

# ID Wars in Côte d'Ivoire

*A Political Ethnography of Identification  
and Citizenship*

RICHARD BANÉGAS  
AND  
ARMANDO CUTOLO

*Translation by*

JESSICA EDWARDS (CHAPTERS 1, 2, 4, 5)

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## *Margouillats, Kamikaze Papers, and the René Caillié Arrangement*

Eleven o'clock in the morning, 4 April 2014, in the Abidjan courthouse car park. As soon as we get out of the car, a young man approaches our colleague Souleymane Kouyaté, aka Clay, offering his services for obtaining papers in a hurry. Before starting our interviews, we had decided to walk across the area in front of the courthouse without revealing ourselves to be researchers.

—Good morning! I'm sorry to bother you. Have you come to get a document drawn up?

—Yes.

—What document are you trying to get hold of?

—A certificate of nationality.

—Is it urgent?

—Well, a little . . .

—How soon do you need it? Tomorrow? Today?

—This evening would be good.

—This evening . . . no problem. But do you know how much it costs? And do you know what you need to provide?

—Not really.

—OK, to draw up your certificate of nationality, first I'll need your [birth] certificate, and a photocopy of an ID for one of your parents . . . I'll explain. It takes two weeks to get a certificate of nationality drawn up. If you drop that off today, you can come and pick up your certificate in two weeks. But you're in more of a rush. [...] Okay, there's no problem. [...] But you have to pay. To get it today, it's 5,000 francs [about 8 euros] plus the stamps are 1,000 francs [1.5 euros]. That's if you comply with all the formalities. Now, if there's no photocopy of a parent's ID, my friend, we'll submit your case and negotiate with the ladies at the front desk. I'll have to buy them off.

Anyone who walks along the pavement leading to the doors of the courthouse in Abidjan is bound to be approached by one or more of these brokers, known

as *margouillats* (lizards) in Côte d'Ivoire (and elsewhere in Francophone West Africa). This derogatory name, once reserved for loan sharks, now refers to a category of informal and illegal intermediaries that can be found around the main civil offices responsible for issuing 'papers': courts, town halls, civil registry offices, and police stations. The authorities have shown these unofficial 'fixers' and brokers a certain ambiguous tolerance. Since Alassane Ouattara came to power, they have been periodically hounded by the police as part of the crackdowns that have gone hand in hand with the policy of economic 'emergence'. However, after each round-up, and sometimes after a few weeks in prison, they are invariably back in business. Like the watchful and motionless agama lizards found in all Abidjan courtyards, *margouillats* wait for potential customers in order to 'eat', as they put it. As we will see, their brokerage is often crucial in acquiring 'papers'. But, in this chapter, we argue that their intermediary role in the production of a legal identity is not limited to the 'politics of the belly'; it also participates, indirectly and informally, to the moral demarcation of the boundaries of citizenship (Cutolo and Banégas 2018).

In the following pages we invite the reader to travel through what we conceptualize as a moral economy of identification. It will be a journey through two time-spaces that constitute two scales of investigation of this moral economy of (false) papers: first, we will investigate their production circuits in an urban environment, at the level of the pavements of the courthouse in Abidjan, focusing on the action of the *margouillats*. Then, we will study the social uses of these papers in a rural environment, in the Anno region, at a micro-sociological scale of analysis of intra-family relations. Our ethnographic observation will allow us to analyse at a local level the popular, widespread practice of arranging identity documents in order to meet personal and social needs. We will refer to such a practice, which plays an important role in the reproduction of Ivorian society, as the 'René Caillié arrangement'.

In Côte d'Ivoire, 'René Caillié' is the popular nickname given to bearers of counterfeit identities. As is well known, René Caillié was a French explorer who in 1827–8 travelled from Senegal to Timbuktu disguised as a Muslim. After having visited Timbuktu, he returned safely to France, where he obtained an important prize from the Société de géographie. As often happens with sardonic Ivorian popular nicknames, the expression 'René Caillié' can be understood to have multiple layers of meaning. Recalling the person of the French explorer, it alludes to the tactical use of a disguised identity in order to navigate social life. But, at the same time, the name René brings into play a further, implicit meaning, as it is phonetically and graphically identical to the word *re-né*, meaning 'reborn' in French. This refers, in turn, to the quite

common practice of lowering one's age for administrative and legal purposes—as, for instance, to overcome the age limits for enrolment in secondary school or for recruitment in the army. It refers, in other terms, to a 'paper rebirth' that is obtained by making a new (and, of course, illegal) civil registration under a new name and with a new date of birth. The new request for registration is presented by the applicant as a belated declaration of birth, and it has to be approved by a judge. Since regular birth registration is limited in Côte d'Ivoire, administrations are used to this special procedure, which is known as *jugement supplétif* ('court-sanctioned delayed birth registration'). It can take some time and can be relatively expensive, if compared to regular registration—especially if it requires, as it sometimes does, corruption. But, at the end, a refreshed identity is available to the applicant, while the older ID document is abandoned.

Resort to a *margouillat* is common, of course (although not unavoidable), in order to cope successfully with this kind of procedure. In this chapter we are first going to look closely at the activity of the *margouillats* in another important domain of production, that is to say, of identity documents. This is the domain of documents attesting nationality and citizenship. We will then focus our attention on the René Caillié arrangement in some villages of the Anno region, in order to decipher the ordinary moral economy of identification.

## The Documentary State and Moral Borders of Citizenship

Before outlining our argument, we should say a few words about the circumstances of our encounter with the *margouillats* and the hypotheses underpinning the arguments that guide the first part of this chapter. As stated in the Introduction to this volume, our studies on the social life of papers in Côte d'Ivoire initially comprised two main levels of investigation. On the one hand, there is the study 'from the top' of the state bureaucratic apparatuses mandated to produce IDs and deliver 'papers'; on the other hand, there is the ethnographic observation 'from the bottom' of the 'practical meaning' of these papers in various social spheres, including among the groups that seem to have the least contact with the civil administration.

Courthouse brokers, the subject of the first part of this chapter, are precisely at the crossroads of these two levels, through their very function, which consists in positioning themselves between the state and citizens in order to facilitate access to the bureaucratic arena and the issuance of papers. They afford a unique vantage point from which to observe the complex articulation

between the institutional and grassroots levels, between the 'top' and the 'bottom' in government initiatives. In a preliminary analysis, one could see the intermediary activities of the Ivorian *margouillats* as a 'bridge' (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2001: 25) connecting the world of anonymous and impersonal relationships that in theory characterizes state bureaucracy, with the world of personal relations and moral obligations specific to ordinary sociability—linking the impersonal morality of public interest that supposedly rules the courthouse with the ethics of the 'belly' that prevail in the street. This perspective is now relatively standard in the analysis of the state in Africa (Bayart 1989) and of practices of 'street-level bureaucracy' (Lipsky 1980). Political scientists and anthropologists have devoted themselves to the ethnography of African bureaucracies in order to study the state 'at work' (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2014), with the aim of better understanding 'everyday corruption' (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2001). This work has highlighted the importance of brokerage logics in the co-production of government initiatives in Africa. For example, M. Tidjani Alou (2001) has highlighted that, in Niger and elsewhere in West Africa, the exercise of justice cannot be understood without taking into account the logics of political, institutional, and informal intermediation. Above all, the research has shown that the forms of corruption practised by the many intermediaries of the administration have contributed to an informalization of the state. This is not necessarily a sign of its failure, but rather an indication of a trend towards privatizing its functions, which is not antithetical to the state's bureaucratic objectives. Côte d'Ivoire is no exception to this general—and relatively mundane—trend in the actual functioning of African administrations. The *margouillats* who 'engage in corruption' with government officials at the courthouse are indeed stakeholders in the 'practical norms' of the state (Olivier de Sardan 2008) and are part of a form of indirect governmentality that has its own rationality (Hibou 1999a; Mbembe 1999). However, one should not be misled by the fact that administrative intermediation is commonplace. The issuance of the identity papers referred to here is a public policy unlike any other; it touches on the very foundations of citizenship. The methodological premise underpinning this research is the assumption that material transactions around identity papers tell us something about how national belonging is negotiated in a country experiencing a long-standing conflict over identity documents.

It is, therefore, in a first part, through the *margouillats'* role as intermediaries that we will address the governmentality of identity papers in Côte d'Ivoire. Nevertheless, this chapter does not adopt a traditional perspective on

the sociology of government initiatives. Our intention is not so much to study in practice the long chain of issuing papers in which the *margouillats* participate, but rather to relate the narratives they present about their intermediary work. The purpose is to reflect on the moral justifications concerning the brokering of nationality—in the double Abidjanese sense of the word, meaning the political principle of belonging and its material form (the certificate). For reasons explained below, we were not able to carry out an ethnographic survey among courthouse officials. Instead, we engaged in indirect ethnography, from a different perspective, as the *margouillats'* work is always carried out in collaboration with the officials. Indeed, every *margouillat* has allies at various levels of the administration. And each ally has a place in the paper-producing chain, which, as astute analysts of their own practices, our informants describe as a 'food chain' connecting the courthouse on the inside and outside. As we will observe later, the metaphor of manducation is central to the brokers' narrative when talking about their work experience and the moral logic that governs it. In the Ivorian context, this 'morality of the belly' echoes a broader governmentality (Bayart 1989), characterized by a long-standing legitimization of the 'philosophy of the peanut roaster'.<sup>1</sup>

In the context of the activities of the *margouillats*, the 'philosophy of the peanuts roaster' can be described as a specific form of moral economy, connecting the top and bottom (from the judiciary to the street) in a set of exchanges and obligations, of relationships of patronage and dependence connected to the representations of legitimacy and power (Scott 1977; Thompson 1991). This set of 'collusive transactions' (Siméant 2010: 156) concerns a 'fair distribution' of wealth between civil servants and brokers—the wealth generated by the functioning of the state. The principles of this specific moral economy are embedded in the 'professional ethos' shared by the actors of the 'food chain', as they call it, of document production—an ethos that shapes the relations connecting *margouillats* to bureaucrats as well as the relations between bureaucrats. It shapes them according to popular principles of reciprocity and debt, of prescriptive generosity and solidarity, following a hierarchical moral idiom of seniority and of personal dependence. The *margouillats*—most of whom are youths—adhere to the values of this moral idiom in their struggle for self-affirmation, social seniority, and success. Their discourse, as we will show in the following pages, enunciates corruption as a struggle. That is, recalling what Jean-François Bayart (1989: 290) has written about corruption

<sup>1</sup> 'You don't look a peanut roaster in the mouth,' President Houphouët-Boigny used to say as a way of justifying corruption and encouraging the enrichment of the Ivorian bourgeoisie, similar to Guizot in France.

in his work on the state in Africa, 'a form of social struggle, in the full sense of the word [...] based on a strong political awareness of inequality'.

