may limit the possible benefits of small-scale projects.

On the other hand, these economic incentives are being used to attract agribusinesses. This partnership is described as 'win-win' by the stakeholders. Agribusinesses and the government are the big winners of this policy. The government foresees its forest resources being replenished by private companies in the long term and legalizing cocoa production in gazetted forests in the short term. International cocoa companies wish to secure supplies of cocoa. Other agribusinesses are seizing the opportunity to access land and the secure tenure guaranteed by the concessions to continue their ongoing commercial activities. In addition, agribusinesses wish to improve their image and sustainability branding by participating in the dissemination of agroforestry in these degraded gazetted forests. What is more, our qualitative interviews with agribusinesses showed that the profits from the sale of forest resources planted in their concessions could be shared between themselves and the

state. Negotiations will focus on the percentage to go to each part. It is also likely that some concession contracts will be renewed once, giving the agribusinesses time to recover their investments. However, farmers will not have access to the income created by the exploitation of the trees they have planted in their fields. The exclusion of farmers from the forestry profits is part of a state logic according to which gazetted forests are 'a sanctuary reserved for the state and foresters who share these revenues' [23]. As underlined by Léonard and Ibo, it would make little sense for farmers 'to become the main actors of their own marginalization, by participating in the reconstitution of a rent from which they will be radically excluded' [23]. Gazetted forests are thus still managed with a post-colonial logic of economic exploitation for the benefit of the state and private companies, allowing the entry of agribusinesses.

## 4. Privatization as a way of regaining control

First, it should be mentioned that models of government involving the use of private intermediaries is 'traceable to pre-colonial and colonial historical sequences and is therefore neither a new modality nor a characteristic of the post-colonial state in Africa' [12]. However, the belief in the greater efficiency of private intermediaries in a neoliberal context is relatively new [14].

Here, the privatization process is used by the state to regain control over these degraded gazetted forests. Indeed, the Ivorian state gradually lost control over these areas in terms of management and planning due to their occupation by people and despite the presence of SODEFOR in these forests. For example, population censuses in one gazetted forest indicate the presence of about 100,000 people. The state wishes to take back control over these areas and exercise its authority again by redefining the existing gazetted forests and creating new gazetted agroforests. Drawing on Vandergeest's theory of territorialization [42], this process can be defined as 're-territorialization'. Indeed, the creation of agroforests redefines the activities authorized in these spaces (agroforestry), as well as the rights of access (concessions and the eligibility of farmers authorized to settle). The objective of state territorialization is to exercise power and control over space and people [42].

Our objective is to emphasize the fact that delegating certain management and development functions of gazetted forests to private companies does not mean the state is withdrawing, but is rather an attempt to regain control and exercise its power. First, it is important to understand that delegating to private companies does not necessarily imply the state will lose control or power [17], rather it distinguishes between state functions and its capacity. We need to differentiate between formal state institutions through which the state performs its functions and the state's control capacity through which it exercises its control and power [17]. As a system of power, the state can extend its control beyond its formal institutions [33].

The Ivorian state's desire to regain control and exercise its authority is first manifested by the power to select farmers who will be able to remain in the 'permanent agroforests', according to criteria defined by the state and concession holders. Indeed, according to the first agroforest model mentioned above, not all the farmers will be allowed to remain in the gazetted agroforests. The criteria have not yet been defined, but they are expected to concern the length of time the farmer has been present in the gazetted forest or the farmer's nationality. This selection is part of the government's objective to relocate and group farmers in a small part (about 20%) of the GAF. In this sense, the state chooses discriminating criteria to reduce the number of farmers to be relocated due to the small portion of available territory. Therefore, managing and planning is a way of reasserting its authority and deciding who has the right to stay or not, and of controlling the land occupied by people.

Farmers who meet the selection criteria will only be allowed to stay if they practice agroforestry according to standards defined by the state. The obligation to practice agroforestry is a means of coercion and a way of exercising power over people and territories through state

<sup>4</sup> Qualitative interview conducted with a state institution, 2021.

territorialisation [42]. The coercive power of the state was undermined in these areas, which had been illegally occupied without the state being able to enforce its laws. Forcing farmers to practice agroforestry in order to receive authorization to stay in these gazetted agroforests and using private companies to disseminate and monitor these practices is a way to regain lost coercive power. The second agroforest model, funded by an international donor, provides for the signing of contracts with farmers who will commit to practicing agroforestry. They will have a few months to choose whether or not to sign the contract. Once the contracts are signed, farmers will be given formal authorization to settle in the agroforest for the duration of the pilot project. Farmers who refuse to practice agroforestry and sign the contracts will have to leave gazetted forest that is transformed into an agroforest. Thus, the promotion of agroforestry remains coercive.

