

# ID Wars in Côte d'Ivoire

*A Political Ethnography of Identification  
and Citizenship*

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## Moral Credit Cards

A few months after the end of the war, we were back in the Williamsville neighbourhood of Adjamé, a commune of Abidjan that had seen violent fighting. During the years of crisis, the Young Patriots had set up an agora there, not far from the university campus, which was tightly controlled by the Fesci and pro-Gbagbo militias. The decor had changed radically. The entrance to the campus was now flanked by a surprising sign for a place dedicated to students: that of the ‘*Confrérie traditionnelle des dozos de Côte d’Ivoire. Bureau: Williamsville-Adjamé*’, painted in the three national colours (Figure 7.1). Present in many West African countries, the secret society of hunters, which originated with the founding of the Mandé empire in the thirteenth century, has long been present in Côte d’Ivoire (Hellweg 2011). Renowned for their invincibility, acquired after a long initiation, trained in therapeutic knowledge, and considered to be the ‘masters of the bush’, the *dozos* have historically been invested with a function of protecting villages and local communities (Cissé 1994; Haggerberg 2004; Kedzierska-Manzon 2014). At the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, they were increasingly mobilized to deal with growing insecurity, including in the towns, and became fully involved in the political confrontations of the *Ivoirité* period and the military transition. Repressed by the Gbagbo regime, many of them ended up joining the Forces nouvelles (FN) rebellion in 2002 to fight alongside it until the victory of the FN and Alassane Ouattara in 2011.

On this day in April 2012 in the ‘Willi cité U’, the *dozos* are the new masters of the place. A few wary guards accompany us to their leader, who has taken up residence in the Fesci office itself, whose acronym and logo are still on the door. What better symbol of the revenge of the victors? One militia had thus driven out the other in what appeared to be a reversal of hegemony, or even a social revolution in the neighbourhood. Sekongo Seydou, the local *dozo* chief who greets us is dressed in ‘civilian’ clothes, wearing a national football team jersey. His traditional hunting cap and outfit hang behind him, along with his rifle and gri-gri. On the walls, in an ultra kitsch decor, photos of the brotherhood in full regalia stand next to posters of Céline Dion and François Hollande on the

front cover of *Paris-Match* magazine. In one corner, an old *dozoba*<sup>1</sup> performs his incantations and approves our exchanges with loud interjections in Dyula. After the ritual visit to the fetish, installed in a little room next door, the *dozo* chief introduces himself to us, displaying his papers:

My name is Sekongo Seydou. I am the president of the Willi *dozos* in Adjamé. I've been registered since 1998, when Gueï was in power. The *dozoya* is like military service. [...] A *dozo* is not a policeman, a soldier or a gendarme. They don't have the right to put anyone in prison [...] We do surveillance at night because of the bandits. [...] But the *dozoya* is in 15 African countries. We have a card. With this card, you can go to any of these countries. [He shows us his brotherhood cards.] [...] (Question: who made this card?) It's Hamed Bakayoko.<sup>2</sup> He's the godfather of this card. [...] Before 1998, Balla Keita was the godfather. I had a Balla card, but because of the crisis, I tore it up. [...] As soon as you're initiated, they give you the card, because you're on patrol at night. And without the card, you can't patrol. Because if you come across the FRCI, the police or the gendarmerie, they might ask you who you are! But when you show them your card, they know who you are. (Sékongo Seydou, Williamsville, Abidjan, April 2012)

**'If you have a card, we'll know straight away if you're  
a *dozo* or not'**

That a little chief of a brotherhood of 'traditional' hunters, founded on the principle of charismatic legitimacy, should spontaneously present himself to us from the angle of bureaucratic legitimacy—that of a registered identity, administratively acknowledged and even sponsored by the Minister of the Interior—was already singular. It was surprising that, at the start of our discussion, he should mention the census and the role of *dozo* cards in the recognition of a neo-traditional identity as a hunter–militiaman. But our

<sup>1</sup> In the brotherhoods of *dozo* hunters found throughout the Mandingo region of West Africa (Kedzierska-Manzon 2014), the term *dozoba* literally refers to the 'great hunters', the 'elders', while the initiation master is the *karamogo*. However, in hunters' associations in Côte d'Ivoire, the term *dozoba* is commonly used to designate an old hunter who is in charge of initiating the youngsters who is also the possessor of knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> Interior Minister at the time, later Defence Minister and Prime Minister, who died in 2021. It should be noted that, two years later, during subsequent investigations, our *dozo* interlocutors insisted on hiding the name of their 'godfather' when they showed us their cards, without us knowing whether this was due to an injunction from the minister or a falling-out with him.

astonishment was not over. Continuing his presentation of the activities of his group in the neighbourhood, the *dozo* chief opened his archives and notebooks to us. In neatly-kept registers were a succession of 'procès-verbaux' covering all sorts of cases: a 'report of a thief' who had stolen a bottle of gas and a DVD, recovered by the *dozos*; an 'accusation of embezzlement' of a bottle of medicine; a 'copin [*sic*]-copine' affair of domestic violence; official summonses to the police station; and even a letter of apology from a *dozo* who had broken the code of the brotherhood (Figures 7.2 and 7.3). The chief hunter kept a register of crimes in the area, either jointly with the police or in their place. In another file, there were 'Information and Identification Forms' for hunters who were members of the Fédération nationale des confréries de *dozos* de Côte d'Ivoire, with the double logo of Fenacodoci and the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire (Figure 7.4) These forms included the hunter's national identity card, identity certificate, driving licence, or birth certificate number (four boxes are provided for this purpose), place of birth and place of residence, level of education, 'previous profession' and 'desired profession' (with three predefined boxes to fill in the latter—and no doubt to prepare for Disarmament–Demobilization–Reintegration (DDR); 'security agent', 'agro-pastoral sector', and 'naturotherapist'). In addition to the hunter's parents' names, there were also the contact details of a 'tutor' (usually the *dozoba* who had initiated him). In another file, slips of 'Registration Certificates' drawn up during a 'Census of *dozos* in the northern regions of Côte d'Ivoire', with the triple letterhead of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, the Ministry of the Interior, and the National Statistics Institute (Figure 7.5). These certificates included information on the hunter's nationality and possession of weapons, as well as the region, department, sub-prefecture, commune, neighbourhood, camp, and 'serial number', in descending order. Finally, there were bundles of 'Mission Orders' and 'Permission to Travel', in the three national colours, under the letterhead of the Ministry of National Defence and the 'SMIR Dozo Adjamé Company', signed by President Sékongo Seydou and the *dozoba* of the Williamsville group (or the 'security chiefs'), specifying the places, dates, and number of days of the mission, as well as the 'number of kalache' (*sic*) (Figure 7.6). Similar 'Roadmaps' were later found at the headquarters of Fenacodoci, endorsed by its president Dosso Sory, enjoining the bearer to 'present himself and place himself at the service of the administrative (including locally elected), religious and customary authorities for the promotion of peace and social reconciliation' (ethnographic observations, Abobo, January 2018).

Whether these ‘official’ documents have actually been endorsed by the authorities, and the *dozo* cards sponsored by Interior Minister Hamed Bakayoko, or whether they are fakes, is of little importance. By mimicking the prerogatives of the state and its administrative aesthetics, they bear witness to an advanced process of bureaucratization of the brotherhood, to a concern to control its members, whose mobility is monitored by paper, and to an overall will of identification that is part of both a particular context, that of the end of the conflict, and a wider horizon, that of a developmentalist conception of modernity, as expressed by Dosso Sory, President of Fenacodo-ci:

With the modernization of the world, we are obliged to take on executive directors [...] You need an organization to evolve. [...] You need an organization to evolve [...] Organization is in demand. [...] So we need to get organized and we also need passports so that when you go into a corner, people know you’re a *dozo*. [...] The *dozos* of Côte d’Ivoire cannot remain on the sidelines of Côte d’Ivoire’s emergence by 2020. So we have to get organized! [...] The modern world calls on everyone not to remain on the sidelines. A job well done can still be done. Even the day I’m not here, whoever is at the head of this organization can see who is a *dozo* and who isn’t. (Dosso Sory, interview, Fenacodo-ci headquarters, Abobo, Abidjan, February 2017)

In the immediate post-war period, the leaders of the brotherhood were encouraged by the authorities—in particular by the Minister of the Interior—to sort out their ranks to establish ‘who is a *dozo* and who is not’. The hunters, auxiliaries to the victorious rebellion, had become unwelcome allies for the new regime in its quest for respectability. Their criminal excesses were condemned by human-rights organizations and by the UN, which published a ‘Report on Human Rights Abuses Committed by Dozos in the Republic of Côte d’Ivoire.’<sup>3</sup> The country’s international image was at stake. It was necessary to act, or to give the impression of doing so. Thus, in November 2012, the *dozos* were brought together by the Minister of the Interior and Zacharia Koné, former com’ zone of Séguéla, head of the military police, who told them:

A *dozo* is not a policeman, a gendarme or a judge. Anyone who does something wrong will go to prison ... The war is over [...] We’re putting everything back in order. During the war, the *dozos* made a contribution to the liberation

<sup>3</sup> ‘Report on Human Rights Abuses Committed by Dozos in the Republic of Côte d’Ivoire’, ONUCI-OHCHR, June 2013.

of the country ... [...] The state is not ashamed to recognize this, to accept it and to say thank you. (Hamed Bakayoko, quoted by Koné 2013: 1)

But the government insisted, 'The *dozos* must return to their original mission' (quoted by Koné 2013: 1).

This was not the first time in Côte d'Ivoire's history that the government has tried to put the *dozos* 'in their place' by encouraging them to organize and identify themselves. Already in the 1990s,<sup>4</sup> hunters had begun to form associations, based on the Malian model of the Benkadi movement, which was to become one of the main hunters' organizations in Côte d'Ivoire (Hellweg 2004). The Ivorian version of Benkadi issued the first *dozo* cards to members who had paid their dues (Figures 7.7, 7.8, and 7.9). These were the beginnings of hunter self-registration (Figures 7.10 and 7.11). 'Hunters joined in large numbers in part because possessing a Binkadi card was like having a gun permit,' observes Basset (2003: 9). These cards were a way for them to compensate for the restrictions that were beginning to weigh on hunting and the carrying of weapons. Other structures emerged at this time, including the NGO Afrique Environnement run by Inza Fanny, a diplomat close to the PDCI, which was the only one to obtain government approval. The process of bureaucratization of the brotherhood had begun, 'adopting a grammar common to NGOs and the state' (Hellweg 2017: 46).