We will discuss the pertinence of the concept of moral economy in a further section of this chapter, when we will focus on the morality of the René Caillié arrangement. At this stage, we think it useful to proceed by questioning what the *margouillats* have told us: that, in the moral economy of the 'courthouse food chain', money has 'actually taken over administrative documents'. We will see, in fact, that bureaucratic objectives and legality are not absent from these intermediation practices. This can be seen in the *margouillats'* interest in producing the papers 'according to the rules', in making 'proper fakes', as they say. But, it can also be seen in the moral variations that become manifest on certain occasions. It is these variations in moral justification that interest us specifically in this chapter, as they seem indicative of the ambivalent relationship between the materiality of papers and the conceptions around citizenship in post-war Côte d'Ivoire. Indeed, the accounts highlight a particular territory that has emerged in the brokers' practices around papers attesting to nationality. In that territory, the *margouillats'* usual moral code may be suspended in cases where certificates of Ivorian nationality are requested by clients perceived as foreigners. In the subsequent part of this chapter, we hypothesize that there is a kind of moral threshold here. Although sometimes crossed, when driven by 'the belly', this moral threshold nevertheless takes the actors into a kind of no man's land where legal and moral norms are partially suspended. It is, according to interviewees, a 'dog-eat-dog' Hobbesian space, where they undertake 'dangerous' procedures to produce 'kamikaze papers' at exorbitant prices, using force and cunning 'properly [to] bleed the customer', often without providing the expected service. This liminal space is interesting to explore. As one approaches what ideologues of *Ivoirité* consider 'a selling-off of nationality', a kind of moral vacuum arises where one may 'eat' another without fear of jeopardizing his professional ethos, which the *margouillats* see as fundamental for establishing their credibility and offering their services to rightful citizens. In these illegal practices, there is a kind of negative demarcation of the boundaries of citizenship, attesting to the presence of a moral nationalist subjectivation where it would not have been expected.

The material presented in this chapter, collected during four fieldwork missions carried out from 2014 to 2018, is taken mainly from interviews conducted with *margouillats* operating around the Abidjan courthouse in the Plateau administrative district, as well as around the police station and town hall of Adjamé, a popular municipality in Abidjan, comprising a high percentage of merchants from the north of the country who have long been



stigmatized by *l'Ivoirité*. Our discussion is not, strictly speaking, based on ethnographic observation, as we were never able to accompany the *margouillats* into the courthouse to observe their practices or witness their exchanges with civil servants. During our fieldwork, we observed the Ouattara government's attempts to 'make identity documents more secure' in the name of 'emergence'. This involved technological measures—the production of secure papers, the introduction of a new national biometric identity card—as well as crackdowns on the counterfeiters and *margouillats* towards around the courthouse and other administrative offices. In the last section of this chapter we will come back to this new tendency of the Ouattara government. The police officers responsible for the repression were highly visible and threatening during our research in the field. Jeopardizing the work and safety of the brokers because of the awkward presence of a European observer in the administration's offices or corridors was out of the question. As a result of this pressure, it was impossible to shuttle between the inside and outside of the administration, and our observations were therefore limited to the physical and social perimeter of the courthouse. At the same time, we conducted interviews with civil servants from the Ministry of Justice, with judges and civil registration officers, but naturally not with those from the Abidjan courthouse who were involved in our intermediaries' corrupt chain. In fact, the comments gathered from functionaries proved to be of little use for our purposes and were therefore hardly brought into play. It should also be pointed out that the choice of focusing on the *margouillats* was motivated by the desire to reverse the generally prevailing perspective on corruption in administrations, as the existing work on the subject is based mainly on remarks from government officials and those using these services (Tidjani Alou 2001), and almost never on the words of the intermediaries themselves.

For these reasons, which are both methodological and contingent, our research was therefore limited to interviews with the *margouillats* in the various places they frequent around the perimeter of the courthouse—bars, restaurants, and the administrative complex gardens— and sometimes just after they had completed one of their missions inside the courthouse following negotiations with a client. More than once our interviews were interrupted by a police patrol, by the arrival of a judge in the restaurant, or by the presence of other people whom the brokers perceived as dangerous or troublesome. During this repressive period, the last thing they wanted was to be seen in public. The interviews were then continued in more discreet places, where we could go more deeply into other aspects of the brokers' daily lives, discuss their experiences of the political crisis of *Ivoirité*, and also reveal a side of the desires of



these young informal professionals of the documentary state. This last aspect is important for our purposes, because it is also what the social and political life of identity papers is made of: a web of relationships, ideas, and practices that, in the concrete production of legal identities, contribute to the extension or rigidification of the moral boundaries of citizenship.

### The Courthouse Food Chain

As we saw in Chapter 4, the Ouattara government has taken many measures since 2011 to reform the legal and institutional mechanisms for the identification of citizens. The adoption of new biometric technologies, the creation of a National Register of Physical Persons and a single identification number, and the redesigning of the civil registry have the explicit aim of limiting document fraud and securing legal identities. However, this modernization of administrative practices has not eliminated the logic of social intermediation and brokerage, as the apologists of 'emergence' and 'good governance' had hoped. The *margouillats* have not disappeared from the vicinity of the courthouse and the district councils of Abidjan—in fact, quite the contrary. They have clearly adapted to the government's new conditions for documentary production and to the constraints of biometric identification policies, and this confirms the social embeddedness of identification policies, even high-tech ones. The *margouillats* remain a linchpin in the institutional and relational system for the production of legal identities.

In their narratives, the brokers we met presented their activities as a 'system' set up to 'get the papers out of the courthouse', to have them issued more quickly than official procedures, which take much longer. They also stressed that some clients who come to pick up their papers 'don't want to go into the courthouse', because, fearing the administration, they 'prefer to stay outside to get their documents drawn up' (Ange, interview, Abidjan, 9 April 2014). Their fear refers, not only to the civil servants' brusque and contemptuous attitudes towards clients, but also to the wariness displayed by those in Côte d'Ivoire and elsewhere who have not 'made paper' (who have not gone to school or have a low level of education) and who feel intimidated by any administrative process. The courthouse is perceived by many citizens from the popular masses as a 'dangerous' place, and one to avoid. The centrality of the issue of identity papers in the Ivorian crisis has undoubtedly aggravated this perception, with the courthouse—which, in particular, issues auxiliary birth certificates—being the pre-eminent authority that decides on nationality. The

notion of 'nationality', in colloquial language, refers both to the nationality certificate and to the abstract principle of belonging to the nation (one goes to the courthouse to 'ask for a nationality', which must then be 'taken out').

This separation between the courthouse and citizens from the working class is frequently highlighted by the brokers. It is presented as the reason for their activity, as attested by Simon's answer to our question about how he had learned his 'trade' as a broker:

We don't call it a trade, eh! Because our term for it is 'griglali' ['living by your wits' in Nouchi, Abidjanese slang]. But I came on my own. Because in the early days in the [Abobo] district, there was an old father [a term for social elders] called Philippe who was already here, who worked here. So in the neighbourhood, young Dyula people, most often they haven't got any papers. And often they don't know where the courthouse is. Or often they're afraid to go there to drop off documents. That way, they get their documents together in a file and then they give them to us and pay us for taking them, and then we come here and drop them off in their place. [...] The old father, he worked there, he was deep inside .... [...] They're the ones who make the calls. [...] He was the one we dealt with. When I collected files in the neighbourhood, I gave them to him; he did the cases, now he's handing them over to me. [...] And that's how I started to deal with it and get by a little bit until now. (Simon, interview, Abidjan, February 2017)

In this narrative, the crucial meeting of the citizens' needs and the greed of government officials are made visible, with the *margouillats'* brokerage developing at their intersection. On the one hand, there are the young 'northerners' who are afraid to approach the courthouse despite their vital need for papers; and, on the other hand, there are the courthouse officials who 'hear the call', see an opportunity in the situation, and decide to offer a paid service for home delivery of documents. Between them are the brokers, who play the functional role of shuttling between the courthouse and the neighbourhood, in a back-and-forth movement that has contributed to the spread of bureaucratic reasoning to all districts and strata of Abidjan society.

Even though the tensions of war have eased and the 'northerners' are now in power with Ouattara, this practice of delivering papers at home still continues. Beyond the throng of brokers who can be seen around the courthouse, there is an active network of *margouillats* connecting government officials and judges directly with people from working-class neighbourhoods. Furthermore, the network's 'old fathers' and 'bosses' often stay in the background.

They almost never show up in the vicinity of the courthouse, managing their 'good lad' accomplices from a distance, except when it becomes necessary—through violence—to deter newcomers on the papers market, which, behind its apparent informality, remains a closed and highly structured oligopoly. Moreover, the use of mobile phones has also limited the need for brokers to have physical access to government buildings. While they are still required to go to administrative windows and offices in order to file or withdraw documents, agreements with employees are often made over the phone, and papers are frequently delivered at an appointed place in the city or at the client's home. This 'dematerialization' of procedures also allows the *margouillats* to circumvent the authorities' repressive measures, as it has become increasingly difficult to enter the courthouse without being bothered by the police. In difficult times, papers are covertly passed from hand to hand (from brokers to employees and back) outside administrative walls, in locations convened following agreements made over the phone. Indeed, having 'lots of civil servants in one's mobile phone' is vital for brokers. Social capital here translates into real economic capital.