Finally, if we analyze the creation of gazetted agroforests from the point of view of political economy, it is part of the state's intention to control cocoa production in the short and medium term. The cocoa produced in these gazetted forests is considered 'illegal' by the Ivorian state law because it comes from gazetted forests that are supposed to be devoted to logging. The creation of agroforests allows agriculture in these areas in the form of agroforestry thereby legalizing the cocoa produced there. This legalization allows Côte d'Ivoire to secure its market share in Europe, where legislation is beginning to be adopted on imported deforestation, excluding commodities that have played a role in deforestation. In addition, by creating temporary and permanent agroforests, the state aims to control and reduce cocoa production in order to increase cocoa prices. Some state institutions are in favor of a complete takeover of gazetted forests in the long term, which would make it possible to reduce cocoa production at the national level. However, it should be mentioned that the expected increase in the price of cocoa is not guaranteed but hypothetical.

However, beyond the cocoa issue and in the long term, the state's main objective is to regain control over these gazetted forests through agroforestry in order to recreate forest resources and exploit them. The objective is to have gazetted forests again become long-term forests. There is an awareness of the challenge to completely reconstituting forest resources in these degraded gazetted forests but the objective is to recover as much forest area as possible in the long term. This objective is in line with those of two main institutions involved in this policy: the Ministry of Water and Forests and the Conseil Café Cacao. The future of the Ministry of Water and Forests, which is responsible for sustainable logging, depends on this. The Conseil Café Cacao aims to reduce cocoa production in the hope of increasing cocoa prices, and reducing cocoa area and expanding reforestation in gazetted forests, meets this goal. This objective is perfectly perceptible to the people settled in these degraded gazetted forests. Interviews with settled farmers in the Diambarakro gazetted forest, which is part of the degraded gazetted forests likely to be transformed into agroforests, revealed they are reluctant to adopt agroforestry. The main reason for this reluctance concerns the advantage that the state might have over them once the forest resources are restored. They fear that once these resources are replenished, the state will force them to leave these gazetted forests in the long term, because although they are allowed to stay if they practice agroforestry, they have no tenure security. Even though the state issues them certificates of occupancy, they do not own the land which still belongs to the state. Indeed, one of the arguments used by these farmers to request the declassification of these gazetted forests and land ownership is that 'there is no longer any forest in these gazetted forests. So why not give us the land and declassify these areas?'.<sup>5</sup> Reforestation could change the situation by creating forest resources that benefit the state, which is the main reason for the reluctance of these populations to plant trees in their plots.

<sup>5</sup> Qualitative interview conducted with one farmer settled in the Diambarakro gazetted forest, 2021.

## 5. An attempt to discharge thorny social issues in contested spaces

Privatization and delegation processes are being stalled by the need for management of social issues in gazetted agroforests. Béatrice Hibou [17] underlined the fact that negotiations, the redrawing of boundaries between the public and private sectors, and the persistence of political control and power are at the heart of delegation processes. The qualitative interviews conducted with the government and agribusinesses in Abidjan between 2021 and 2022 made it possible to follow the process of negotiation concerning the design and implementation of the agroforest policy. Negotiations between the state and private companies focused on social issues: How will the relocation of farmers to 'permanent agroforests', i.e. population displacement, be handled? Will private companies have to take part in the population displacement or will the state carry it out alone? What criteria will be used to choose the farmers who are authorized to remain in the 'permanent agroforest'? Who will endorse the reputational risk and the responsibility linked to displacing people and practicing industrial agroforestry in areas previously devoted to logging and small-scale farming? Béatrice Hibou [17] highlighted the interdependence of actors involved in these delegation and discharge schemes. Little land is available for relocation in these degraded gazetted forests because the area is already occupied by farms and people's homesteads. Jonas Ibo Guéhi [16] analyzed the social injustices involved in moving settled people in gazetted forests.

Another thorny issue concerns the criteria for choosing which farmers are allowed to stay in the 'permanent agroforest'. Some of the people who settled in the gazetted forests are Ivorians from other regions and some are not Ivorians [40]. Qualitative interviews with government bodies and international institutions showed that controlling migration is one of the issues underlying this policy. An in-depth analysis of the discourses showed that a link was made between migration and environmental degradation, justifying the implementation of policies that could ultimately contribute to migration control. These discourses can be described as 'ecobordering', a concept defined as an emerging discourse that obscures the primary causes driving the ecological crisis while simultaneously shifting the blame onto migration [41]. The clauses of the contracts signed by settled farmers in agroforests could discourage them from facilitating the installation of new people. Moreover, the nationality criterion was under consideration during the negotiation and design process to define which farmers will be allowed to remain in permanent agroforests, and if adopted, could exclude foreign farmers, who are currently present in significant numbers in the gazetted forests. Given the modern socio-political history of Côte d'Ivoire and the political instrumentalization of 'Ivoirité' [4], such a decision could lead to conflictual situations. However, Guéhi [16] also questioned the real intentions of the Ivorian state behind the multiple announcements of population displacement in gazetted forests, knowing that these people are often exploited politically by coercing their votes.