This process continued with the encouragement of the Bédié government, which used the *dozos* but feared losing control of them—to Ouattara in particular. In the second half of the 1990s, the regime embarked on a policy of increasingly strict confinement of hunters, suspecting them of welcoming into their ranks many foreigners who were 'false *dozos*', donning the traditional uniform to disguise their criminal activities (Hellweg 2004: 9). This was the height of the *Ivoirité* boom, and the argument of the 'real/fake' *dozo* struck a chord with the *Ivoiritaire* theory of the 'real and fake Ivorian'. Sorting the wheat from the chaff was to become the leitmotif of all subsequent attempts to structure the brotherhood, both 'from above' and 'from below'.

To sort them out, the Bédié government attempted to take a census of the *dozos* and identify them individually. This first census of hunters was conducted by the Institut national de la statistique (INS, or National Statistics

<sup>4</sup> This history of the 1990s has been well documented by Thomas Basset (2003, 2004, 2005); by Joseph Hellweg (2004, 2011, the 'white *dozo*' himself initiated in the Odienné region); and, more recently, by Fahiraman Rodrigue Koné (2018). Our surveys, carried out since 2010 in Abidjan among the *dozos* victorious in the conflict, confirm the political genealogy established by these authors.

Institute) between September and October 1998 (Basset 2004: 43). This is evidenced by the 'Census Form', signed by the INS, displayed by the Williamsville *dozo* chief during our first meeting, mentioned above. Once registered, the *dozos* are given a receipt, with a number, indicating their participation in the process—just as was the case, after the war, during the DDR operations. The receipt authorizes them to carry arms in the north, and they must carry it with them at all times, on pain of arrest. However, the administrative registration of hunters met with resistance owing to the very nature of the brotherhood, which resists any centralized organization. As the head of a hunters' organization in Yamoussoukro admitted: 'It didn't resonate with the elders. Because, quite simply, the object [the card or receipt] conflicted with their activities as *dozos*' (interview, Abidjan, April 2012). These initial attempts to identify and confine hunters, led by Balla Keïta, an adviser to the President of the Republic and himself an initiate, were largely unsuccessful. But the direct influence of *Ivoirité* can be seen here, which plunged the *dozos*, like a large proportion of other citizens from the north, into an era of suspicion about their identity. After violent clashes with the Gbagbo regime, this led them to engage in the war of 'who is who' (Marshall-Fratani 2006).

Many hunters joined the rebellion in 2002,<sup>5</sup> justifying their military commitment as 'an act of political militancy' and as needed 'to defend the northern community' with which the brotherhood is associated (Koné 2018: 24). In Bouaké, a special *dozo* unit, the *Guerriers de la Lumière* ('Warriors of Light'), was even set up under the command of Bamba Mamoudou, a renowned *dozo* chief, head of the powerful Benkadi movement. *Dozo* recruitment then continued, in a different, more militarized form, with identification documents issued jointly by the FN and Bamba Dozo. During these years of conflict, there was a mimetic process of militarization–bureaucratization of the *dozos* involved in the rebellion, and of '*dozisation*' of the rebel forces (Banégas 2012; Koné 2013).

Following Alassane Ouattara's victory in 2011, the new regime was faced with the delicate task of regaining control of these auxiliary forces, which

<sup>5</sup> Although the exact number of *dozos* is still uncertain, their presence has been known since the very beginning of the insurrection. International Crisis Group estimated that around a thousand *dozos* joined the rebellion from the outset, half of them from neighbouring countries, including Mali (Crisis Group 2003). A report by GRIP (Brussels) put the number at 1,500 (Gramizzi 2003), while Agence France Presse (AFP, 2 October 2002) put it at 800. However, as Marie Miran (2015: 83) points out, 'it would be extremely simplistic and, worse still, misleading to simply equate rebellion with the *dozo* brotherhood'. In some localities, such as Mankono, *dozos* have even mobilized to block the advance of rebel forces (Hellweg 2004: 20).



had been criminalized during all these years of war impunity. In order to 're-sectorize' the social space (Dobry 1986), the government once again encouraged the *dozos* to register and organize themselves, in a clear move towards 'legibility' and surveillance. But the will of 'being seen by the state'—reversing Scott's formula (1998)—is not enough to account for the bureaucratization of the brotherhood that we were able to observe in the archives of the *dozos* of the Williamsville university campus or in our subsequent surveys. The interviews and observations we conducted with the three major hunters' organizations (Fenacodo-ci, Codoz-ci, and Benkadi) indicate that the hunters were not simply subjected to an injunction from the state to be counted and identified so that 'everyone returns to their place'. The initiative has also come 'from below', from *dozo* chiefs who, in the context of tense internal competition within the brotherhood, and powerful patronage relationships with the regime's *big men*, have taken upon themselves and for themselves the idea of taking a census of their members, identifying them in due form and recording them in paper registers or electronic databases.

### **The Community Panopticon, or the Paradoxical Reinvention of Colonial Customary Law**

What is striking, in fact, is the extent to which these neo-traditional hunters, who belong to a magico-religious world of hunting that is a priori resistant to the bureaucratic rationality of the state, nonetheless share its imagination, practices, and values. Other observers had already noted this paradox: 'The *dozo* has become the shadow of (the) state, but not its opposite, its alter-ego or its adversary,' wrote Hellweg; 'the *dozo* is rather made in the image of the state, almost inseparable from it.' For him, this homothety 'testifies to a state whose legality is as dubious or ambiguous as that of the *dozos* themselves' (Hellweg 2012: 164–5). On the contrary, our research shows that it is precisely bureaucratic 'legality'—and even legal identities—that the *dozos* are demanding in the post-war context, in order to renegotiate their place in the city and have their 'war debt' recognized. They even suggest that the state mimicry of identification cannot be reduced to its tactical or strategic dimension: it testifies to an incorporation of the bureaucratic ethos and the force of the state imagination in actors who are theoretically far removed from it.

Admittedly, the initiatives taken by the *dozos* to self-identify had obvious instrumental dimensions. Counting themselves at the end of the conflict was



a way for them to make themselves known and recognized by the new regime, which owed them so much, as the Minister of the Interior confessed in his speech, quoted above. It was a way of claiming what was owed to them and identifying the beneficiaries of a war debt incurred during the rebellion, right up to the final victory in Abidjan in April 2011. Sékongo Seydou, the *dozo* chief of the Williamsville university campus, admitted as much:

Since the end of the crisis, we have had to reward the *dozos* who have had problems. We were asked to draw up information and identification forms for the *dozos*. That's why we drew up this form. The Ministry of the Interior requested it. (Sékongo Seydou, interview, Abidjan, April 2012)

The census technique was also an important resource in the rivalry between the various brotherhoods (Benkadi, Fenacodo-ci, and Codoz-ci in particular), engaged in tense competition to arrogate to themselves the 'monopoly' of representation of hunters—linked to the internal factional rivalries within the Ouattarist regime, each organization being discreetly patronized by big men from the ruling politico-military coalition (Figures 7.12 and 7.13). In this immediate post-war context, identifying and counting oneself was a lever for gaining a place in post-conflict society and the political economy of 'reconciliation'. But there was more to it than that. The logic of sorting out 'real' and 'fake' *dozos* was clearly endorsed by the leaders of the brotherhoods conducting these bureaucratic operations to identify their members. They were anxious to distinguish themselves from the crimes committed and to avoid possible prosecution:

All the *dozos* got together so that we know who is a *dozo* in Bouaké and who is a *dozo* in Séguéla, so that people don't use *dozo* clothing to sully the name of this guild. [...] The *dozos* can't hide from the government. We are their parents, their parents-in-law. If they need something, they can say: 'Oh Dad, my little brother did this. Can you see that? I can tell if it's *dozo*, and if it's in Korhogo, I can say here are the Korhogo *dozos*. [...] So we can justify ourselves, whether it's the Ivorian government, the criminal court or any human rights organization.' (Dosso Sory, president of Fenacodo-ci, interview, Abobo, Abidjan, January 2017)

After the crisis, everyone was making a mess of things. You hear around here: 'we've seen road blockers, we've seen them dressed as *dozos*.' And so on. Everyone did what they wanted. It was he [Bamba Dozo] who decided that we

had to get organized and then try to identify the people, in order to find out who is who [...] Know who is who, because [...] the nonsense that is going on, is it really the *dozos*? [...] The war is now over: we must remain what we are as *dozo* [...] The *dozo* must not be found in the nonsense, the *dozo* must not be just anybody. (Harouna Fofana, Secretary General of Benkadi, interview, Yopougon, January 2020)

Over and above these tactical and political considerations, the *dozos*' self-identification also carried with it a moral connotation of selection between 'good' and 'bad' elements, which resonated with the Ivoirité controversies over civic inclusion and the moral boundaries of the national community (a surprising stance considering the transnational nature of the brotherhood). 'We seek to remove the false among us to put the good and progress [...] We want to eliminate all those who proclaim themselves false *dozos* to spoil the name of the brotherhood,' argued Dosso Sory (interview, Fenacodo-ci headquarters, Abobo, Abidjan, January 2017), while his deputy specified:

As the boss said, there are a lot [of *dozos*], a lot of them don't have papers! But they're dangerous people! So we're fighting against that. If you're a *dozo*, you have to go and get papers [...] Because someone who is known, who has a document [an identity card] can't just go and do anything! (Dosso Sory's deputy, interview, Fenacodo-ci headquarters, Abobo, Abidjan, January 2017)

In the vast post-war process of reorganizing identities, the hunters' brotherhoods undertook to guarantee the identity and good character of their members, by combining the *dozoya* code of honour with the principles of legal identification. The moral credentials attached to the *dozo* card are doubly guaranteed, in fact, by the association structure, on the one hand, and by the testimony of the *dozoba*, on the other. To certify the identity of 'real' *dozos*, each organization demands that their identity be certified by the wise man who initiated them, even requiring the name, fingerprints, and signature of their *dozoba* master on each hunter's identification card (Figure 7.14). Individual identity is thus socialized and understood in a relationship of begetting, debt, and dependence.

Since 2006, we decided to draw up a census form to find out who your *dozoba* is. If you are a *dozo*, who made you a *dozo*? Who made you a *dozo*? [...] If

there's a *dozoba* who's agreed to make you a *dozo*, we take his fingerprints. The person who agreed to be a *dozo* also puts his fingerprints. We put your village, where you were born, your origins, and we put it into a software program that is held by the government and that the whole world can access. (Dosso Sory, interview, Abobo, Abidjan, January 2018)

This logic of testimony and social certification of legal identities is not insignificant for the general argument of this book. It refers to a 'practical sense' of identification that is quite widely shared, considering that within each community 'we know each other'—this principle of local inter-knowledge being metonymically extended to the national community, according to the autochthonist principle that still influences ordinary definitions of citizenship. In their efforts to self-recognize, the *dozos* thus highlight the strength of a regime of identity veridiction that combines attestation of the subject and community certification, as part of a moral economy of recognition marked by the strength of relations of debt, patronage, and dependence.