The *margouillats* therefore describe their work as fulfilling the role of facilitating bureaucratic procedures, mediating in a practical way between the different requirements and objectives centred around a place of power, the courthouse. On the one hand are the citizens who need to have essential papers drawn up, such as a certificate of nationality or a police record; on the other hand are the civil servants and employees (typists, archivists, bailiffs) who work in the courthouse and promote their services to augment their meagre salaries. The brokers find their place and role at the centre of this market in papers. Naturally, that market is not limited to a comparison of supply and demand, but rather is embedded in the web of interpersonal relations and the social division of labour that constitute the 'food chain' of documentary production. We are dealing here with an conception of brokerage that, as has been observed in other cases, presents the undue remuneration of public services and their 'internal privatization' as a 'deserved salary bonus' (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2001) and as a way to circumvent administrative dysfunction.

It is the *margouillats'* task to connect these different bodies that form the links in the 'food chain'. The basic principle of this moral economy of documentary production lies in reversing the 'social production of indifference' (Herzfeld 1992), which traditional sociology considers, at least theoretically, to be constitutive of the state bureaucracy. The *margouillats* counteract the impersonal nature of bureaucratic procedures, meant to ensure the proper

functioning of the administrative machine, by building personal relations based on reciprocity and debt:

For the same type of dossier, there may be at least 10 or 20 people filing the same request. Now if I [...] if I come and deposit a file, and then I bribe the person who is in the office [...] My file will automatically go first. Because the person who is sitting in that office feels kind of obliged to give me my document quickly, because there's a contract between you and that person. [...] You see what I mean, right! (Anonymous *margouillat*, interview, January 2017)

In passing, we should note the eminently unequal nature of this hidden and illegal privatization of the bureaucratic machine, where those who pay enjoy the best services at the expense of those who do not. What interests us here is to understand the overall architecture of the chain described by the *margouillats*. To grasp how it works, let us look at this production chain from the bottom up, starting from the example of the 'northerner' citizens and their difficulties in obtaining a certificate of nationality. For these clients, the *margouillats* are mediators, facilitators, and protectors. The *margouillats* in turn contact a plurality of actors with whom it is necessary to establish relationships to 'get the papers out' without difficulty: the policemen who guard the courthouse entrance and lobby, the typist 'mamas', the 'old fathers' who work in the courthouse as employees, civil servants, judges' secretaries, and even the judges' drivers, who play a significant role in gaining access to the courthouse hierarchy.

The establishment of these relationships builds a chain where the actors 'eat together' in varying configurations. Depending on the importance of the case and the type of document to be produced, they share the money from the clients according to established percentages. Of course, there are links that are much higher than those just mentioned. The 'food chain' goes all the way to the top of the judicial institution hierarchy, to the source of the signatures that determine the certificates' validity, the judges themselves. This is a very difficult level for the little *margouillats* to access, and they can reach it only through other 'little guys' who are already in contact with the judges. This attests to the importance of the clerks, secretaries, drivers, and police officers who guard the courthouse and want to 'eat' too. For the *margouillats*, it is a matter of connecting with the right people, to whom the judges feel morally obliged to grant favours from time to time in return for their devotion.

For us, there are documents in our hands that are a bit complicated for us to get the signatories for, the signatures and so on. We go to see them. [...] For example, a prosecutor must sign a 'for transfer' so we can drop it off at the investigation department. I can't go knocking on the prosecutor's door directly [...]. When you go through the prosecutor's clerk, he earns a little something for himself. He goes off, he pleads in front of his boss and his boss signs. That's why we go to them, to subcontract with them. (Simon, interview, March 2014)

Sometimes, if a *margouillat* is lucky enough to run into a senior civil servant or a judge himself, he tries to establish a direct relationship, to offer his services as a 'good lad' ready to help out:

When I see you there with your powerful car, always coming in and parking, I know you work in the courthouse, you're a lawyer: 'Good morning, Sir!' When you come over, I grab your briefcase: 'Sir, I'm going to walk with you.' 'It's heavy, walk with me, lad.' You may only give me 100 or 200 francs. But you don't know what my hopes are. These crumbs you're giving me here, I'll content myself with that because I know what I'm looking for in return. (Bérenger, interview, April 2014)

Once established, these relationships of patronage and small services—which are indeed preparatory to the corrupt negotiation relationships that enable the production of papers—often borrow from the language of kinship, birthright, dependence, and family protection:

Often, we know the judges ourselves, we go to see them. In the old days, there was a female judge who was there . . . She was very welcoming, she liked young people like us who were resourceful. So when you had a certificate to sign, you'd go to her office, you'd knock and she'd say, 'Come in!' You'd go in, 'Mama, I need to have my certificate signed'—'Give it to me.' She'd take it and sign it. You'd go out, put on the stamp, go to the desk and get that stamped. That's it. (Bérenger, interview, April 2014)

While judges can be approached through their 'little guys', or in some cases by brokers who have succeeded in becoming 'good little guys' themselves, there are larger and more sensitive cases—such as those involving the registry of business of the major Lebanese merchants. These cases are then handled by particular brokers, described as operating in a special relationship involving alliance and reciprocity with a judge. They are the ones whom our informants

described as ‘salamanders’, ‘big fish’ who have a prosecutor or judge ‘behind them’ or ‘in their phone’. For these high-level transactions, the ‘food chain’ must necessarily go through them:

Ange: ‘There are different ranks among us [...]’ Lazare: ‘There are *margouillats* that you might come across in the courthouse, and you won’t even know they’re a *margouillat* ... The prosecutor needs them more than he needs his fellow prosecutors!’ Ange: ‘They’re the salamanders!’ Lazare: ‘Because these people ... that guy can bring in a million a day for him. Millions every day, anyway the guy brings him income, and a sizeable income. So, someone like that, you don’t abandon him. You don’t let him go. He’s got the prosecutor in his phone contacts like a friend: “Where are you? Okay, come on ...” [...] Just because he [the prosecutor] knows that with this guy I always have [he has] money coming in.’ (Ange and Lazare, interview, Abidjan, January 2017)

Every *margouillat* would naturally like to become a ‘salamander’ and take care of the ‘big business’. But accessing this network requires having the opportunity to offer a judge an initial ‘juicy’ *deal*. Pretenders must also be reliable and demonstrate professional ethics that would ensure not dragging the judge into a scandal or an excessively risky case. At the time of our investigation, Ange had tried to cross that particular threshold; but, at his ‘little *margouillat*’ level, he had to go through the mediation of another ‘little guy’ who was close to a judge:

Because I’ve already proposed a case to a judge here where I myself didn’t know the judge in question. It was someone, a clerk of the judge who [introduced me] ... because I told him, that money, I couldn’t put it directly into his hands like that. So I still wanted to say a word to the judge first, and if he agreed, then I was going to deal with [him]. And the clerk managed to get me a brief appointment with the judge ... I went to see the judge, I explained the situation to him. He told me it was a question of money, and that in any case he couldn’t see himself talking about money with me. But if my guy [the clerk], the one who sent me to him, if I worked it out with him about the amount he mentioned, then he could help us. I went back to the clerk, and we came to an agreement. It’s just to tell you that ... when you approach them in the right way, if they can help you, they will. What they don’t like is doing fake stuff ... That kind of thing starts to put their credibility at risk. Otherwise, if you’re good, if you’re fair and square, and you bring them the right cases, the good deals, then they’re with you. (Ange and Lazare, interview, Abidjan, January 2017)



The 'fake stuff' refers to practices that go beyond the 'normality' of corrupt transactions and enter into the sphere of producing forgeries—for instance, signing documents drawn up by forgers. In Côte d'Ivoire, as elsewhere, documentary falsification encompasses a wide variety of practices and situations. In its 28 January 2014 issue, the satirical bi-weekly newspaper *L'Éléphant déchaîné* revealed the extent of the trafficking it had managed to uncover throughout the territory after a long and perilous investigation: fake student cards and diplomas; fake driver's licences and roadworthiness certificates; fake national identity cards; fake birth certificates and certificates of nationality. The journalists claimed to have 'discovered that, in Abidjan, around 2,000 fake national identity cards were fabricated daily and distributed to people who are not Ivorians', fuelling suspicions of a vast nationality fraud operation designed to inflate the electoral rolls in the run-up to the 2015 election. A year later, the newspaper returned to its revelations and found that no real judicial investigation had been carried out to break up the trafficking, concluding that 'the forgers are attacking the foundations of the Republic'; 'Danger for the Republic!!!'; 'Fraudsters from all countries, sign up!'<sup>2</sup>

As we have seen in Chapter 5, the argument of nationality fraud is not new, and is moreover a central and recurring theme of the social and political life of identification papers in Côte d'Ivoire. However, the argument's focus on national and electoral issues masks the key element—namely, that the vast majority of documents are falsified or modified for practical issues of daily life: to continue one's education and take an exam, to register for a public service competition, to obtain a salaried job, to open a bank or mobile phone account, to sign a notarial deed, to obtain a title to land, to acquire a passport to travel, and so on. At the heart of these covenants with documentary legality is the civil registration document, which is supposed to attest to the legal identity of each person and enable the person to be recognized by the state.

In Côte d'Ivoire, as in many other French-speaking African countries, low birth-registration rates and the sparse territorial coverage of civil registry services mean that it is common to have to obtain a civil status record after the fact through a birth affidavit. The fake industry is embedded in this process, with the extensive production of falsified birth certificates known, as we have explained above, as *René Cailliés*—a phrase that refers in Ivorian vernacular to birth extracts and affidavits that have been falsified aimed at lowering (or, more rarely, increasing) the age of individuals, according to the needs of the moment—whether educational, professional, or otherwise. This practice is

<sup>2</sup> *L'Éléphant déchaîné*, 353, Friday, 29 May 2015, p. 1–Monday, 1 June 2015, p. 4.



extremely common. For the *margouillats* and their clients, it does not appear to have any consequences, unlike the ‘fake stuff’ that involves the credibility and reputation of the major players in the courthouse ‘food chain’.

The professional ethos that Ange spoke of above, as paradoxical as it may seem, implies a dividing line separating certain corrupt practices that are morally acceptable from others that are not. This morality primarily entails a minimal level of respect for the rules and bureaucratic procedures, but also—as we will see in the next section—with a shared ideas and values that structure the representations of the good citizen and the ‘true Ivorian’. Naturally, this is a narrative. And, yet, it demonstrates principles that, even if they exist only in the field of representations of the self, are important to take into account if a less stereotypical image of the Ivorian brokers is to be formed. These principles can be seen more distinctly in a particularly sensitive area, that of the production of papers attesting to Ivorian nationality.