The many social issues linked to population displacement explain the position of the agribusinesses involved in the delegation process. Interviews with agribusinesses revealed that they do not want to 'take the place of the state, nor do they want to pay for the mistakes of the state, which has allowed population settlements in gazetted forests. We are not the police, that is not our role. The state must assume its responsibility and handle social issues, then we can work'.<sup>6</sup> However, in the government's discourse, it is considered fair that international cocoa companies and other agribusinesses are involved in all stages of agroforest implementation because they are 'partly responsible for deforestation in gazetted forests and have profited from the agricultural commodities produced there'.<sup>7</sup> Concession holders should participate in managing

<sup>6</sup> Qualitative interview conducted with an international cocoa company, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Qualitative interview conducted with a government body, 2021.

social issues because they are responsible for the management of their concession, even if the area is currently occupied by people. Here, the state is attempting to discharge any responsibility for social problems. The state is willing to unload its responsibility and increase its autonomy while exercising its power in these agroforests. These negotiations and deadlocks are evidence for the lack of clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of the state and private companies in the privatization process. Moreover, the privatization process questions the limits of discharge in such delegation systems but also shows how state bodies might be inclined to delegate some highly politicized issues. How far can the state offload its functions onto private intermediaries? Even if the state so wishes, can certain functions actually be delegated? The process underway in Côte d'Ivoire clearly identifies the challenges to state privatization and discharge processes because of their social and political consequences.

Moreover, since their creation in colonial times, gazetted forests have always been contested spaces. These territories, which were originally confiscated by state authorities, are claimed by certain population groups as their ancestral territories. They consequently settled there, claiming it is their heritage, and in turn, have authorized migrants (Ivoriens and non-Ivoriens) to settle in the gazetted forests under crop-sharing arrangements through a 'tutoring system'. 'Tutoring systems' allowed national and non-national migrants to access land where they had settled, thanks to the delegation of land rights [6]. This system was challenged to a certain extent during the Ivorian socio-political crises, particularly those of 2010–2011. Indeed, new settlers in the gazetted forests after the 2010–2011 crisis were veterans who considered the forest as a reward and a war booty [40]. These forms of legitimacy (ancestral territories, war booty) challenge state territorialisation [42] and state power in these spaces. Physical presence in and the occupation of these contested spaces are potential obstacles to the implementation of the agroforest concessions. Moreover, as mentioned above, farmers who settled in gazetted forests often consider reforestation projects as a way for the state to re-appropriate the space and dislodge them once the trees reach maturity. The relative agency of the settled people explains their importance in the negotiations between the state and the private companies, even though they are excluded from the negotiation process. Indeed, settled farmers or their representatives were not invited to the formal negotiations between the government and agribusinesses beforehand. Awareness raising campaigns targeting farmers will take place during the implementation stage. Finally, the central question of these negotiations between state bodies and agribusinesses is the following: how to lay claim to inhabited and invested territories, when these settlements have been tolerated and even to a certain extent encouraged by the state [32]? The Ivorian government is using private intermediaries, the legal argument of state ownership, and the instrumentalization of environmental objectives regarding forest cover to regain control over these contested spaces.

## 6. Conclusion

Attempts to promote agroforestry in gazetted forests for the purpose of reforestation are not new in Côte d'Ivoire. SODEFOR, whose role was to reforest gazetted forests, did attempt to get farmers to adopt agroforestry practices, but their results did not meet expectations. Moreover, the goal of regaining 20% forest cover by 2030 does not date from the 21st century. In 1988, the 1988–2015 Forestry Plan already had the objective of achieving 20% forest cover. The social-environmental issues related to the situation of gazetted forests and the solutions envisioned are the same as before. What has changed is the *modus operandi*. By acknowledging the failure of a public institution (SODEFOR), the government is assuming that agribusinesses will be able to do what the state has failed to do. In a neoliberal perspective, agribusinesses are considered to be more efficient and to be able to monitor reforestation. But there is no evidence that they will achieve the objectives set by the state and they have their own interests. Attempts at discharge reveal the scope

of state privatization, which can go as far as a willingness to delegate highly politicized social issues and to use coercive social measures. The primary objective for the state is to regain control over territories where its authority and law have been challenged by the long-term 'illegal' presence of farmers and other population groups who regularly demand the declassification of these degraded gazetted forests now that they are almost no longer forested areas. Another main objective of the state is to control and legalize cocoa production in these areas in the short term. What is more, imposing agroforestry as a condition for regularization, in addition to the eligibility criteria for regularization, is a means of exercising power over territories and people, regardless of whether or not implementation is being delegated to private intermediaries.

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## Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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