'Everyone needs to get organized [said Dosso Sory]. The Muslims, the Christians, the *dozos* know each other, the fighters know each other, the *vodunon* know each other. All these people will form a block. Everyone needs to know each other. So don't prevent others from getting to know each other. I don't know if there's anything wrong with making yourself known! Getting known is very important in a country. [...] People say that everyone knows each other through the ONI, but I say no. [...] Because not all those who joined the ONI are *dozo*; when you identify yourself with the ONI, some are Muslims, others are Christians and others are not. If there's a Muslim problem, you can't go to ONI and say it's a Muslim. It's through our organizations that we can know it's a Muslim problem. That's the truth [...] If I'm organized at home and you need me, you'll take my family. But if I'm not organized, you'll come and ask me, and I'll say that I don't know all my children. [...] But if I'm organized, you know everything and that's very important. When you read Muslim books, you see that each people have had its prophet. Prophet Moses, prophet Mohamed. So let each group organize itself so that we can get to know them. (Dosso Sory, interview, Abobo, Abidjan, January 2018)

This quotation can obviously be read as the self-serving plea of a *dozo* chief seeking official recognition. But it also points to the importance of the principle of collective veridiction of individual identities, which is even projected

here as an extreme form of community panopticon. In his reflections on the biometric state in South Africa, Keith Breckenridge (2014) considered, against the Foucauldian hypothesis, that the development of new identification technologies did not reflect an extension of the states' 'Will to Know', but, on the contrary, enshrined a 'Will *not* to Know'. Throughout the colonial period, the state operated according to the principle of 'decentralized despotism' (Mamdani 1996), delegated to local communities, including in the French direct rule model. What a paradox, then, to see Ivorian society gripped by a biometric logic that aims to centralize identities, but that in reality operates on the basis of an identification governmentality outsourced to third parties—be they *dozos*, community, village or neighbourhood chiefs, or local notables called to testify, for example, during mobile courts hearing or electoral enrolment. It is not the least irony of history that the emerging biometric reforms are leading to a reinvention of the *Coutumier colonial* (customary colonial law based upon local traditional authorities).



Figure 7.1 Sign of a *dozo* brotherhood in front of Williamsville university residence, Abidjan, October 2011. (© Richard Banégas)

samedi 22-10-2011  
 rapport d'un voleur  
 Il était environ 14h30 mn que  
 quelqu'un est venu nous dire  
 qu'il y a un voleur qui est resté  
 dans la maison pour attendre  
 la sortie de eux et un couplet  
 est venu à nous nous  
 avons rendu sur le lieu  
 et à vu. Dès que on l'a vu  
 il a commencé à tirer sur  
 nous et on nous a pris  
 repasser et il a fait  
 9 fois quelque seconde  
 nous rendus compte y a  
 eu un vol de plus de 50  
 de mille. Les matériaux volés  
 ont été  
 Fait à Abidjan le 26  
 26-11-2011

Figure 7.2 'Report of a thief', in a *dozo* register, Williamsville, Abidjan, October 2011. (© Richard Banégas)

samedi 12-10-2011  
 Register Copie d'argent  
 Au soir 50000 est resté dans  
 un sac qui avait été donné par  
 quelqu'un de la maison de mes chers  
 mais il a été volé dans les  
 alentours que j'ai perdu mes  
 papiers et mon argent, mon  
 portefeuille et mes bijoux et mes  
 vêtements.

Présent	De l'argent	En argent
	Quatre mille	3 000 000
	<del>et</del>	est.
	Quatre mille	46 58 91
	Yousouf	
	tel. 02 27 41 33	46 58 91 01
	03 27 41 33	

Ban 2

Figure 7.3 'Boyfriend-girlfriend affair', in a *dozo* register, Williamsville, Abidjan, October 2011. (© Richard Banégas)

**FENAGODOO**

Fédération Nationale des Associations de chasseurs de Côte d'Ivoire  
Union Nationale des Dozo

REPUBLIQUE DE CÔTE D'IVOIRE  
Union Nationale Dozo

**FORMULAIRE D'INFORMATION ET D'IDENTIFICATION DES DOZO**

Nom .....

Prénoms .....

Date de naissance: 01.01.1982

Lieu de naissance: BOUNDIALI

Matricule: 0004005

Nationalité: IVOIRIENNE

Sexe: M  F

Niveau d'étude: C.P.I.

Profession antérieure: CHAUFFEUR

Profession souhaitée: Agent de sécurité  Domestique Agropastoral  Naturothérapeute

Lieu de résidence: WILLIAMSVILLE

N° CNI  N° Attestation  Permis de conduire  N° Extrait

ATT N° 131-33705-10/PJ-11

Contact: 05 16 38 37

**Père:**

Nom et prénoms: BAKARY

**Mère:**

Nom et prénoms: KARIDJA

Contact des parents: 05 16 37

Signature de l'intéressé




Figure 7.4 'Information and Identification Form' for *dozo* hunters, Williamsville, Abidjan, October 2011. (© Richard Banégas)



REPUBLIQUE DE CÔTE D'IVOIRE  
 (Union - Discipline - Travail)

MINISTÈRE DE LA DÉFENSE  
 DE LA MOBILISATION

MINISTÈRE DES DOZOS DES RÉGIONS  
 DU NORD DE LA CÔTE D'IVOIRE

**CERTIFICAT D'INSCRIPTION**

REGION: SAVANES  
 DÉPARTEMENT: LORHOUA  
 SOUS-PREFECTURE: LORHOUA  
 COMMUNE: LORHOUA

**DOZO**

EXERCICE: 2011  
 N° DOZO: 2011/000000  
 SP: LORHOUA  
 QU: 2 / Non  
 2 / Autre

28.09.11

Figure 7.5 Dozos' Census 'Registration Certificate', Williamsville, Abidjan, October 2011. (© Richard Banégas)

Force Républicaine de Côte d'Ivoire

**Ministère de la défense**

Compagnie : SMIR-DOZO  
**Ordre de Mission**

Date : .....

Ville : .....

Quartier : .....

Nom : .....

Prénoms : .....

Nombre de kalache : .....

Combien de jour : .....

<b>Le Président</b>	<b>Chefs de Sécurité</b>	<b>Intéressés</b>
SEKONGO Seydou	KARAMA Salifou	
03 40 57 10	45 19 47 47	
44 34 20 93	KONATE Adama	
	05 70 19 87	
	Karamoko	
	55 67 55 29	

Figure 7.6 Dozos' 'Mission Order', Williamsville, Abidjan, October 2011. (© Richard Banégas)





Figure 7.7 Dozos' old membership card from Benkadi brotherhood, Korhogo, January 2017. (© Richard Banégas)



Figure 7.8 *Dozos'* new membership card from Benkadi brotherhood (recto), Abidjan, January 2020. (© Richard Banégas)



Figure 7.9 *Dozos'* new membership card from Benkadi brotherhood (verso), Abidjan, January 2020. (© Richard Banégas)

Association des chasseurs traditionnels (Dozo) « BENKADI »

Republique de Côte d'Ivoire  
Union-Discipline-Travail

### Fiche d'identification des dozos

Région: 10M/KP Dpt: MAN

S/P: YAPLEU Village: YAPLEU

MATRICULE: 018143

Nom: YAPLEU

Prénoms: ADROPO

Né(e): LE 01/07/1969 à ADROPO

Fils de PALE KIEFLE et de PALE KIEDJINA

Nationalité: IVOIRIENNE

Lieu de résidence: PETIT YAPLEU

N° CNI / ATTESTATION / CONSULAIRE

Contacts: 020 20 11 14 12

Arme { N° .....  
Type .....

SEXE: Masculin  Féminin

Situation matrimoniale

Marié(e)  Célibataire  Nbre d'enfants 05

Nbre de femmes 02

Fonction: PLAQUEUR (DOZABA)

Personnes à contacter en cas d'urgence:

Nom: PALE

Prénoms: GUERKANE

Contacts: 020 20 11 14 12

Signature

Figure 7.10 Identification form for Benkadi dozos, Abidjan, January 2020.  
(© Richard Banégas)



Figure 7.11 Identification register of traditional hunters (*dozos*) from Benkadi association, Abidjan, January 2020. (© Richard Banégas)



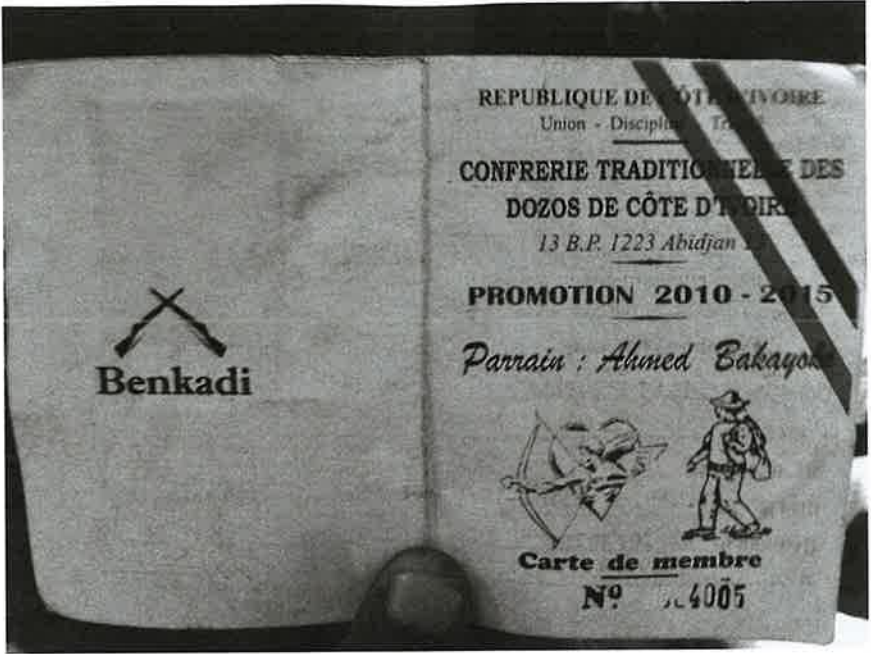
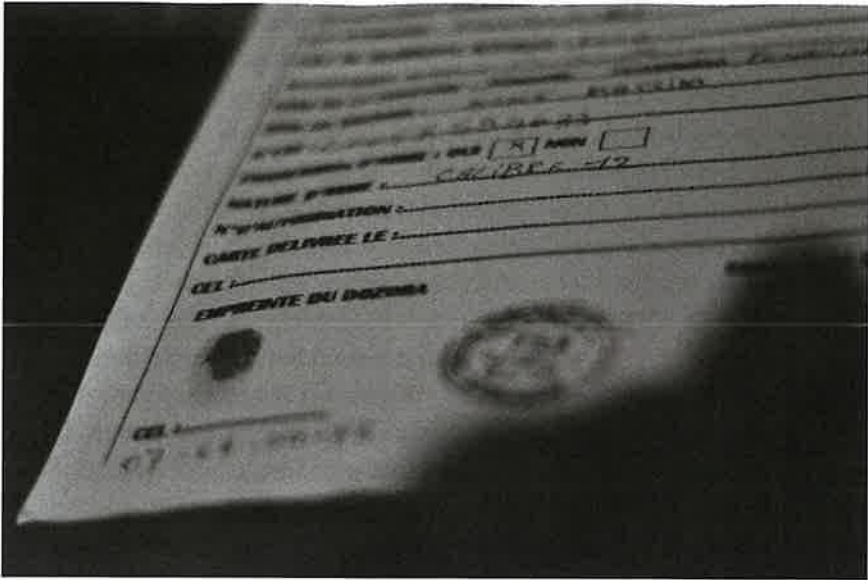