### ‘Bringing out Nationalities’: ‘Good Names’ and ‘Kamikaze Papers’

The *margouillats* played a significant role during the Ivorian crisis, when it was very dangerous for northerners and other ‘undocumented persons’ to go to the administration to obtain a certificate of nationality. In the 1990s, and even more so during the war, citizens from the northern regions, stigmatized as ‘foreigners’ and as accomplices of the rebellion, lived in a documentary nightmare. The daily life of northerners in the days of *Ivoirité* was a long litany of frustrations and discrimination: identity cards torn or confiscated by the police at checkpoints; living under the constant suspicion of falsified nationality. While it is difficult to date the first appearance of the *margouillats*, this phase of ethnonationalist discrimination was certainly conducive to their activities. The brokers remember this period as a golden age when they could earn 100,000 CFA francs a day (about 150 euros), and they complain that today (after the end of the war) the Ouattara government has tightened the repressive measures against them, ‘after all our kind deeds toward the people of the ‘north’ (Simon, interview, February 2015).

Although a new nationality law was adopted in 2013 and the qualifying conditions were relaxed, producing certificates of nationality remains one of the major sources of income for *margouillats*. Money cannot do everything, however. ‘Getting out nationalities’ involves much more than a mercantile relationship, and this has led to the legal and moral boundaries of citizenship

being stretched. It is here that we encounter the space of moral variation that is most significant for our subject matter. To understand that space, we must first make clear that the *margouillats* themselves believe they are operating in a context where 'money has really taken precedence over administrative documents' (Ange, interview, Abidjan, January 2017). The courthouse is portrayed as an environment of widespread corruption, a 'jungle' where only 'very tough men' can survive. There are, however, some shared principles that must be respected for the smooth running of the process. These principles concern not only agreements between those who 'eat together', but also a pact between client and broker based on what could be described as a minimum of 'frankness', a mutual recognition that, when not respected, frees the *margouillat* from any professional ethic, shifting his actions into an amoral 'dog-eat-dog' space.

As an example: someone might come to me and say 'Ah, I don't have any papers [...] I ask you your surname first. If your surname is perhaps Koudou, then it's Bété; there's no other ethnic group for Koudou. In that case I can help get a birth certificate issued for you, and even get you an ID. But when you come to me and say your name is Koné, or maybe your name is this or that, I'll ask you to bring an ID for one of your parents at the very least. Because, for example, in Burkina there are Koné, in Mali there are Koné, in Guinea there are Koné. [...] So he can come to you, bluffing like that, and say 'my name is Koné, I'm Ivorian'. Because he was born here, he understands French better, and he might not have any marks on him [scarification] which could prove that he's Burkinabè. Now, there are others out there doing this for the money. [...] Because the guy can come and offer you 500,000 francs for a nationality certificate and a birth certificate' (anonymous *margouillat*, interview, Abidjan, April 2014)

This interview excerpt shows that *Ivoirité* and its stereotypes are not easily dispelled. There is discrimination between those who have 'a good name' (that is, one 'from the south') and those who, with foreign-sounding surnames, are required to provide documents that the *margouillats* do not ask of the former. Although some bearers of 'Dyula names' now occupy the highest government offices, they are still suspected of being non-nationals. This immediately ignites suspicions of being short-changed, and the *margouillats* can be seen spontaneously to seize power over the identification of applicants, which is not unconnected with the ethnonationalist fantasies of the Ivorian crisis in the 1990s–2000s.

It should be noted, however, that this obsession with an ethnonational 'who's who' does not necessarily fall within the ideology of threatened sovereignty and the 'selling off of nationality' promoted by partisans of *Ivoirité*. Nor is it a well-established intentionality of the *margouillats* as actors in a legal and illegal mechanism for the production of papers. More prosaically, the suspicion of hidden identity is part of a relationship of supervised reciprocity that characterizes the brokers' 'morality of the belly' and their professional ethos towards their clients. More than ideology, it is the *margouillats*' peace of mind in their work that is at stake. They can get involved in a dangerous 'theft of nationality' only if they are able to control the risks, and provided that they benefit financially as much as possible from such a venture. This is particularly evident when it comes to making 'impossible papers,' which the *margouillats* call 'kamikaze documents':

Lazare: 'We call them kamikaze documents. That's actually the kind of document we like. Because, that's right, it's the kind of document that bleeds the client dry. [the other *margouillats* laugh] Those impossible documents, they're what we like best; because we're going to properly bleed you dry. You only have your birth certificate, no document from a parent. To issue a certificate of nationality, a birth certificate plus a photocopy of a parent's ID is required. You don't have a parent's document. We'll put it together for you, really fast.'

Ange: 'It's a network. It's Al Qaeda, man! But you only have your birth certificate without your parent's document. So I go get a newspaper—*Fraternité matin*—and look in the obituary section. I see a deceased young man. I ask you, "So when you see your father there, how old would you say he is?" He says, "My dad was 55." I say, "no problem". So I look in the obituary section, at the pictures of the deceased, I see one that looks around 55 years old, I cut out the clipping, I get it scanned, and I stick it on a piece of paper. It becomes your parent's ID.'

When we pointed out that such an operation would not be difficult to unmask, we were told that the guarantor of this operation's success was the money passed on to civil servants:

Lazare: 'What they're watching is their money.' Ange: 'The money goes into their till; they don't really check the ID. What are they going to do with it—look and see if it's real or if it's fake? He's already got his money; at noon he'll have a 5,000-franc lunch at Pergola, then he'll take a taxi home for 2,000

francs, and the next day he'll take another 2,000 francs taxi ride back to work. He doesn't care. All he wants is his money. What does it matter if it's really your dad or not? Take your papers and walk out in front of him! Otherwise, yeah, we like those kamikaze files! We sure do like them.'

Ange: 'Totally impossible files [...] they pass everywhere, wherever ... they're good, they're clean.' Béranger: 'We call it a "montage"'. Ange: 'We make sure your files are complete.' Béranger: 'It means they're proper fakes!'

These scam techniques—detailed here by Ange, Lazare, and Béranger, and also confirmed in other interviews—are naturally part of a wider trend, and not specifically Ivorian, of informalization and criminalization of African societies (Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou 1997). This trend has increased since the 1990s, with the crisis of structural adjustments, the collapse of school systems, the explosion of unemployment, and the narrowing of employment prospects for graduates. New paths of accumulation and trajectories of social ascent have been developed at the interface of the public and the private, the formal and the informal, the legal and the illegal, upsetting representations of social success everywhere (Banégas and Warnier 2001). Embodied by Senegalese *moodu moodu* and *goorgorlu*, Mauritanian *tcheb-tchab*, Cameroonian *feyme*, or Nigerian 419 scammers, a political economy of resourcefulness, cunning, and scams has imposed its normality on sub-Saharan urban societies. In Côte d'Ivoire, this dynamic developed into a real social and cultural movement, with the advent of musical trends such as *coupé/décalé* ('cheating/shifting') and *broutage* ('grazing'). The global boom of these trends born in the early 2000s between Paris and Abidjan was highly revealing of this new spirit of fraudulent capitalism. Before flooding dance floors around the world, the art of the 'cheater' was actually to carry out a bank scam, then 'shift' over to the nightclubs of rue Princesse in the Yopougon district of Abidjan ostentatiously to squander their money (*travailement*) and build up a reputation (Kolhagen 2006). Fashioned into a lifestyle, this art of 'canniness' turned the social norms of legitimate accumulation upside down. It was taken to new heights a decade later by the 'grazers', who became masters of internet scams (Koenig 2014). The *Jeunes patriotes* (Young Patriots) had themselves mastered these techniques of *travailement en esprit* ('psychological intimidation'), which allowed them, by ensnaring public figures, to assert their power in society (Banégas and Cutolo 2012; Koné 2014). The war unquestionably accentuated this fraudulent trend of the popular economy, turning scamming into a major tool of revenge for social subordinates (Newell 2012). Since the outbreak of the conflict, it is said in the suburbs of Abidjan that 'Côte d'Ivoire is under a tarpaulin': in the

dark, under the tarpaulin, everyone can do what they want without ever being bothered. The huge fortunes that were built up during and after the crisis have proven over and over that impunity now prevails at all levels of society.

The courthouse *margouillats*' 'kamikaze' practices must, therefore, be understood in the broader context of this (im)moral economy of 'shifting', foul play, and scams that permeates contemporary societies in general and Ivorian society in particular. But the argument that it is commonplace should not mislead. The transactions in question here are not about just any commodity; they relate to nationality. They involve criteria for social recognition and moral representations of citizenship that fluctuate according to the circumstances. While it is true that 'money has taken over', our investigations confirm that there are nevertheless variations in the *margouillats*' attitude regarding this crucial question of client nationality. 'Foreigners' who come to the courthouse to obtain 'nationality' illegally are treated quite differently from Ivorians experiencing problems concerning their papers, especially those from the north. Such cases are indeed 'kamikaze', as the *margouillats* are aware that they involve much greater risks than a conviction for 'the offence of vagrancy' to which they are normally exposed, punishable by a prison sentence of three to six months. It is interesting to see, in particular, how respect for 'professional' principles is obliterated when a foreigner seeks to obtain a certificate of nationality by claiming to be Ivorian, giving the *margouillats* an opportunity to swindle the unfortunate client without any concern. Several levels of moral justification are involved in these cases, including the dignity of the broker, generally regarded in the common popular sense as a shameless individual willing to do anything in order to 'eat':

There are some who think that they can easily obtain nationality through us out here because it's as if, for us *margouillats*, anything is possible. So, the gentleman comes over, knowing full well that he's Burkinabè, but he won't tell you that he's Burkinabè, because he was born in Côte d'Ivoire. But if you take a closer look, you can tell the guy's a foreigner. (Lazare, interview, Abidjan, January 2017)

In a case like this, the (supposed) lie about nationality legitimizes the broker's distance from his client's fate:

When it's like that, we can't refuse, because we're here for the money, we need money. We take the certificate, we pay the cashier for your document, knowing that when we go over there, it will inevitably be rejected. (Lazare, interview, Abidjan, January 2017)

This distance is then easily transformed into a predatory attitude:

Lazare: 'There was a case like that, but I refused to do it. [...] Then again, I took his money. The first day he gave me 70,000; after that he called me, we met in Williamsville, he gave me another 50,000; then he called me once, and I told him the document is finished but you have to send me 100,000 [...] When he came to give me the hundred thousand, I went up there, then I said "oh, the judge wants to see you". So he left and he never called me again. [...] He couldn't! First, his name is Affolabi Isai. Affolabi is Anago [Nigerian]. When you try to do something shady and you come here, I'll take your money and then at the last minute I'll tell you the judge wants to see you. Because I know you can't go there. It's a trap.'

