As Pierre Englebert (2009) notices, the genesis of African sovereignty is at the basis of the centrality of what he calls ‘legal command’ in African politics. As the state is defined on the basis of its ‘legality rather than effectiveness’ the law provides opportunities for domination even in conditions of state weakness or failure. The ‘legally sovereign’ nature of the African state has also another implication: nationalism is expressed through attachment to the state as a juridical entity. This paper aims at exploring the connection between law, sovereignty and nationalism by looking at the discourse of former President Laurent Gbagbo and his supporters in crisis-affected Côte d’Ivoire between 2002 and 2011. I aim at analyzing how and why the Constitution and the legal framework of Côte d’Ivoire occupied a central role both in the nationalist ideology and in the political strategy of the pro-Gbagbo elite in the course of this period. In Western political thought, Constitutionalism and ‘rule of law’ are associated with political liberalism. The Ivorian experience however provides a different disturbing lesson, revealing how the law and in particular the Constitution can become instruments of domination.