Figure 7.12 Dozo card from the Benkadi association sponsored by the Minister of the Interior, Ahmed Bakayoko, Abidjan, January 2017. (© Richard Banégas)



Figure 7.13 Dozo card from the Fenacodi association sponsored by the Minister of the Interior, Ahmed Bakayoko, January 2017. © Richard Banégas)



**Figure 7.14** A *dozoba's* (master initiator) fingerprint on a *dozo* identification form testified to by him, Abidjan, January 2020. (© Richard Banégas)

### **'Everyone recognizes their victim'**

The second scene took place in January 2017. The meeting had been arranged in a maquis (bar-restaurant) near the 'Cité rouge', the university residence in Cocody where the Fesci has its headquarters. Since the end of the war, the leaders of the student union, which had become a militia of the Gbagbo regime, had kept a low profile. Having come out of hiding, 'General'<sup>6</sup> Mian, surrounded by bodyguards, was worried. To protect himself from prying ears, he demanded that we meet elsewhere, in the shady courtyard of another maquis, where the trade unionists were accustomed to meet. The beers were beginning to 'kill the table'. As the conversation livened up around sensitive political issues, the owner of the premises, respected like a mother by the Fescistes, invited us to continue the meeting in her 'office'. An office in a drinking maquis? Astonishing. And this was not the last of our surprises.

The room in which Odile Gonkanou welcomes us is filled with hundreds of files and dozens of stapled registers, scrupulously arranged on shelves (Figure 7.15). An outdated computer and an old printer gather dust on a desk.

<sup>6</sup> The general secretaries of Fesci claim the title of 'General' within a union that has been organized in a martial, even paramilitary, fashion since it was founded. The students salute him by standing to attention.

Under a heavy padlock, an imposing stack of handwritten identification forms, complete with fingerprints, await computer processing. Letters on the letterhead of a London law firm. And all around us, on the corners of shelves, a multitude of cards, cardboard or laminated, blank or already filled in. A batch of new cards, held together with a rubber band. Blue ones, green ones in the classic format, white ones in the form of a notebook. What an incredible discovery for us who were investigating the IDs' war in Côte d'Ivoire! One of these cards, in a black and orange gradient, catches our eye: the words 'Republic of Côte d'Ivoire', in the three colours of the national flag, give it an official look. A barcode on the side appears to contain numerical or biometric information. The bearer's surname, first name, date and place of birth, and a passport photo are also prominently displayed. At its centre is a logo showing a ship and a strange acronym: OVADETCI, followed by the address of the 'head office'. It's a 'membership card' (Figure 7.16). But membership of what? Of an 'Organization of victims affected by toxic waste in Côte d'Ivoire', patiently catalogued by Odile, the president of the association, in her maquis in the Cité Rouge in Cocody. The story deserves to be told, so illustrative is it of the social life and moral economy of the papers on which this book concludes.

In September 2006, after months wandering from port to port, the *Probo Koala*, a ship from Rotterdam, illegally dumped highly toxic petroleum waste in working-class neighbourhoods of Abidjan, with the complicity of the port authorities.<sup>7</sup> The consequences were dramatic: 17 people died and around 100,000 others were poisoned. The health scandal sent shock waves through the country. Prime Minister Konan Banny resigned before being reappointed. To avoid prosecution, the Dutch company, Trafigura, paid the Ivorian state nearly 200 million dollars, but only a third of this was earmarked for the victims. Legal proceedings were initiated in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. A new out-of-court settlement was negotiated in return for the payment of £30 million to 30,000 identified victims. But these sums were widely misappropriated, implicating even the highest state authorities, including the minister Adama Bictogo, close to Alassane Ouattara, who was sacked in 2012 for his involvement in the case and returned to power a few years later at the head of parliament.<sup>8</sup> Local initiatives have multiplied to represent those poisoned, under the aegis of umbrella organizations run by contractors

<sup>7</sup> J. Tilouine, 'Probo Koala: Drame écologique et bonnes affaires', *Le Monde*, 19 August 2016, [https://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2016/08/19/probo-koala-drame-ecologique-et-bonnes-affaires\\_4984771\\_3244.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2016/08/19/probo-koala-drame-ecologique-et-bonnes-affaires_4984771_3244.html) (accessed 12 June 2023).

<sup>8</sup> A. Silver Konan, 'Affaire des déchets toxiques en Côte d'Ivoire: Adama Bictogo visé par une plainte des victimes du Probo Koala', *Jeune Afrique*, 1 March 2019, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/743216/societe/affaire-des-dechets-toxiques-en-cote-divoire-adama-bictogo-vise-par-une-plainte-des-victimes-du-probo-koala/> (accessed 12 June 2023).



competing for the compensation windfall. At the head of the main association, Claude Gahourou, a member of Fesci, spotted Odile Gonkanou, a young student trade unionist who seemed to be succeeding in the small businesses she had set up around the university campus. In 2009, he entrusted her with the task of identifying victims in the Cocody commune (Odile Gonkanou, interviews, Abidjan, January 2017). But, accused of fraud, Gahourou fled into exile.

After the war, in 2011, Odile Gonkanou took over the census process by creating her own officially accredited structure, with the aim of identifying as many ‘real victims’ as possible, as demanded by the lawyers—the ‘witness victims’ or ‘code victims’, according to his nomenclature, who had been admitted to hospital and whose names had been published in *Fraternité matin*. In the aftermath of the disaster, the ‘official newspaper’ had drawn up a complete list of these victims, assigning them a number, the famous ‘code’ that would become one of the signs of authentication of the damage. ‘We’ve been through so much, we don’t want there to be any tricks,’ Odile told us, echoing the many suspicions of corruption (interview, Abidjan, January 2020). At the time of the first compensation payments in 2009, a number of identity frauds had tainted the procedure and led to its suspension. The president of OVADETCI then took precautions to verify the status of the victims and certify it: she cross-referenced various numbers and official or association ‘codes’, and took the victim’s ten fingerprints, civil status documents, and medical certificates to draw up ‘forgery-proof’ cards, which were then kept in a duly certified ‘validation folder’ (Figure 7.17).<sup>9</sup>

‘You see, I don’t take just one finger. All ten fingers! [...] I don’t want anyone to say that the name isn’t safe. So I take the prints of all ten fingers of the person, of the victim’ (interview, Abidjan, January 2017), said Odile, although her office was obviously not equipped with an optical fingerprint reader (Figures 7.18 and 7.19). The ‘government code’ is written on the identification form, registers, and membership card, along with a fifteen-character alphanumeric code specific to the association, ‘so that no one else can steal my victim’ (Odile, interview, Abidjan, January 2017). It also includes the site of contamination, the place of residence, the national identity card number, telephone contacts, and checkboxes specifying whether the victim has already received compensation (from the state or the association), and whether he or she is a minor or deceased (heirs may receive compensation). The ‘validation pack’, which includes all the identification documents, codes, and membership card, ‘certifies that the victim has been genuinely identified by me. You [I] recognize

<sup>9</sup> All these data were gathered through ethnographic observations and interviews with Mrs Gonkanou at her office headquarters in January 2017, January 2018, and January 2020.

them, then you go [represent them] so that they can take their money [...] Do you understand? Everyone recognizes their victim' (interview, Abidjan, January 2020). Competition is fierce between grassroots associations to represent as many victims as possible and get them recognized by the umbrella organizations and lawyers who closely monitor compensation payments. With the help of Fesci activists, and in conjunction with Cocody town hall, Odile Gonkanou has counted more than 30,000 people in the courtyard of her maquis, 12,000 of whom have been retained by the law firm. Each census-taker is entitled to a 5 per cent share of the compensation. This is a small share compared with the commissions paid to the big bosses of the umbrella organizations who monopolize contact with the lawyers, not to mention the fact that 'the state also wants its share' (interview, Abidjan, January 2020). The health and environmental scandal surrounding toxic waste has undeniably opened up countless opportunities for 'eating' throughout the intermediary food chain. From the port director, close to the pro-Gbagbo Young Patriots, to the first Ouattarist circles, the 'politics of the belly' was widely shared. But that's not what we are here to talk about, and neither is the legal outcome of this affair.<sup>10</sup>

What interests us is the mimicry of identification procedures. Although cobbled together in the back room of her maquis, the identity verification device created from scratch by Odile Gonkanou is modelled on the official procedures and graphic forms of the documentary state, with its many stamps, forms, photos, signatures, and tick boxes. Using fingerprints and alphanumeric barcodes, it even mimics the aesthetics of the biometric state, conjuring up an imaginary sense of reliability. Each victim is thus identified and recognized in his or her individual singularity and personal prejudice by a state and a justice system that have largely failed to take charge of them. The identification and attestation process, through its bureaucratic form, objectifies a status that is materialized in the membership card and the 'validation pack'. Produced by an association approved by the state, it takes on the form and force of the state, although it does not have the force of law. So this individualized status would be worth nothing without the strength of numbers: it is because Odile Gonkanou has nearly 30,000 duly attested victims on her books that they can hope to be included on the list of beneficiaries, which is fiercely negotiated with the 'bosses' who deal with the lawyers. Here, as in many other cases, the 'politics of recognition' (Englund

<sup>10</sup> Among some writings on the subject, see in particular Amnesty International's voluminous investigative report, 'A Toxic Truth: About Trafigura, the *Probo Koala* and the Dumping of Toxic Waste in Côte d'Ivoire', Report AFR 31/002/2012 (September 2012).

and Nyamjoh 2004) is closely correlated with the power of the collective, with the ‘politics of the gbonhi’ (Banégas 2010).

Beyond the individual demands for compensation, Odile’s registers and her discourse assert a collective demand for recognition, a demand for rights from the state that, on certain occasions, has even been expressed in the street in the form of public demonstrations by organizations of toxic waste victims. AVODETCI membership cards are not just a promise of financial compensation, but also a moral credit card that places the individual in a relationship of debt and accountability on several levels. A moral credit card vis-à-vis the state and the company responsible for the health and environmental disaster, of course, but also vis-à-vis a whole chain of intermediaries involved in this action and bound together by complex relationships of patronage and accountability. The intense work of enlisting the victims of toxic waste ‘from below’ thus reminds us of the equation posed by Breckenridge and Szreter (2012) between registration and recognition (with the major difference that both authors were referring to civil status censuses); it emphasizes that the acquisition of rights through the identification of those entitled to them, far from enshrining the autonomy of the subject in his or her relationship with the state, proceeds from an extension of the relations of indebtedness and dependence that embed citizenship in social and political inequalities.