Angé: 'Because the guy comes to you as if, like, you're the naive one. [...] You're in need of money, you'll get the nationality for him, as if you didn't know. He doesn't realize that you actually do know. You tell him the sum, he pays you the money, you take his document, you pay the cashier. [...] If it's turned down, I'm not the one who rejected it. [...] That's how we trap them [...] you call the client, you say "well, I paid for your document. Right now, they've entered the data. It's at the prosecutor's, he wants you to go there yourself. You tell him your parents died, right? The prosecutor or the president just wants to see you, he'll ask you a few questions before signing your certificate." He knows he isn't legal, so he can't go. No one's going to claim that money he paid you, so you come out a winner in this situation, and you're fine.'

This is a clear illustration of how one enters a grey area around the ethics of papers where any behaviour is possible, in a 'dog-eat-dog' territory. Cunning, canniness, and force prevail in swindling a client deemed to be a nationality scammer. It is as if, through their embezzlements and dodgy dealings, the *margouillats* were implicit defenders of Ivorian citizenship. Or, to put it another way, it is as if entering the no man's land on the frontier between being on the inside or the outside of nationality triggers predatory behaviour that, in turn, marks the border between nationals and non-nationals. In this liminal space, there is then a reversal of the communication role that the brokers occupy between the bureaucratic world of anonymous and impersonal relations and the popular world of personal relations—a function that we have described as a bridge, borrowing the metaphor from Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2001: 25). Far from always assuming the role of identity 'guides', the foreigner-scamming *margouillats* sometimes turn into ambiguous



'gatekeepers'<sup>3</sup> of national citizenship, highlighting the limits of a 'morality of the belly' that never completely obliterates the presence of the state in relationships involving the production of documents. Under normal corruption practices, the state is subject to collective manducation, informalization, appropriation, and privatization, but it does not disappear from the scene. Rather, by taking over the role of identifying and sorting 'foreigners', through practices that recognize individuals and form part of a shared imagination of nationality, the *margouillats* incidentally reproduce the boundaries of that role in the street, while also reproducing the discriminatory power of the state without necessarily meaning to.

### **Biometric Reform and the Repression of Brokers**

January 2017, Plateau district, Abidjan. For our penultimate round of investigations, we visited the Office national d'identification (ONI, or National Identification Office) to conduct a final interview with the Director General Diakalidia Konaté. On the stairs leading up to his office, an October 2016 memo was posted for all services:

I have been informed on a recurring basis [writes DG Konaté], that individuals commonly referred to as *margouillats* have been extorting users in collusion with ONI agents in return for the timely processing of their identity documents.

This practice, already denounced in my circular letter [...], severely disrupts the functioning of the service and thwarts the ethical values of the ONI's new managerial vision.

To put an end to these practices, I urge the staff in charge of enlisting, processing, producing and distributing identity documents to abandon these disgraceful practices.

While the letter then ends with threats of punishment, it is on the grounds of morality and values that the director of the ONI bases his fight. Indeed, the political economy of the production of identity documents cannot be reduced to its legal, technical, and bureaucratic aspect. Nor can the brokerage and corruption practices discussed here sum up alone the social life of papers in Côte d'Ivoire. Between the two, there is a long chain of relations in which the practices of the documentary state are embedded on a daily basis.

<sup>3</sup> To use a metaphor employed by Fred Cooper (2002) to describe the late colonial state, but in a different context and with a different meaning here.



Our exchanges with the *margouillats* brought to light that, beyond corruption strictly speaking, there is a 'morality of the belly' that structures relationships involving the production of 'papers' and, probably more broadly, the functioning of the documentary state. This moral economy of 'papers' does not operate exclusively through the exchange of cash, but rather through a chain of power relations, social reciprocity, and a professional ethos that clearly aims to 'get the papers out' more quickly, but according to bureaucratic rules that are not only practical but indeed 'legal'. Given the reforms and the creation of the biometric *Registre national des personnes physiques* (RNPP, or National Register of Natural Persons), we could ask ourselves whether this 'food chain' is destined to disappear. The question is not only technical. It alludes to the criteria of citizen recognition shared by civil servants and their auxiliaries in the street, and more broadly, to imagining a nation where people 'recognize themselves' according to a whole set of stereotypes and social markers.

At a time of 'emergence' and where an all-out appeal to investors has been launched, the Ivorian government shows its desire to hunt down *margouillats* and forgers, to 'secure administrative documents' (by adding tamper-proof watermarks), and to fight fraud. A communication campaign has been launched by the ONI, in which, on posters in the three national colours, an elegantly dressed young man and woman can be seen making a gesture with their hand to stop any 'act of fraud in the identification process': 'I am not in it,' the posters proclaim (Figure 6.1).

Since the official end of the war in 2011, the Ouattara government has taken many measures to reform the legal and institutional apparatuses for the identification of citizens, as we saw in Chapter 4. The adoption of new biometric technologies, the creation of the RNPP, and the redesigning of the civil registry have the explicit aim of limiting document fraud and securing legal identities. The post-conflict identification reforms aim at depoliticizing identification. New technologies are meant to dissociate the criteria for assigning legal identity from the stereotypical signs defining the social person that are deciphered by the *margouillats*. In this rhetoric of development and 'emergence', biometrics is presented as the key to a modernity free from the relics of belly politics and nationality fraud. The imposition of the single biometric identification number as the cardinal principle for the production of any administrative document is intended to eliminate all interference in the documentary production process and to reduce corruption. This naturally 'spoils' the *margouillats'* work, or at least makes it more difficult for them.



Figure 6.1 Official ONI campaign against ID fraud. (© ONI 2018)

However, this modernization of administrative practices has not eliminated the logic of social intermediation and brokerage, as the apologists of biometrics and ‘good governance’ had hoped. Despite recurrent police harassment and a growing criminalization, the *margouillats* have not disappeared from the vicinity of the courthouse and the district councils of Abidjan. It should be observed, on the other hand, that technical and administrative reforms have not drastically reduced the presence of the René Caillié arrangements that we mentioned at the outset of this chapter. In the following pages, we will look more closely at the social logics of their production and at the way they are used in ordinary life. By ethnographically following the social life of ‘René Cailliés’, we can see that their circulation is not limited to instrumental purposes—being able to enrol at school, pass a competitive examination, be recruited for a football club, obtain a bank loan, and so on—but is deeply embedded in social relations and forms part of chains of family accountability—particularly between generations—which create a veritable moral economy that bends the managing of identity documents to the relations of reciprocity, authority, and dependence of domestic units.

## René Caillié in the Anno Country

In March 2018, while carrying out research on the social and political use of identity documents in the *pays Annò*, a quite out-of-the-way rural area in the centre-east of Côte d'Ivoire, we made a peculiar finding. The closest Ivorian friend of Armando Cutolo, with whom and with whose family he had had a close relationship since 1997, revealed that the name on his ID card was not his own, but the name of a relative. He made this confession with an amused but at the same time embarrassed expression, adding that he was 'a René Caillié'.

Armando Cutolo had always called his friend by the name of Adama, as did his relatives and all the people who know him well. He was aware that this name was different from the one written on his ID card, but he considered the one on the ID card to be his 'real' name: Nguessan Kofi Souleymane. This is a typical Anno name, where Akan and Muslim forms are mixed: the father's name, used as patronymic (here, 'Nguessan') is followed by a personal name connected to the local ritual calendar ('Kofi') and by a second personal name showing religious conversion (here, 'Souleymane'). This last name is generally taken from the Dyula Muslim tradition, which has an important religious influence on the Anno.

Hence, until we were told about it, we both thought that 'Adama' was only a nickname given to our friend when he was a kid, and that such a nickname had continued to be used by his relatives and friends. In fact, Adama was his 'real' name. To be precise, it was the Muslim name he had been given at birth. Indeed, he should have been declared as Dongo Kuaku Adama at registration, because this was the name given to him by his father. But neither this name nor its bearer was ever registered; no declaration of birth was made for Adama.

Not having been declared at birth, and having grown up without having an official identity, Adama was given the birth certificate of his maternal uncle, Nguessan Kofi Souleymane, in order to attend secondary school. The transfer was helped by the fact that nephew and uncle were roughly of same age, as can happen in families where polygamy is frequent. My friend explained to me that his uncle Souleymane, having failed several times in primary school, had become too old to be accepted by a *college* (secondary school). Hence, his father (Adama's maternal grandfather) decided to establish a new identity for him, pretending that his son had never been registered and applying for a *juge-ment supplétif* (delayed birth certificate). In this new registration, the former Souleymane's year of birth was delayed by three years, and for the Ivorian state he became Nguessan Kofi Amadou.

The original identity of Souleymane having become useless—a legal identity with nobody to bear it—his father, who at that time was the head of the compound where the two boys lived, decided that such a resource should not be wasted. When another unregistered relative needed an official identity, it was cheaper and easier to use an already existing one, rather than make a trip of 70 kilometres on a muddy track to Prikro, the only sub-prefecture of the Anno country at that time, in order to start the complex procedure needed to obtain a *jugement supplétif*. Adama was a perfect candidate to receive the redundant ID: not having been registered by his father, he had begun to have trouble in his application for secondary school. Hence, Souleymane's birth certificate (*extrait de naissance*) was passed to him, and he became Nguessan Kofi Souleymane. The shift of identity happened, of course, only in the realm of law: Adama continued to be called as such by his relatives, and this is still the case, even now he lives in Abidjan.