Figure 7.15 Files and registers of toxic waste victims, AVODETCI association, Abidjan, January 2020. (© Richard Banégas)



Figure 7.16 Membership cards of AVODETCI toxic waste victims organization, Abidjan, January 2017. (© Richard Banégas)



Figure 7.17 Validation folder containing ID cards and certificates of a toxic waste victim, registered by AVODETCI, Abidjan, January 2020. (© Richard Banégas)

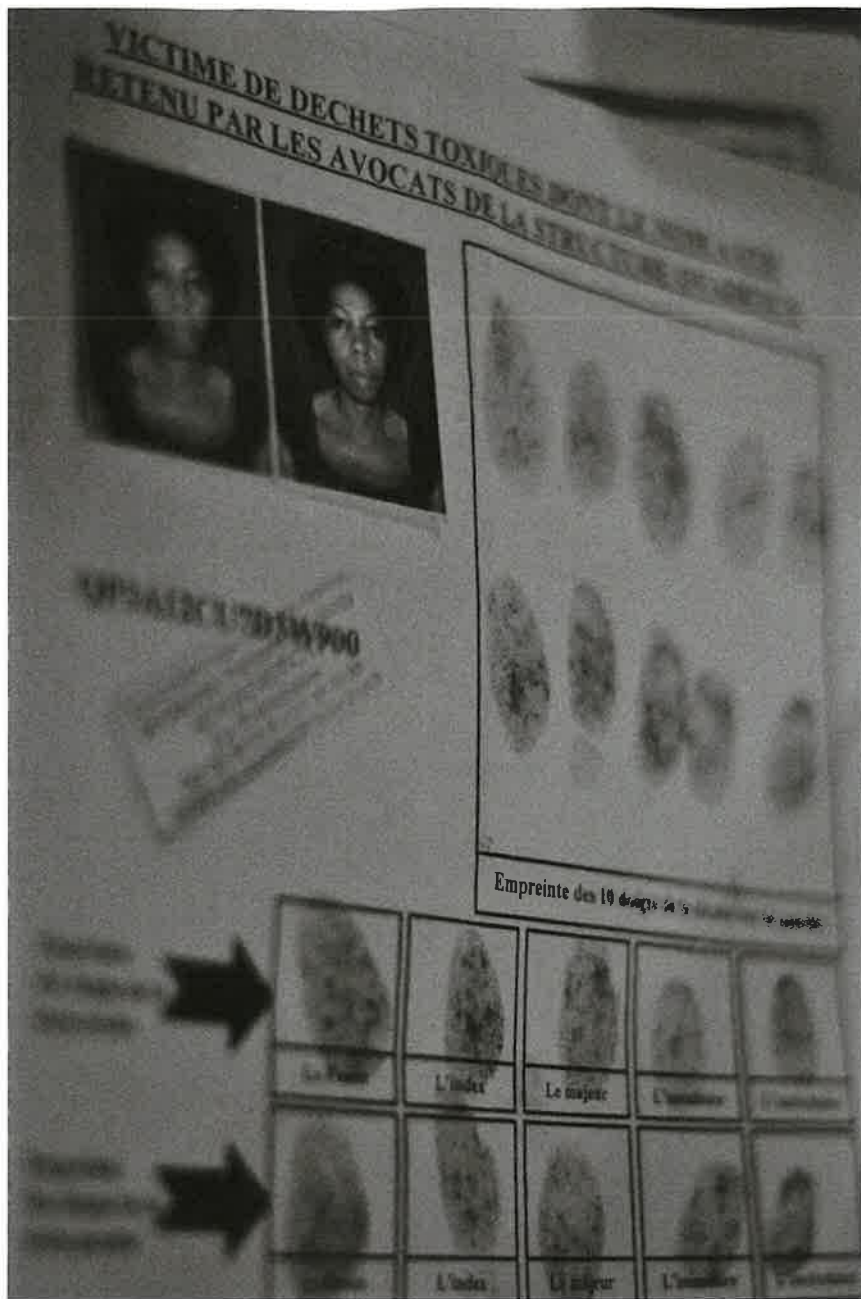


Figure 7.18 Fingerprints of a toxic waste victim registered by AVODETCI, January 2017, Abidjan. (© Richard Banégas)





**Figure 7.19** Odile Gonkanou, OVADETCI chairwoman, in her former office established in her restaurant's backroom, Cocody, Abidjan, January 2017. (© Richard Banégas)

## Bureaucratic Writing of the Self, and the Moral Economy of Recognition

During our years of fieldwork, we came across a multitude of identification documents and personal cards, issued by civil society associations, militant groups, trade unions or political parties, professional organizations, community structures, traditional chieftaincies, churches and religious brotherhoods, armed militias, sports clubs, neighbourhood associations, or wider social networks. Among these, we have worked on the membership cards of hometown associations from a particular region or locality whose members meet up in town to reaffirm the bonds of solidarity stemming from their 'community debt' (Marie 2002). A typical example was the card—the size of a driving licence, pink in colour and bearing the stamp of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire—for membership of the 'Association des ressortissants agni résidant à Abobo-Doumé, Jérusalem Lokodjoro', a working-class neighbourhood in the commune of Yopougon, Abidjan. The back of the card shows the owner's village of origin, as well as a list of monthly contributions to the association, which operates on a tontine basis (Figure 7.20). Or, in the same spirit, a certificate of membership of the 'Jeunesse d'Ake-village', created ex nihilo through the violent action of a group of 'Jeunes patriotes sans abri' (Homeless Young Patriots) in the low-lying area of Gobelet, in the heart of the prosperous commune of Cocody (Banégas 2017b) (Figure 7.21). Or an official 'customary authority identification' card, displayed by Mr H., in his capacity as 'village chief', in support of his request for biometric enrolment at the ONI office in the Bouaflé sub-prefecture (Figure 7.22).

Street politics also generates its own documentary inflation. For example, the cards issued to activists or militiamen in the patriotic galaxy (Figure 7.23) were a precious key for speakers who travelled from agoras to street parliaments to mobilize crowds in support of the Gbagbo regime and resist international pressure (Cutolo and Banégas 2012). Issued by Charles Blé Goudé's COJEP or one of the rival branches of the 'Sorbonne', Abidjan's most important 'street parliament', they created a space for inclusion in the inner circles of power, while also materializing factional affiliations within it. But the Young Patriots were not the only ones to join. The opposition also tried to identify its street sympathizers, in particular members of the tea grins close to the RDR, which a former FPI activist who had switched to the Ouattara party, nicknamed the 'Rector', tried to identify nationwide by setting up a central register of the Rassemblement national des grins de Côte d'Ivoire (Figures 7.24 and 7.25).



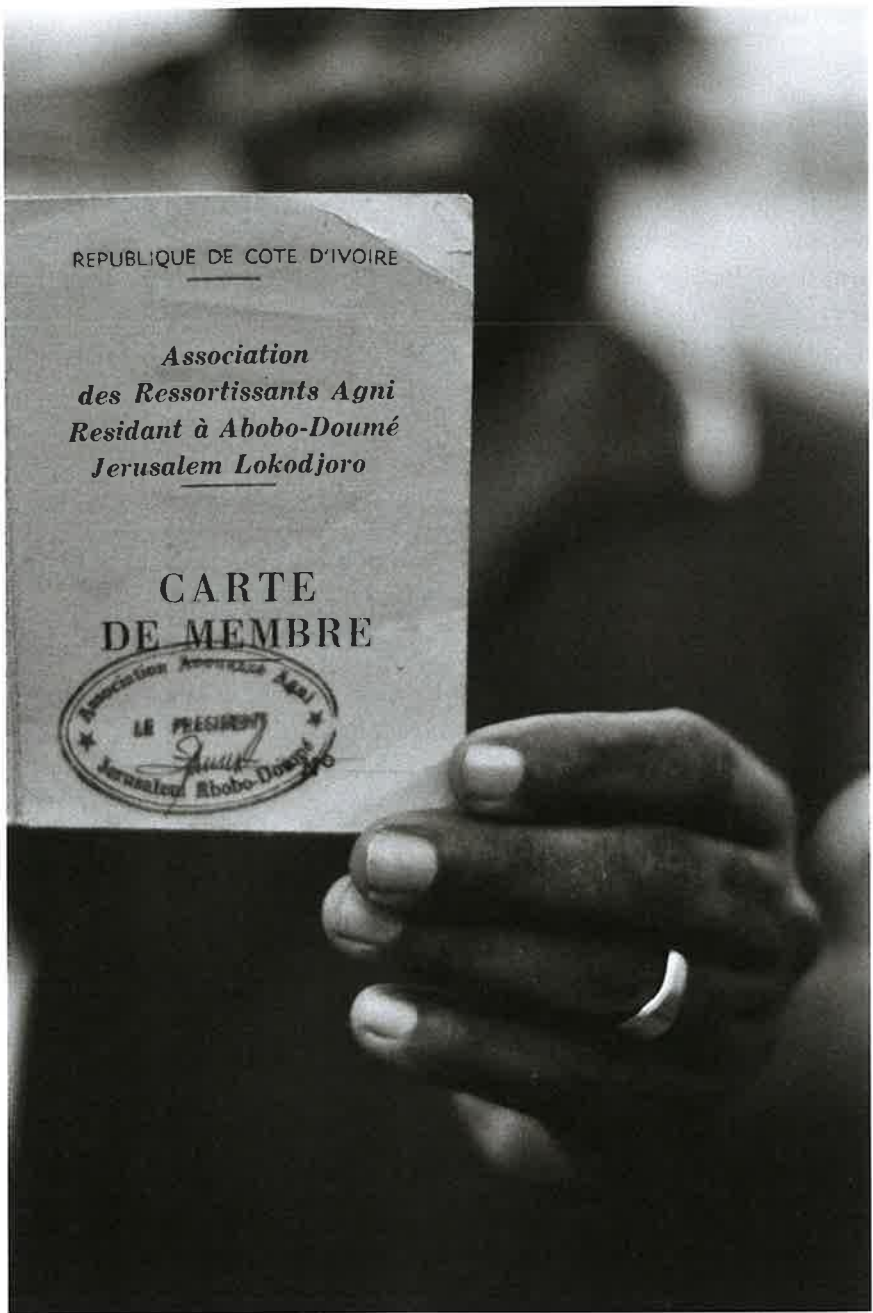


Figure 7.20 Hometown association membership card, Yopougon, Abidjan, February 2019. (© Richard Banégas)