The story of Adama, who became a registered citizen without ever having been declared at birth, is a good example of the tactical arrangements taking place in the social life of identity papers in Côte d'Ivoire. Adama's legal identity was a by-product, a secondary consequence, of the 'paper rebirth' of his maternal uncle (*ofa* in Anno); that is, of the 'rebirth' of an elder. Souleymane (the original) was only a 'distant' maternal uncle: he was not the full brother of Adama's mother, but her patrilineal half-brother (the son of the second wife of her father). Anno kinship terminology equates 'full' (*kpa* ('good')) maternal uncles, who are matrilineally connected to nephews, with those who are connected by the polygamous marriage relations of the latter's mother's father. Yet the difference remains and is indeed important, since in Anno society, as happens in other Ivorian Akan societies, matrilineal succession continues to contribute to the social reproduction of groups and identities (Cutolo 20015). Consequently, taking the legal identity of Souleymane in the domain of Ivorian civil law, Adama was legally disconnected from his 'real' matrilineal descent group. His maternal grandfather now became his father, and the second wife of the latter became his mother. As a consequence, Adama had legally become the brother-in law of his (real) father, and the half-brother of his (real) mother and of mother's brother.

In theory, this would have been an awkward situation, since in Akan kinship culture a sister's son is in a special relationship with his maternal uncle. Due to the principles of matrilineal succession, the sister's son is the heir and the ideal prosecutor of the maternal uncle's social identity; he is thus subordinated to his authority. Nonetheless, what could have appeared difficult to someone 'seeing like a state' (Scott 1998)—that is, following a principle of legibility where each

individual should have a unique, invariable, identity (Scott, Tehranian, and Mattias 2002)—was not so for Adama and his family: kinship relationships deriving from official documents and ID cards were apparently considered as extrinsic to the truth of personal and social identity, which could be defined only by the community. Matrilineal succession depends on arrangements that are made within the community, independently from (and often in spite of) civil law on inheritance.

In the case of Adama, as in many other similar Ivorian cases, we are confronted with practices and tactics that bend legal identity, and the documents attesting it, to the relationships of reciprocity, authority, and dependence that structure domestic units, following the necessities of social life. We conceptualize and represent this kind of practice as moral economies of identification. We think that using the concept of moral economy is appropriate in this context because of its implicit but constitutively relational character. It allows us to represent the awareness, in the acting subject, of the coexistence of opposed logics and ethos (the juridical-administrative and the popular), which in actual social life are experienced together and are often tactically combined. It allows us, as we have seen in the previous section on *margouillat* brokers, to address the networks of exchanges and the negotiations connecting administrative norms to actual practices, formal rules to informal arrangements, and legal procedures to illegal practices. As a matter of fact, these connections are constituents of the relations between the Ivorian state and Ivorian civil society, and they can easily be observed through ethnographic research. They can also be seen as what Jean-François Bayart (2008) has defined as popular modalities of appropriation of the state.

We do share the concerns of scholars, such as Johanna Siméant (2010), who have highlighted the risks of overstressing the concept of 'moral economy', making of it an equivalent of other already existing concepts such as 'values', 'morality', and in some cases 'culture'. In particular, we agree with Siméant (2010: 155–60) when she insists on avoiding its use as an explication in itself, as a causal factor, and on understanding it as an imperative to what ethnographers would phrase as a 'thick descriptions' exploring the meaning of social actors. This is, indeed, what we have tried to do in our work on the *margouillats* and, as we are going to see, on the René Caillié arrangement. But it is exactly this stance that pushes us to include the 'regime of production, circulation and use of moral sentiments, values, norms and duties within a social space' on which Didier Fassin (2009: 1257) has centred his understanding of moral economy. The René Caillié arrangement, as we are going to see, is a popular answer to the requirements made by the state and its institutions

concerning the attestation and legibility of personal identity; at the same time, it is a practice that deals with moral values concerning the construction of the person, on the one side, and, on the other, the moral integration of state and society, administration and citizens, institutions and social reproduction. It is an infrapolitical kind of answer, taking place in a society where there's a clear conscience about the fact that state laws are not able to overcome the relationships of power and subjection, of authority and dependence, that do actually shape 'real' life; that is, social life.

Administrative procedures have to be adjusted, consequently, to social life. Access to status, employment, *réussite*—a word widely used in francophone Africa meaning accomplishment and success (Banégas and Warnier 2001)—has less to do with the respect of law than with belonging to (and maneuvering) networks of moral (that is, family, kinship, community) bonds. One of our Anno informants stated explicitly that a younger brother has 'the moral obligation' to cede his birth certificate or his ID card to his elder brother, if the latter needs it; and that, in any case, it is up to the family elders to decide on these matters. As we are going to see, birth certificates of birth and ID cards can be treated as goods that can be exchanged or redistributed within the family, following the situation of its members and budgetary needs. This subverts, of course, the juridical principle stating that social praxis should take place within the perimeter defined by the law, because here legal identity is made functional to social and personal needs. The following story comes from an upper-level state functionary:

Moi, j'avais 14 ans et je venais d'échouer pour la seconde fois. Mon père a approché le Directeur [...] Ce dernier lui a conseillé de venir avec l'extrait de mon petit frère qui fréquentait l'école coranique. C'est avec l'extrait de ce dernier que je suis allé à l'école. J'ai pu obtenir mon entrée en 6<sup>ème</sup>, mon BEPC, mon Bac. Bon, aujourd'hui je suis habitué à ce nom. (Abidjan, interview, 17 February, 2016)

Although we were told this particular story in Abidjan by an Anno functionary, it could have come indeed from any part of the country. After Adama had made us aware of the ordinariness of such a situation, we have collected similar narratives from many people, in different parts of the country. In these narratives, some recurring characteristics can be observed: the need to lower the age of a student in order for him to continue his career; the encouragement of a state official in what is seen as a morally tolerable practice; the shift of a legal identity from a younger to an older brother seen as a rational use of resources.



In the story that we have cited above, the fact that the younger brother was at a Koranic school, where legal age is not important, was presented as a self-evident rationale of the transfer of identity from him to his elder brother, given the indisputable moral duty to help a *grand frère*.

'Papers' are thus rearranged according to the need to harmonize life cycles and kinship ties, rather than the opposite. It would be immoral to hinder a career, to frustrate the will of a youth to receive instruction, to stop the progression toward one's social destiny 'just because of a piece of paper'—so we were told. These practices of appropriation of legal and administrative logics 'from below' should not be seen, however, as strategies of resistance to state power. They are just tactics to circumvent norms aimed at keeping an individual within the frame of state's governmentality, to avoid exclusions from processes of social reproduction that would be perceived as unmotivated. They respond to a popular moral economy of identity stemming from the irreducible autonomy of the African social sphere (Bayart 2013: 294).

A further example can be seen in the story of another youth coming from Adama's village—we will call him Kouadio—who has already been (un)legally 'reborn' twice, and who was heading towards a third legal identity at the time of our research. His first rebirth happened by taking an identity that 'had been left free' by a younger cousin, when the latter had provided himself with a new (illegal) *jugement supplétif* (Anonymous, interview, Prikro, 8 February 2017). The second time, needing an even 'younger' legal identity in order to apply for a job in the state sector, he took the ID card of another cousin, who did not use it as he was badly ill and bedridden. Unfortunately, his application did not succeed. In the meantime, the ill cousin got unexpectedly better, and his parents asked to have his ID card back. Now, since Kouadio had already given his former (that is, his cousin's) birth certificate to another relative 'who needed it', he was left without any official identity. At the time of our interview, he was applying for another *jugement supplétif* with the help of a broker, in order to obtain a third identity.

Birth certificates and ID cards circulate within the family following the needs of its members, but they can also become objects of transactions binding different partners outside the kinship network. This is the case of a now retired high officer of the Ivorian army, coming from a Baule village close to the border of the Anno country. Here we will call him Komenan. In order to be admitted to the military academy, he used the birth certificate of one of his friends, with the approval of the latter's family. His friend apparently 'wouldn't



use it', since he had left school and worked in his father's plantation. After the academy, Komenan had a brilliant career under the name of his friend. When he became a captain, the latter's mother approached him, saying that he was in 'debt' (*kale*) to her for the success he had had using the name of her son, who had died a few years before. After negotiation, the captain paid a reasonable sum, and he renewed the payment when he eventually became a colonel. Now that he has retired, he still sends presents from time to time to his friend's family, who originally 'owned' his legal name.

It was only after the enquiry in Adama's village, as our research on registration and ID documents was progressing in Abidjan and Bouaflé, that we became aware of the extent of the René Caillié arrangements in Ivorian society, of just how widespread was their use, and of how it was represented as standard practice and one of the disposable instruments available to navigate administrative life. We were able to observe that this 'administrative rebirth' (Konan 2010)—for example, the transfer of an ID card from a younger to an older brother—did not necessarily involve the complicity of local bureaucrats or middlemen. In many cases the transation was made 'outside' the bureaus, in family arrangements or through illicit declarations at the registrar.

In a way, the René Caillié arrangement could be compared with Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan's concept of 'practical norms' (Olivier de Sardan 2014; see also Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2014b). Aimed at describing ethnographically bureaucratic practices deviating from the official rules, this concept is meant to bring to light the routines of 'regulated informality' belonging to the professional culture of local bureaucrats. Illegal practices such as the René Caillié arrangement, of course, cannot be represented in terms of norms, nor as unconscious routines, because they are always consciously assumed and tactically enacted: they are practical arrangements of norms. They do not call into question the laws concerning registration, but they make them compatible with a subaltern moral economy of identities; and, most of all, as we are going to see in the next pages, with the moral values of age and eldership.

It is true that, owing to their very high number, these arrangements seem to create two coexisting layers of identity, obstructing the normative relation connecting the legal identity with the social person. But it is precisely this distinction and this coexistence that makes it possible for many Ivorian citizens to overcome what would otherwise result in an immoral identification system damaging careers and lives.

## René Caillié Arrangements and Ivorian Popular Culture

Forgery of documents is quite current in Côte d'Ivoire. It concerns fake student cards and diplomas; fake driver's licences and roadworthiness certificates; as we have seen, it also concerns fake national identity cards, fake birth certificates and certificates of nationality. As we have seen in Chapters 2 and 3, since the 1990s public concern about fake documents has focused mainly on nationality fraud. What has been often described by nationalist politicians and local medias as the 'theft of nationality', perpetrated by foreigners holding national identity cards, has taken front stage in the public space since the rise of the nationalist ideology of *ivoirité*. The creation of the ONI by Laurent Gbagbo's government in 2001 responded to this Ivorian moral panic, and presented the modernization of registration systems as a means to 'redesign and stabilize the body of the nation', as Gbagbo stated in a public speech in Figayo (Abidjan) broadcast by Ivorian television.

A year and a half after the ONI had been created, the headlines of the *Fraternité matin* newspaper reported how its newly established director, Colonel Koné Al Moustapha, had immediately discovered 'extensive frauds' concerning ID documents. Ivorian records of the *état civil* were full of irregular birth certificates following three main models: individuals having received a birth certificate without ever having been registered; individuals having been registered many times and, consequently, having many legal identities; different individuals possessing and using the same birth certificate. In the interview, Colonel Al Moustapha declared that this 'multiform fraud' was made possible by the poor state in which public service had been kept for years, lacking personnel and means. He pleaded for the public acceptance of the new mass identification promoted by the ONI as the best means to prevent frauds, ending with a discourse on state and identity that could easily have been taken from the works of Michel Foucault or James Scott. The state, he emphasized, 'needs to know its citizens and all the people living in its territory. [...] A modern state has to be able to identify people, and their identities must be fixed once for all. Changing identities make people inaccessible.'<sup>4</sup>

Although every Ivorian reader knew that the René Caillié arrangement was surely the most prevalent, no mention was made of it in the debate that took place in the Ivorian press during the following months. The 'theft of nationality' ('le bradage de la nationalité ivoirienne') was presented as the only apparent rationale in documentary fraud, and the narratives of 'strangers' usurping Ivorian citizenship was relaunched once more by the media, feeding

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in *Fraternité matin*, 11276, 22 June 2002, p. 2.

national(ist) moral panic. A good example of this was the circulation of rumours in December 2008, when the newspaper *Notre voie* reported that 6,000 *extraits de naissance* had been delivered to non-Ivorians.<sup>5</sup> Two months later, in an article in the *Fraternité matin* newspaper, the *sous-préfet* of the Anyama municipality Kouamé Kouadio Noël deplored the use of fraudulent birth certificates in an area where many residents have Malian or Burkinabè origins, connecting again false IDs with the 'bradage de la nationalité ivoirienne':

The maintenance of registers (by crooked agents) has encouraged fraud, which has been amplified and maintained by a network of agents from the sub-prefecture and the town hall, supported by external collaborators who are heavily equipped with inkers, civil status stamps, registers and printed documents with forged signatures from the current administrator and his predecessors.<sup>6</sup>

The *sous-préfet* revealed, moreover, that, following an official inquiry, it was discovered that 90 per cent of Anyama's registers had not been copied and dispatched to state archives, and that 200 recently checked birth certificates had been forged, having no correspondent registration. Although he did not state anything concerning the use of these forged documents, the message to the Ivorian public opinion was clear: that the aim of the forgery and frauds was to obtain certificates of nationality and, as a subsequent step, illicit electoral enrolment.

Even though public discourse on identification still revolves today around nationality and electoral matters, the civil servants we spoke to were ready to admit that one of the major questions concerning legal identity in Côte d'Ivoire is to be found in the widespread practice of lowering one's age. Although there are no statistics on this odd subject for obvious reasons, it is common knowledge that all families in the country, even the most illustrious, have some René Caillié within them—up to and including in the government, where there are ministers who, at some point in their lives, have had to 'cut (alter) their age'. Low birth registration rates and the sparse territorial coverage of civil registry services, as we have already noted, make it possible to obtain a civil status record after the event. Nonetheless, René Caillié arrangements have been kept within a 'cultural intimacy' (Herzfeld 1997) that has until recently avoided their explicit mention in the public domain.

<sup>5</sup> *Note voie*, 3,168, 20 November 2008.

<sup>6</sup> *Fraternité matin*, 27 January 2009, p. 4.

There is, however, a domain where the René Caillié topic is openly discussed. This is the domain of football—or, to be precise, the scandals about René Caillié professional football players that periodically crop up in the media. This well-known topic connects the popular image of football with the moral narratives where personal talent and effort are seen as radically divergent from the extrinsic, formal requisite of legal age. As we have been told, for someone aspiring to a professional career in football, who has spent many years working hard in the field of football and who feels he is in the right shape, it is difficult to give up the chance of recruitment into a European club just because he has reached a certain age. So football players, helped by their managers, try to get new *jugements supplétifs* through civil registrations under new names. This periodically gives rise to scandals. In 1995, the Abidjanese football club Africa Sport, winner of the national soccer championship, was disqualified when its striker Bamba Yacouba was discovered to have a double identity. He had initially been registered as Bamba Ladji. Needless to say, Bamba Ladji was older than Bamba Yacouba: the striker had reduced his age using a new, illegal, registration. After other minor cases had been reported over the following years, in 2008 another famous football player, Koffi Kra Marc, was caught in a similar situation, when an enquiry found out that he had two dates of birth. When he had started his career in the ASEC, his licence stated that he was born in 1983; but, when he was eventually recruited in the École de football Yéo Martial (Efym), he declared, using another document, that he was born in 1984. The Stade d'Abidjan football team immediately reported the fraud, but was unable to produce evidence and failed to convince the Ivorian football league. It was the Jeunesse Club d'Abidjan (JCA) that, thanks to a private enquiry, proved the fraud. As a consequence, the Ivorian league disqualified the Efym team, which had defeated JCA in a previous match, letting the latter play against Abidjan's Asec in the final match of the National Cup.

Similar cases have been reported in other African countries. In 2014 the famous Cameroonian striker Samuel Eto'o was suspected of having lowered his age by his trainer, José Mourinho, at Chelsea football club. In 2018, ten players of Benin's national Under 21 team were accused of having falsified their age with forged documents (the team being eventually debarred), and in 2019 the same problem occurred with the Under 21 Tanzanian team. What is interesting for our argument, however, is that, in Côte d'Ivoire, the social commentaries on these scandals only rarely depict this kind of fraud as a morally intolerable deed. Outside the newspapers, where the indignation of journalists and their claim for 'modernity' is displayed, the difference of 'only one year'

found in Koffi Kra Marc's papers is not wholeheartedly judged by many of our friends and interlocutors as a sound motivation for discarding the results of his team. On the contrary, it was the legal enquiries commissioned by opposing teams that were often depicted as a nearly immoral deed, as an unfair way of winning a match outside the football field.

It could be tempting to link the shared acceptance of the René Caillié arrangements with the general lack of relevance of biological (and thus *legal*) age in vernacular sociocultural systems of recognition and personhood. For many Ivorians living in rural areas, their date of birth is something that has no relevance in the representation of the self. This is, at least, what we had learned in previous research in rural areas, when we were collecting genealogies and making censuses of villages and households: very few people were aware of their year of birth. But, even though this interpretation would seem to match an apparent social ethos, it would, in fact, be misleading to present this as an accurate account, because villagers of rural areas, as well as city dwellers, are all very aware of the relevance of ID documents. It could be added, moreover, that circumventing the law certainly requires more ability in administrative matters than the normal, straightforward registration of a newborn.

### Age, Personhood, and Legal Identity

In Ivorian society as elsewhere in Africa, in rural and urban contexts alike, age is not just an individual trait defined by a date of birth. As is well known, it is instead related in complex ways to social and moral attributes defining status. Only seldom represented by the number of years passed since birth, age is usually merged within relational categories having hierarchical connotations. Vernacular lexicons of age and status do, of course, vary following different languages and cultural areas, as do the categories through which the life cycle is represented. The scientific literature on this matter is so vast that trying to recall it here would be out of place. Nonetheless, it is quite sound to observe that, in many African societies, the moment of birth is important insofar as it plays a role in ordering and shaping relations of seniority. Being born before or after a brother, a sister, a cousin, or a member of one's community—that is, being older or younger than someone—has consequences in terms of authority and dependence. It places the individual within a hierarchical order. Being the older brother, being the elder of a group of friends or the elder of a household, means being in a position of (at least potential) authority. In *nouchi*, the Abidjan's urban pidgin, this particular status is designated with the malinké term

*koro*. Now, if the position of the elder is primarily seen as a status defined by specific social features—such as being in a position of exerting authority over dependants/youths and the means of redistributing resources—it follows that being an ‘elder’ is not just, nor primarily, a matter of years. Seniority depends, in fact, on the status reached by the person in what we will here call his/her ‘social career’: a progression towards eldership, where age and advancement in status should ideally coincide, but where advancement in status is shown to have a predominant role in defining personhood (Balandier 1974; Meillassoux 1975; Abélès and Collard 1985; Spencer 1985; Attias-Donfut 1994; Bekombo 1994). A young man can become an ‘elder’ after an appointment, after a succession to ‘traditional’ office, after having become a father, or after having obtained wealth; an old person who did not have children and who did not succeed in obtaining status or wealth is just an old man who, since he cannot be acknowledged as an elder, is not fully included within the category of ‘real’ old men.

Following these logics, the more social relations are removed from kinship, family, or community, the more the connection between eldership and status is built independently from what we define as ‘legal age’. This happens, for instance, with the anteriority of one’s presence in a working activity. Moreover, owing to the same principle, one can be an elder in a social space and a youth in another, independently from age. A good example of this can be found in Eliane de Latour’s ethnography (2001) of Abidjan’s criminal youths. In their gangs, someone can be the *bon petit* (‘good son’) of a boss and address him as *vieux père* (‘old father’), and at the same time be the *vieux père* of a new (sub)gang, with his own *bon petits*, irrespective of individual age.

Social time takes over abstract time, social age takes over individual age. But, on the other side, as we have said above, it is also true that individual age—defined by the years passed since birth—should ideally progress together with status. Some concordance between social and individual age is expected, and this expectation can give rise to painful contradictions, as happens with old people who have not been able to become ‘real’ (that is, social) elders during their life course. Anthropological scholarship has shown how African representations of the person, despite differences owing to the different socio-cultural backgrounds, seem to converge in representing the backgrounds in processual terms (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012)—that is, as something that should be kept in a constant condition of ‘social becoming’ (Vigh 2010). Personhood is generally represented in the frame of a progression leading the subject to ‘the conquering of eldership’ (Meillassoux 1994).