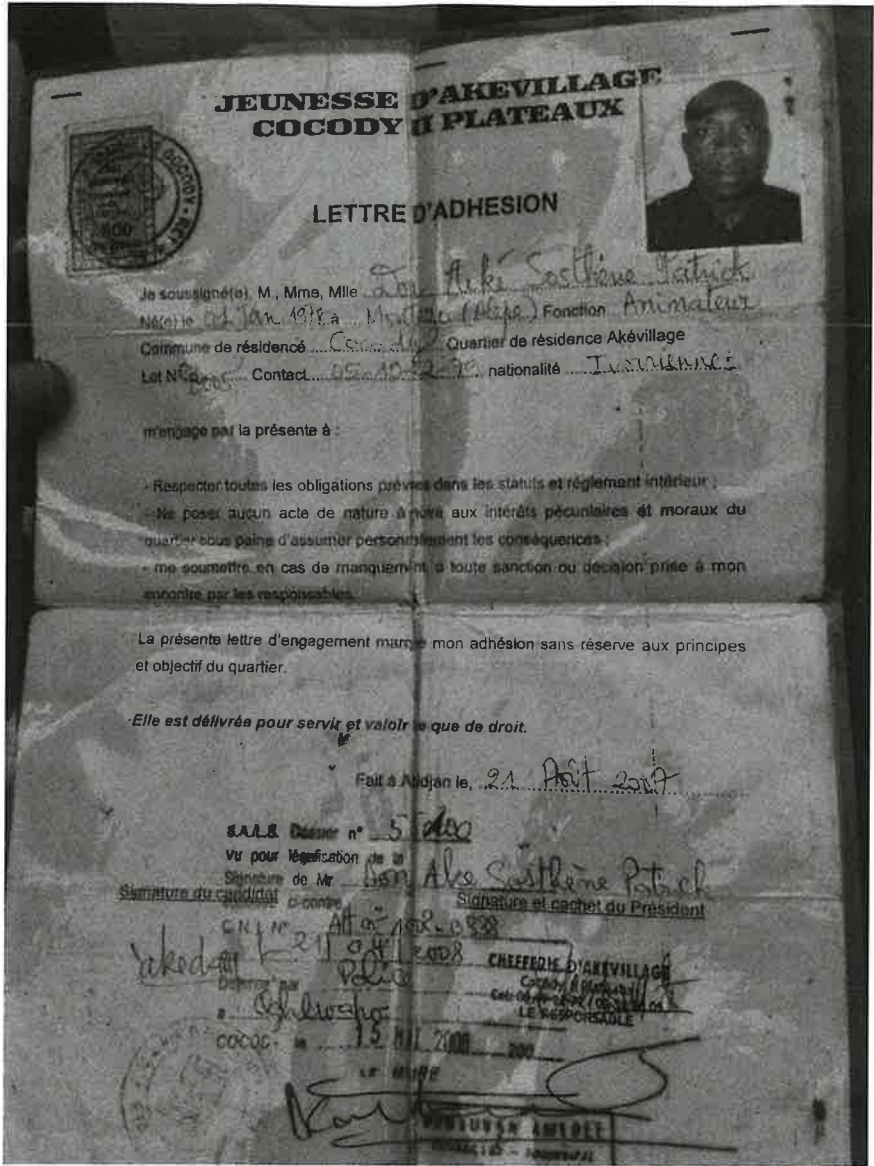


Figure 7.21 Certificate of membership from a newborn 'Ake-village' established by Homeless Young Patriots activists in Abidjan, October 2012. (© Richard Banégas)



Figure 7.22 Identification card of traditional authorities, village chief, Bouaflé, January 2019. (© Richard Banégas)

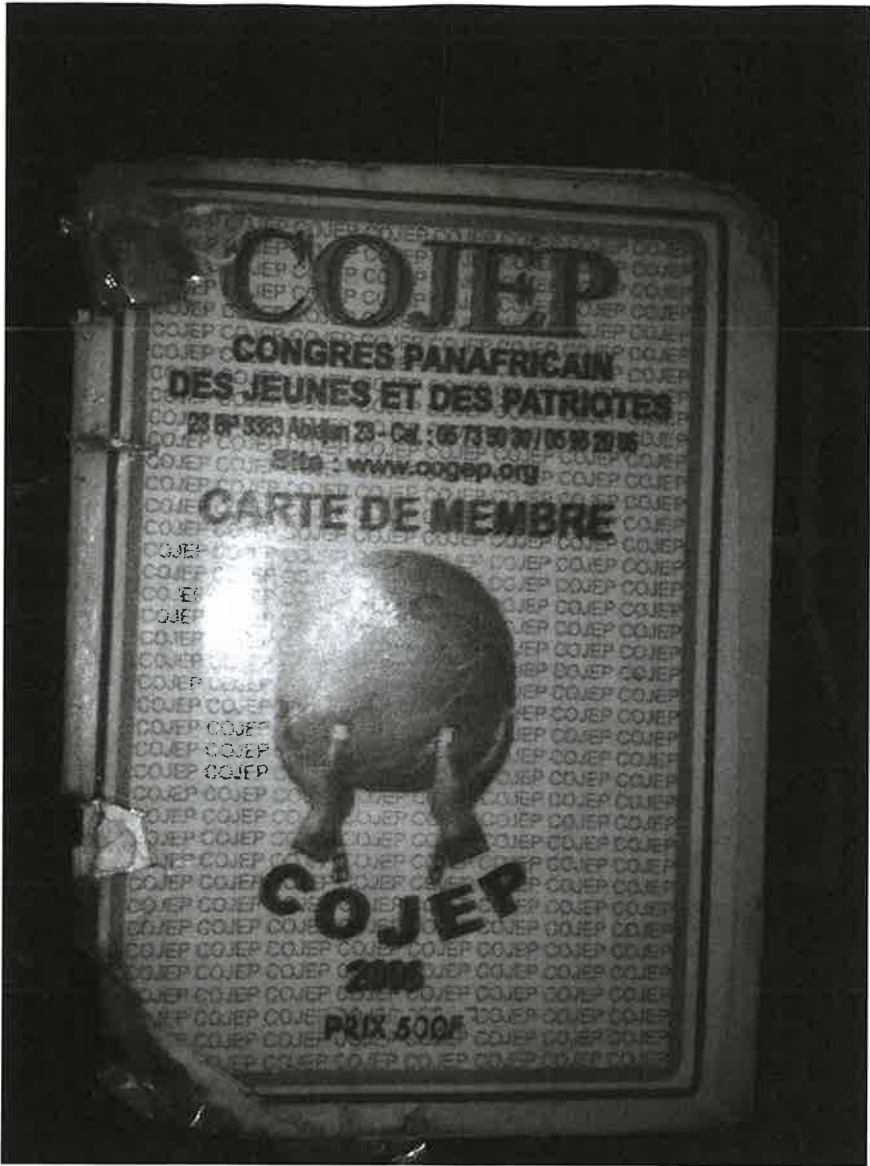


Figure 7.23 COJEP Young Patriots membership card, Abidjan, September 2006.  
(© Richard Banégas)



Figure 7.24 Debate on the 'social life of IDs' in a grin (tea meeting), *Grin L'Ambassade* in Adjamé, Abidjan, February 2019. (© Richard Banégas)



Figure 7.25 Logo of the National Association of Grins in Côte d'Ivoire, which registered its members in the 2000s. (© Richard Banégas)



What do all these ‘bottom-up’ self-produced identification papers and documents reveal? Apparently, they show that the state is not the only producer of papers and does not have a monopoly on identification—if it ever did.<sup>11</sup> Alongside legal identification, a number of social bodies are involved in this vast undertaking to identify people. This does not mean, however, that the sovereignty of the state is being challenged or circumvented, or that it is in a situation of ‘fragility’ or ‘failure’, as the advocates of ‘state building’ have claimed in recent years. While these ‘informal’ cards may, in some respects, express a form of autonomy for civil society in its relationship with the state, they are not the opposite, nor the sign of an Ivorian society living on the margins of the state. They should not be seen as the product of a competing view of the ‘eye of the state’ (Scott 1998), nor as an expression of opposition to the legibility it demands of individual identities. Whether we are talking about the cards of toxic waste victims counted by Odile Gonkanou in her Cocody maquis, the cards of Benkadi or Fenacodo-ci *dozos*, patriotic speakers from the ‘Sorbonne’ or members of the grins around the Adjamé market, these documents show the extent to which social agents are caught up in the imagination and practices of the documentary—or even biometric—state. Even those who, like traditional hunters, appear the most recalcitrant to administrative logic reproduce its graphic forms, signs, and aesthetics. The reproduction of legal identification procedures in documents emanating from the social world is not a matter of simple mimicry; it testifies to a shared ethos of state modernity and its hold on African societies often regarded as resistant to graphic reason. Our observations clearly refute this old cliché. Far from opposing the state, these self-census procedures ‘from below’ extend its identification and classification logic into all spheres of society.

All this paperwork highlights a second paradox. The new identification technologies, introduced to put an end to the ‘IDs war’ and promote ‘emergence’, were intended to depoliticize and ‘de-socialize’ the identification process, by singling out biometric data in centralized digital registers. But the profusion of forms of social identification evidenced by this multitude of papers paradoxically demonstrates that the individualizing and depoliticizing logic of the new identification technologies is constantly challenged by the concrete practices of everyday identification, which involve a multitude of circles of belonging, materialized by a profusion of cards that reproduce the signs of bureaucratic modernity but also, and above all, insert the individual into a

<sup>11</sup> For a comparative historical perspective, see, among others: Caplan and Torpey (2001a); Noiriel (2007); Denis 2008; About and Denis 2010; Breckeridge and Szreter 2012; Awenengo Dalberto and Banégas 2021.

social space of knowledge and recognition. Group membership cards attest to 'belonging', materialize a 'social image', and produce forms of 'identification'—to use Avanza and Laferté's post-constructivist trilogy (2005), commenting on Brubaker (2001)—that are more or less assumed and asserted. In Côte d'Ivoire, as elsewhere, each individual belongs to various social fields, each of which gives them a part of their identity panoply, which varies according to the interaction situations in which they find themselves (Martin 2010). But in a country that has experienced a war of 'who is who' and an over-politicization of the documentary issue, these material traces of personal identification are not insignificant. They illustrate the complex relationship between paper identity, personal identity, and social personhood. They build up partial, semi-official networks of identification that emerge 'from below', as a counterpoint to the infrastructures of citizenship produced by state devices for documentary or biometric identification.

At the beginning of this research, we started from the idea that identity papers in Côte d'Ivoire were not just instruments of surveillance or administrative control, but also constituted an interface between the state and citizens, material supports for claiming rights and asserting oneself. Identifying oneself is not simply a matter of bringing individuals into line with the law—the obligation to register with the civil registry or to hold a national identity card. In many cases, it is a quest for rights and an issue of recognition. Analysing the 'containers of papers' that the inhabitants of the 'Voltaic colonization' villages around Bouaflé have to mobilize to escape their status as a 'population at risk of statelessness', or the tricks deployed by the *margouillats* and their clients to obtain a certificate of nationality and other 'kamikaze papers', had already provided us with fuel for this argument. Looking at the self-produced cards allows us to go further and better grasp these emic forms of enunciation of citizenship.

Official or self-produced documents are a central means of claiming individual and collective rights. They embody a sense of belonging and a status whose legal accreditation comes from the state and whose social—or even moral—accreditation comes from the group to which the individual refers. Like the 'validation packets' issued by Odile to victims of toxic waste, they give bureaucratic form to collective struggles for recognition. This materialization of status through the production of papers 'from below' is all the more crucial given that the state, in its plans for biometric reform, tends, on the contrary, to want to dematerialize identities. It inscribes social agents in a civic space that is also a space of morality, that of the 'good citizen', not only recognized as such by the state, but also attested to by his peers in the group to which he belongs.



This is the meaning of the identity documents issued by the brotherhoods of hunters to the *dozos*, whose moral ‘rectitude’ is doubly accredited by the oral testimony of their *dozoba* and the written record in a register. Other examples are the ‘certificates of indigeneity’ required in Nigeria for all administrative procedures (Fourchard 2018), or the village identity cards and letters of recommendation issued by local committees in Uganda (Brisset-Foucault 2021) to guarantee the morality of ‘good citizens’.

It is perhaps precisely the desire to establish an essentially ‘moral’ recognition—both social and personal—that defines many of the documents produced ‘from below’ in African societies today. This is easy to understand, comparatively speaking, if we think of the struggles over the national identity card in Côte d’Ivoire. These, as we have seen, concerned not only access to citizenship, the right to vote, and landownership, but also the attribution of a set of connotations that defined the personality of the Ivorian citizen (the ‘autochthon’) vis-à-vis the state, on the one hand, and non-citizens (the *allogènes* or the allochtones), on the other. The moral status of ‘citizen’ claimed by the legitimate holder of a national identity card certainly stemmed from recognition by the state apparatus, but—according to a widespread nationalist vulgate—it also depended on belonging to one of the ‘ethnic groups’ that, from the founding of the colony, were considered to be entitled to a national identity. In the Ivorian context, the legal principle of *jus sanguinis*, understood as descent, was the logical means of linking the individual to the group by virtue of the recognition accorded by those who represented them: parents, elders, chiefs, notables. These are the same people who, in the 2000s, will still be called upon to guarantee the recognition and therefore the identification of individuals during mobile court hearings and post-conflict biometric enrolment.

Reversing this official logic, but retaining its general principles, most of these documents produced ‘from below’ can be seen as a means for individuals to gain recognition in the political arena as holders of a certain moral credit in relation to the state, the nation, and sometimes international agencies. They attest not only to the fact that they belong to a collective, but also to the debt connecting them to their community and, through the latter, to the nation. In a society such as Côte d’Ivoire, which is emerging from an intense conflict over identity papers, this dual objectification of moral debt through identity papers is important. The case of demobilized former rebels provides a good illustration. The mutinies of 2017, which shook the Ouattara regime (Schiel, Faulkner, and Powell 2017), highlighted the fragilities of a regime based on the clientelist management of the war debt contracted from those who had

been able to be integrated into the new army or who had been demobilized. During our investigations, we met many of these ex-combatants, nicknamed the 'demos', who kept in their pockets all the documentary evidence of their armed involvement in the FN, and then of their passage through the various phases of the DDR process: cards from the 'Guépard company', stamped by its commander Chérif Ousmane, certificates of demobilization issued under the double seal of the rebel administration and the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, considered by their bearers as recognition of rank, registration receipts in the biometric databases of the DDR piloted by the UN, demobilization cards in cardboard or plastic, and so on. Among these, one card seemed to count more than others in claiming the rights of ex-combatants: the card with the number 0039. This number, attesting to the precocity of the commitment in the ranks of the rebellion, conferred on its owner the feeling of a moral—and thus also financial—debt of the Ouattara regime towards him. It even became the common denominator and rallying sign of an unprecedented post-war collective mobilization, that of the ex-combatants of 'Cellule 39', who, in their fight for recognition of their rights, moved from armed action to a 'purely administrative struggle' through papers (Diallo 2017; 2024).

As infrastructures of citizenship, official papers and the social practices of self-registration thus operate on the macro-political scale of legal identification mechanisms, on the meso-sociological scale of community membership and collective struggles for rights, and finally on the micro-social, even intimate, scale of individual identities. To paraphrase Mbembe (2000), they constitute bureaucratic writings of the self, eloquently illustrated by the practices of self-census mentioned above. The presence of a heterogeneous multitude of 'written and graphic objects aimed at identifying' (Dardy 2004) among the personal effects of citizens is not, of course, specific to Côte d'Ivoire, or to any particular country. As Claudine Dardy (1998) has written, drawing on the work of Jack Goody (1977, 1986), 'graphic reason' structures much of the relationship between the state and civil society (in the Gramscian sense). The ethnography of these 'papers' as material objects that accumulate in homes and pockets, and circulate through social interactions and transactions, has turned out to be the ethnography of a highly sensitive 'political materiality' (Bayart and Warnier 2004). In other words, as a political anthropology of material culture that is not limited to 'the social life of things' (Appadurai 1986), but also and above all concerns the constitution of the social subject that is the 'paper citizen' (Awenengo Dalberto and Banégas 2018) and the relationship between technology and subjectivation (Warnier 1999),

We have observed these relationships in many situations of ordinary life, and in certain more critical circumstances that highlight the performative effect of paper identities on social identities. The collective research carried out as part of the PIAF programme (*La Vie Sociale des Papiers d'Identité en Afrique* (The Social and Political Life of Identification Papers in Africa)<sup>12</sup> has provided other examples, such as the case of Aïcha, a former member of the FN, reported by Kamina Diallo (2021), who kept with her all the material evidence of her life in combat: badge from the first rebel movement MPCFI-FAFN, attesting to her involvement, from 2002, as a cook, within the 'Battalion of the Warriors of Light', 'Combatant's Receipt', issued by the National Programme for Reintegration and Community Rehabilitation (with the number 0039, like those of Cellule 39 mentioned above), a demobilized soldier's card, nicknamed 'Koffi Koffi', after the Minister of Defence at the time, a membership card for an association of women fighters, and so on. Archived by Aïcha in a simple plastic bag, her various documents bear witness to the central role played by documentary identification in formalizing membership, roles, and status within the social space—in this case, within a rebel organization and, later, in a post-conflict public space where ex-combatants had to fight hard to assert their place. Keeping this series of cards is not just a way of claiming demobilized combatant status—and the rights that go with it. It is also a form of moral and political subjection, a way of thinking about oneself and representing oneself to the world.

### Lines of Flight

In conclusion, our ethnography brought to light a set of relations that we had not considered at the beginning of this research: namely, the connection between debt, recognition, and identification. This triangle has theoretical implications. It allows us to reconsider the relation between registration and recognition that has been highlighted by Breckenridge and Sretzer (2012). The Ivorian context shows that identification relies not only on a dyadic relation between the state and the individual but rather on a triangular connexion. As revealed by the case of the toxic waste victims census, carried out by Odile Gonkanou and her association, the initiative to register and count oneself, in order to be recognized, can be produced 'from below', by an autonomous and

<sup>12</sup> <https://piaf.hypotheses.org/> (13 March 2023).

collective action on the part of Ivorian society, creating a third party aimed at mediating the recognition of the person by the state.

In this case, the demand for recognition does not reach the level of policies for the social appropriation of suffering that have led elsewhere to the emergence of a 'biological citizenship' (Petryna 2004). It does seek, however, to open up a space for biopolitical demands reaching for the international political level where human-rights organizations operate. The result is twofold: on the one hand, by appealing to the agencies of transnational governmentality, these kinds of actions, following James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta (2002: 981), 'call into question the principles of verticality and encompassment that have long helped to legitimate and naturalize states' authority'. But, on the other hand, appealing to the 'humanitarian reason' (Fassin 2010) upheld by international organizations can be seen as a way of reaffirming the state's responsibility and its moral debt towards the victims.

The same interpretative framework can be used, *mutatis mutandis*, in the description of the case of the Mossi and Bissa communities in Bouaflé. Here too, as we saw in Chapter 5, census-taking 'from below' was carried out by associations working for recognition of citizenship and for national identity cards. These initiatives brought the collective naturalization decree of 1995, which made the 'Voltaics' of Bouaflé Ivorian citizens. Notwithstanding this success, the members of the Mossi continue to experience difficulties in obtaining their documents of identification. In Bouaflé, the tensions between the 'indigenous' Gouro and Yowere and the communities of Voltaic origin, still considered 'non-indigenous' by the first, exemplify how a colonial history inscribed in the names of villages, communities, and individuals persists into the present. It is a history that no technical and/or legal mechanism can bypass, because this would imply a reshaping of relationships, recognitions, and moral and political debts that have become embedded over time and incorporated into a shared habitus. The 'natives' of Bouaflé, a territory opened up by the colonial authorities to the plantation economy and to the importation of migrant labour, still see in the naturalization of the descendants of the Voltaic migrants of the 1930s the final fulfilment of a history of their own dispossession, just as the Mossi and Bissa descendants of the migrants see in the difficulties of obtaining identity documents an unacceptable perpetuation of their exclusion from the national community. Different debts and moral claims are intertwined here in conflicting ways, wrapped around the axis of citizenship. Hence, what an international player like the UNHCR defines as a 'risk of statelessness' is the result not of nationality laws, but of the local, 'autochthone', administration's resistance against issuing identity cards to the 'Voltaics'.

In cases like this, identities and identification very clearly display a political constitution. For better or for worse, implicitly or explicitly, the depoliticization of identities that has been the objective of post-crisis governmentality is resisted in many contexts. Ivorian society showed strong resistance to the 'state work' (Noiriel 2007) of identification. In many ways, this resonates with Frederick Cooper's historical studies (2012, 2014) of the transformations of citizenship in late colonial West Africa, which show how these societies used the civil state to assert their own goals, bending it as far as possible to contextual needs and local notions—and practices—of personal identity. As a matter of fact, the complexity of the relationships binding the autonomy of African societies to the frame of the postcolonial state is indeed one of the most salient features of their historicity (Bayart 2008: 63–93). In this book, we have shown in many respects that identification and registration devices can be analysed only with reference to the history and specific features of the social and political spaces in which they operate. In Côte d'Ivoire, as elsewhere on the African continent (Bayart 2013), there has been a popular appropriation of bureaucratic writing that, albeit unevenly and discontinuously, uses its enunciative, classificatory, and performative power to construct specific claims of citizenship and participation in the political sphere. A power to define and to be defined, to recognize and therefore to be recognized, to establish and to strengthen—just like the state's gaze does (Scott 1998)—the relations of recognition between the subjects participating in a common social–political arena. The bureaucratic writings that we have observed in urban chiefdoms, in neighbourhood associations, in social movements, and in the many autonomous and spontaneous unions, militias, and associations of demobilized soldiers can be seen as attempts to inclusion in the universal legibility—and 'recognizability'—of what can be read on paper.