In a context where age is considered to be a moral attribute dependent on social status, congruence between individual time and social time has to be kept at all costs. Where progression towards eldership is at risk, its restoration becomes necessary. Now, since the social time of eldership has a shared, intersubjective, public dimension, it cannot be adjusted. The individual 'legal' age, instead, being just a written record based on abstract, immaterial, time, has no (social) reality of its own and can be adjusted to re-establish congruence when needed. In other terms, if social seniority is to be reached by social means in social time (that is, in a progression that is defined by the changings of status), individual legal age becomes a danger, as it progresses in an abstract time that is not socially determined nor subjectively controlled. Lowering it by paper-based procedures restores the possibility of building a congruence that participates in the construction of personhood. It avoids the entrance in an 'existential moratorium' (Vigh 2010) where progress towards eldership would be disrupted by extrinsic, bureaucratic rules. Everybody knows, in Côte d'Ivoire, that many important *fonctionnaires*—businessmen, ministers, high officials, and so on—'wouldn't be where they are' had they respected the age limits set by the administrative-legal system for instruction, recruitment, and so on. Their *réussite* after a 'paper rebirth' authorizes the morality of the René Caillié practices. If we add to the picture the malfunctioning of institutions and the braking it causes to careers—as, for instance, the long strikes in schools causing the *années blanches*—it is easy to see how individual legal age stands in contrast to that of 'conquering of eldership', which is crucial for the construction of the person.

To conclude on this point, the concept of a moral economy of identification with which we started this section on the René Caillié arrangements can be considered as a heuristic instrument that has helped us to address this shared management of identities 'from below' and not just in terms of the illegal overturns it imposes on the logics of registration. It brings to light a popular mode of appropriation that hybridizes legal construction of identities with the 'moral sentiments, values, norms and duties' (Fassin 2009: 1257) that stem from Ivorian civil society. This appropriation is made through 'practical arrangements' such as the René Caillié, re-establishing congruence between individual life cycle and the moral—hence, social—implications of ageing, but providing at the same time inclusion within citizenship and adherence to the state apparatus of registration.

Finally, it can be said that this moral economy of identity, although being conceptually opposed to legal and bureaucratic rationality of identification, is



constitutively related to it. Historical studies on the *état civil* in French West Africa have brought to light that resorting to *jugements supplétifs* in order to lower age has been recurrent and widespread since late colonialism. Frederick Cooper (2012: 401) has pointed out how in the mid-1950s, when the colonial government started to extend registration of the African populations that had previously been excluded from the gaze of the state, it became progressively clear to state officials 'that Africans were using the *état civil* in their own way, when they wanted it, for what they wanted'. It is easy to understand that, for the colonized, segregated into the *état civil indigène* and having a citizenship of subaltern status without real political rights, 'registration of a birth for the sake of inscribing an official identity on the child was not the case in point, but when parents wanted the child to go to school, then an alternative road to inscription had to be taken' (Cooper 2012: 401). Hence, declarations *post facto* and *jugements supplétifs* rapidly became an important legal instrument in the hands of the natives in order for them to claim their rights of access to instruction opportunities and services offered by the state—for instance, family allowances—in the post-war decade. Jérôme Konan Kouakou, in his work on the Ivorian *état civil*, has recalled how, in AOF between 1954 and 1957, the declarations of birth *post facto* requiring a *jugement supplétif* largely exceeded regular declaration, and that in 1958 and 1959 they more than doubled the totality of the *actes d'état civil* (that is, including marriages and deaths). As Louise Barré (2018: 31) has convincingly shown in her research on registration in late colonial Côte d'Ivoire, the use of *jugements supplétifs* shows 'the importance of personal procedures aimed at administrative inclusion when, in the colonial period, the majority of residents were excluded from it'. Following Barré, this way of obtaining 'papers' shows how local arrangements *idem* with late colonial civil law were undertaken by the colonized in order to have rights. In the late 1950s, in particular, when instruction was extended, civil servants and administrators themselves did sometimes 'arrange' the ages of an entire class of children in order to admit them to primary school (Barré 2018: 28).

### A General Amnesty for all 'René Cailliés'!

From this historical perspective, it is remarkable how in November 2018 President Ouattara and his government, aware of the diffusion and of the strength of the René Caillié arrangements and other illegal practices concerning identity,

passed two new laws, aimed at 'modernizing the *état civil*'. One of the laws established a 'special procedure for the restoration of identity' that 'grants amnesty to persons born in Côte d'Ivoire who either use birth certificates not registered in the civil registry services, or registered persons using the birth certificate of someone else'.<sup>7</sup>

Although it passed largely unremarked in the national and international press, this astonishing legal proposal is far from insignificant. Behind the rhetoric of rights, good governance and development endorsed by the state here, it is in fact a legalization of the 'proper fakes' produced by the *margouillats*, and an amnesty for all the 'René Cailliés', the administrative 'born again' who at one time or another in their lives have cheated on their civil records. The official argument is worth stating here, as it so aptly illustrates the subject of this book. In its explanatory statement, the bill establishing the special procedure is motivated not only by the high number of unregistered persons and the high number of destroyed civil status records, but also by 'a high rate of irregular birth registrations', 'a high rate of people holding false birth certificates', and 'a high rate of fraudulent use of birth certificates'.<sup>8</sup> The bill, aiming explicitly at 'encouraging the denunciation of forgery and the use of forged documents with respect to birth records, for the purpose of annulment and establishment of lawful records (Articles 3, 10 to 13 of the bill)', states, in Article 11:

Any person born in Côte d'Ivoire, who uses a birth certificate other than his or hers or uses a false birth certificate, and thus enjoys status in accordance with that other birth certificate, may appeal to the President of the court or the judge delegated by him to be given back his true identity.<sup>9</sup>

Articles 14 and 15 state:

The effects of the restoration decision extend to diplomas and other administrative documents obtained by the applicant [...] Identity restoration only has an effect in the future, without the rights, obligations and situations previously acquired or contracted being called into question.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> République de Côte d'Ivoire, 'Exposé des motifs du Projet de Loi instituant une procédure spéciale de déclaration de naissance, de rétablissement d'identité et de transcription d'acte de naissance' (October 2018), 2.

<sup>8</sup> République de Côte d'Ivoire, 'Exposé des motifs', 2.

<sup>9</sup> République de Côte d'Ivoire, 'Exposé des motifs', 3.

<sup>10</sup> République de Côte d'Ivoire, 'Exposé des motifs', 3.

What was proposed was thus, in other words, a general amnesty concerning most Ivorian variations on identity frauds. 'Jeez,' cried the very popular satirical newspaper *Gbich*, 'with so many "René Cailliés" in the country, this law will suit tons of people, right! Even I'm into it too.'<sup>11</sup> As matter of fact, if the bill on a special procedure for amnesty for civil-status crimes was passed so quickly and almost without debate in the National Assembly, it is indeed because so many people, up to the highest levels of government, were 'into it too'. For obvious reasons, there are no statistics on this taboo subject, but it is common knowledge that all families in the country, even the most illustrious, have 'René Cailliés' within them. Beyond these personal interests, the amnesty decision was in fact guided by a pragmatic concern. For the identification reforms to succeed, it was necessary to wipe the civil-status slate clean and for everyone to have 'their true identity restored'.

Will this be enough to regularize all 'the undocumented, those with fake names, fake ages, fake mothers, and fake fathers'?<sup>12</sup> Soon after the bill, parliamentarians from the ruling party tried to convince the inhabitants of their constituencies to take advantage of this amnesty law. One such example is the MP Maurice Kakou Guikahué, touring his Gagnoa constituency in February 2019:

We don't want to see any more children without birth certificates or affidavits in our towns and villages [...] Because if you are born and you have no birth affidavit you might as well be a sheep in the village, you are unknown. There are people who are 50, 60, 80 years old, and they have no affidavit. That's not normal. There are also people who have lowered their age, because they want to go to school. Now we've passed a procedure where you can say your real age and we'll give you the affidavit for free. Or maybe you wanted to go to school, and you took your brother's affidavit, but that's not your real name. Now anyone who wants to have their real name or real age is allowed to. We're going to handle this procedure. All those who, for whatever reason, have had incorrect ages or names can now have their papers made out with their real names and ages. Whatever your situation, if you want to regularize it, you can [...] Don't be afraid. Introduce yourself to the sub-prefect and explain your

<sup>11</sup> *Gbich*, 12 April 2018, <https://www.gbich.com/niouuuzzz/tchiee-avec-les-beaucoup-beaucoup-de-rene-caille-dans-pays-la-cette-loi-la-va-arranger-des-paquets-de-personnes-deh-meme-moi-je-suis-dedans-aussi/> (accessed 6 May 2019).

<sup>12</sup> 'Sans papiers, faux noms, faux âges, fausses mères, faux pères ... Une amnistie signée pour tout régulariser', *Le Nouveau Réveil*, 5101, Thursday, 21 February 2019, p. 2.

case. He will fix it. To all those who think they will be put in prison because they cheated, I say no, everyone has been amnestied [...]'<sup>13</sup>

Guikahué added:

I want to tell you that this matter of affidavits is not the same as an identity card. We have to make affidavits for everyone, even foreigners. There's no point talking endlessly about this or that person being Burkinabè, Malian, Guinean, etc. We have to make affidavits for everyone, regardless of their nationality. On the new affidavit, we will put the name of the father, the mother and their nationality. So, when making out an identity card, in view of the affidavit, we'll issue a national identity card to Ivorians and a residency card to non-Ivorians. So there's no need to get into an argument about it.<sup>14</sup>

Laurent Gbagbo had dreamt of redesigning the civil registry. It was the core of his project of 'national refoundation', which was striving to go beyond the cosy arrangements of Houphouëtism and its documentary informality. Alasane Ouattara tried to achieve it, but by legalizing that informality, negotiating it explicitly and directly with the bearers of the national moral economy of identification.

<sup>13</sup> 'Gagnoa: Le Député Guikahué explique les lois sur l'état civil et la nouvelle procédure', *Le Nouveau Réveil*, 5101, Thursday, 21 February 2019, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> 'Gagnoa: Le Député Guikahué explique', 2.