From this point of view, we can see very clearly how these diverse bureaucratic writings of the self share a sense of identification that is radically opposed to the logics of the biometric identification imposed by current global public policies. This opposition, as we have highlighted in the first chapter, has complex theoretical foundations that are inherent in the history of biometric technology. The historian Carlo Ginzburg, in an essay published in 1979 reconstructing briefly the history of the fingerprint method, recalls that in 1860 Sir William Herschel, chief administrator of a district of Bengal, borrowed it from the Bengali culture of contract to use it as a device for identifying and monitoring those who, in the eyes of the colonial administration, could not otherwise be recognized and distinguished as individuals and as persons (Ginzburg 1979). Ginzburg's perspective has been resumed some years later



by Giorgio Agamben's critical reflections (2010) on biometric identification. In Chapter 1, we looked at the heart of the matter: biometric identification, Agamben observed, breaks all ties with the recognition of the social person, which is the basis of the social bond. It produces an identity that is not 'personal', an identity with which the subject can establish no relationship, not even a 'bodily' identity, since the impressions of fingerprints or the structure of an iris are fortuitous features of the phenotype that have no relationship with an individual's perception of self as a body. It can be questioned whether or not this encoding of somatic traits should be seen as a contemporary 'marking' of the body, recalling the identification numbers tattooed on the arms of inmates in Auschwitz and Birkenau concentration camps. Whatever the answer, these techniques of identification share the erasure of the voluntary aspect of recognizing—and of being recognized.

In the recognition of 'autochthones' in mobile courts as in the production of community-made cards of the *dozo* brotherhood of hunters, we find political instances that are antithetically opposed to the 'uniqueness' sought by biometrics. In Côte d'Ivoire, biometric identification, even though it is framed within a promise of inclusion and modernization, is thus perceived as the tool of a governmental project seeking to thwart, circumvent, and depoliticize social practices of recognition that are a constitutive element of its historicity. This depoliticization trend of new technologies of identification is not neutral. In the villages around Bouaflé, as in Mauritania (Ould Ahmed Salem 2021), northern Cameroon (Mbowou 2019) and elsewhere in the world, the introduction of biometrics, precisely because of its tendency to de-socialize and depoliticize identity, accentuates the effects of exclusion and sometimes produces new tensions over who is a citizen and who is not, or, more accurately, who is not quite so.

This hyper-individualizing and de-socializing effect of biometric IDs is *de facto* at odds with, the social, cultural, juridical, and institutional apparatus that produces the logics of belonging and nationality. Moreover, if we think about its 'abstract', 'inaccessible', and 'delinguistic' character (Breckenridge 2021), we can appreciate how it hinders not only the practices of mutual recognition and consent underpinning civil registration, but also the practical norms and arrangements—like the René Caillié scheme or the *margouillats* brokerage—that make the latter accessible to popular needs, taming and tuning it with local moralities of debt, eldership, and belonging.

Let us return to Ranajit Guha's reflections (1997) on hegemony and critique from where we started. It seems as though the rise of biometrics, calling into question the hegemony of the documentary state, has made space for a new

appreciation of its concrete functioning—and of the performative power of writing in Ivorian society. Leaving aside Guha's dialectical theoretical framework, we have entered this space describing the contradictions facing different apparatuses of identification in the Ivorian context. Although each one of them brings with it its own technology of identification and its own regime of veridiction, their coexistence, struggle, and conflict engender their mutual hybridization, making them drift along unpredictable lines of flight.



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# Index

*For the benefit of digital users, indexed terms that span two pages (e.g., 52–53) may, on occasion, appear on only one of those pages.*

- Anno, 10–11, 18–20, 34, 186–187, 234–235, 256–261
- Audiences foraines, 66, 89–90
- Autochthony, 2–3, 36–37, 41, 43–44, 46–48, 54–55, 57–58, 72, 77–78, 86, 87–88
- Bédié, Henri Konan, 3–4, 8–11, 43–44, 46–47, 55, 58, 63, 64–65, 68–72, 75, 78, 82–83, 88, 90–91, 138–139, 146, 218, 276
- Biometrics, 5–6, 9–10, 15, 16, 22, 23–29, 31–37, 40, 85, 113, 115–116, 136–137, 158–163, 165–166, 169, 170–176, 178–181, 184–188, 227, 230, 254, 255, 312–313
- Blé Goudé, Charles, 70, 95–96, 117–118, 127–128, 299
- Bouafilé, 14–18, 20, 34, 131, 170, 185–186, 189–194, 196–200, 203, 204–207, 209–218, 222–230, 261, 299, 302, 306, 310, 312
- Bouaké, 90–92, 215–216, 277, 279
- Bureaucratic writings of the self, 17, 20, 37, 308, 311–312
- Bureaucratization, 12–13, 35, 275–278
- Census, 5–6, 16, 36–37, 49, 64, 75–76, 112, 113–114, 121, 125–126, 132–133, 135, 139–141, 146, 147–156, 158–160, 164, 166, 170, 273–274, 276–280, 293–294, 299, 308–310
- Depoliticization, 4, 31–32, 177–178, 311, 312
- Depoliticize, 9, 19, 25, 41–42, 77, 130, 138, 143, 145, 147, 160, 191–192, 305–306, 312
- Depoliticized, 2–3, 165, 194, 227–228
- Depoliticizing, 140, 194, 231–232, 254, 305–306
- Djobo Esso, Benjamin, 79
- Gbagbo, Laurent, 2–4, 8–9, 11, 16–17, 19, 27, 41–42, 47–48, 50, 60, 63, 72–79, 82, 86–91, 93, 95–96, 100, 102–110, 113–114, 117, 120, 122–123, 125–131, 137, 138–139, 141, 152–153, 155, 157, 172–175, 181, 201, 213, 225, 227, 262, 271, 272, 276–277, 291, 293–294, 299
- Gueï, Robert (general), 69–70, 74–75, 90–91, 113–114
- Houphouët-Boigny, Félix, 9, 27, 45–50, 53–56, 58–60, 63, 68–69, 173, 191, 200, 212–219
- Houphouëtism, houphouëtist, 38–39, 41, 46, 48–50, 56, 57–60, 68, 75, 105, 126, 129–130, 138–139, 173, 212–215, 219, 231, 271
- ID4Africa, 23–24, 176, 177–178
- ID4D, 23–24, 165–168, 170–171, 173–174, 176, 177–180
- Ivoirité, 2–4, 8–12, 19, 36–37, 40, 41–42, 45–47, 50, 58, 63–72, 74, 78–79, 86, 88, 90–91, 93, 138, 143–144, 146, 154, 173, 185, 190–191, 196, 197, 209, 215–220, 225, 238, 239–240, 247, 248–249, 262, 272, 276–277
- Konaté, Diakalidia, 158–160, 178–179, 181–182, 253
- Koné, Al Mustapha (colonel), 76, 79, 80–81, 87, 262
- Koreki, Paul, 17–18, 53, 142, 144–145, 196–203, 220, 222, 224, 226
- Marcoussis (agreement), 9, 88, 89, 100–108, 111, 112, 116–117, 120–121, 131, 134–135, 141–145, 197–198, 201
- Mobile court(s), 16, 66, 87, 89–91, 95–96, 105, 108–110, 112, 113, 115–128, 131–132, 134–137, 143, 174–175, 180–181, 187–188, 273–274, 281–282, 312
- Moral economy, 7, 20, 46, 86, 149, 234, 235, 237–238, 242–243, 251, 253–255, 258–261, 267–268, 271, 281, 291–292, 299–309
- National identity card(s), 8–9, 25–26, 41, 56, 62–63, 65, 66, 70, 74, 78–79, 98, 112–113, 123–124, 126, 129–130, 136–137, 145, 154, 160, 166–167, 172–173, 185, 217–218, 228, 246, 262, 271, 273–274, 293–294, 306, 307, 310

- Nationalism, 46–48, 54–55, 60–63, 155–156, 173
- Naturalization, 16–17, 100, 102, 106–107, 120, 129, 141, 142, 147, 201–202, 214–218, 220–225, 228, 310
- Naturalize, 55, 68–69, 129–131, 153, 154, 156, 157, 165, 189–190, 197, 214–215, 218, 220–224, 227–228, 230
- Ouagadougou (agreement), 9, 88, 89–90, 100, 110–114, 116–117, 121–123, 125–127, 129–131, 134, 135–137, 143, 160, 174–175, 197–198, 227
- Ouattara, Alassane, 2–3, 9, 10–17, 19–20, 25–26, 35–36, 40, 41–42, 58, 60–63, 67, 68–77, 82, 84, 90–92, 94, 101, 103, 106–107, 119–120, 125–126, 137, 138–143, 147, 148–149, 151, 152–155, 157–160, 167–168, 172–175, 177–178, 191–193, 197, 202, 219, 227–228, 233–234, 238–242, 247, 254, 268–269, 271, 272, 276, 277–278, 292–293, 299, 307–308
- ONECI, 27–28, 34, 36–37, 62–63, 163, 165–166, 172–173, 178–180
- (Single) Party card, 56–57, 210–215
- Panopticon, panoptic, panopticism, 7–8, 35, 168, 171–172, 176, 278–291
- Patronage, 1–2, 33, 39–40, 46, 56–57, 87–88, 92, 105, 124–125, 127–130, 133, 135–136, 210–216, 219, 237–238, 244, 277–278, 281, 295
- Personhood, 30, 38, 178, 260, 265–267, 305–306
- Post-conflict, 2–4, 6, 9, 19, 33–35, 124–125, 136–138, 140, 174–175, 191–192, 254, 279, 307
- René Caillié, 31, 136–137, 179–180, 233, 234–235, 238, 246–247, 255
- RNPP, 2–3, 34, 139–140, 158–163, 168, 175–176, 179–180, 183–184, 231–232, 253–254
- Soro, Guillaume, 91–92, 95–96, 104–105, 110, 111, 120–123, 139, 141, 256–259, 261, 262–265, 267–270, 312
- Statelessness, 17–18, 20, 32–33, 53, 131, 133, 139–140, 143, 145, 174–175, 189, 190–204, 211–212, 214–215, 222–232, 306, 311
- Voltaic villages, 190–191
- Voltaics, 45, 213, 221–222, 310
- Wayoro, Séry, 79–81, 84, 87
- World Bank (WB), 2–3, 15, 16, 23–25, 27–28, 34, 75–76, 107–108, 159, 162–182, 196
- Zoro Bi, Epiphane, 53, 66, 74, 83, 84, 197

