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The Social life of IDs in Côte d'Ivoire:

A visual political ethnography

Visual Ethnography

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Abstract:

The photos proposed in our essay come from an ethnographic archive on identification practices in Côte d'Ivoire that we have set up in a long-term research. Côte d'Ivoire has offered us a particularly sensitive context for observing the relationships that connect identification and citizenship. Until the 1990s, the country was famous for its openness to the immigration of foreign laborers. Most of them took part in the cocoa plantation economy, their number raising up to the 28% of the total population in the Nineties. Between 2002 and 2011, however, the country was torn apart by the emergence of nationalism. In the ensuing political and social crisis, claims to the right to documents giving access to citizenship were countered by a fierce ethno-nationalist discourse, that saw identification as a way to 'unmask' the 'foreigners' surreptitiously seizing Ivorian nationality. Carrying fieldwork in the post-conflict period, we have witnessed the deployment of policies aimed at depoliticizing identification. Biometrics have been used as technological panacea aimed at overcoming the political connotations of identification. Ivorian society, however, seems to implicitly resist this process. Electronic technology of biometrics is countered with the a new popular material culture of paper and writing, namely by producing a multitude of self-made, unofficial, 'cards' enunciating the position of individual identities in the social space.

Keywords:

Identification; Registration; Biometry; Citizenship; Côte d'Ivoire

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The question of identification and identity document in Africa is a crucial issue that has long remained under-studied (Awenengo Dalberto, Banégas, Cutolo 2018; Awenengo, Banégas 2021). It is, of course, a central concern for the policemen of the Schengen area and all the administrations seeking to strengthen border surveillance of the EU fortress by identifying those who seek to reach it by any means. But it is also, and above all, a major citizenship issue in the African countries themselves, where millions of people remain undocumented and thus unable to access their social, economic and political rights. Many of the conflicts on the continent relate to this issue of rights, and involve the legal and political means of their recognition, first and foremost the documents by which they are evidenced (national identity cards, electoral cards, certificates of nationality, birth certificates, certificates of indigeneity, etc.). Côte d'Ivoire is a critical case study of these crisis of citizenship which, between 2002 and 2011, turned into a veritable "IDs war". For nearly 10 years, we have conducted fieldwork on this theme in order to revisit the 'Ivorian crisis' from the angle of identity documents and personal identification systems (Banégas, Cutolo, 2024 in press). Photography, which initially had a purely documentary and archival purpose, has gradually come to play an increasingly important role in our investigation of the social and political life of identity documents in Côte d'Ivoire.

Among the West African post-colonies, Côte d'Ivoire has long been portrayed as an extraordinary case of political stability and economic success. Renowned for being the world's leading producer of cocoa, the country was cheered by the agencies of transnational governance and privileged - but at the same time tightly controlled - by the former French colonial metropolis. Since the second half of the 1990s it has nevertheless been plagued by tensions and social struggles concerning citizenship and the redefinition of the imagined national community.

Indeed, from 1995 onwards, Ivorian society was heavily marked by the ethno-nationalist politics of '*ivoirité*' conceived by President Henri Konan Bédié with the contribution of the local academics and nationalist intellectuals (Cutolo 2010). In a country whose population was quite composite in terms of national and ethno-cultural belonging, the ideology of 'Ivorianness' sought to redefine the imagined national community by shaping it on the 'autochthonous' identity of the southern populations. This called into question not only the citizenship of those belonging to the ethnic groups populating the northern part of the country, but also the presence of immigrants (or descendants of immigrants), most of them coming from Burkina Faso and Mali.

These 'allocthonous' (according to the local definition), who made up almost a third of the population at the end of the Nineties, have been flowing into the country since the 1930s. This was the consequence of a developmental scheme conceived in colonial times and pursued even after independence (1960) by the President Felix Houphouët-Boigny. This scheme entrusted the exploitation of dense forest areas in the south to a labor force coming from the more densely populated northern territories, both national and cross-border (Chauveau, Dozon, 1985, 1987).

The success of this model, which has made Côte d'Ivoire a major producer of cocoa and tropical products, has had as its counterpart the dilution of national citizenship. President Houphouët-Boigny, himself a cocoa planter, became the protector of the 'foreigners' who came to the country to work and share the benefits of its natural capital. He encouraged them to actively participate in elections, at the time when his party, the PDCI, was the only one allowed in the national political arena. National identity cards were distributed to foreigners on these occasions. Later on, they will be accused to be "electoral cattle" by the opposition parties.

The transition to multipartyism (1990), the death of the old president (1993) and, above all, the limits reached by the expansion of cocoa plantations, with the competition for land that followed, undermined the colonial development model of the 'planter state' and the economic citizenship it offered *de facto* to foreigners. President Bedié, blowing on the fire of widespread social discontent, used the politics of *ivoirité* not only to gain consensus and legitimacy, but also to delegitimize the presence of his rival Alassane Ouattara in the electoral arena, by insisting on his 'Nordic' origins and his alleged 'dubious citizenship' (Dozon 1995; Le Pape, Vidal 2003).

The ensuing tensions led to the 1999 coup d'état and the ousting of Bedié. Subsequent elections in 2000 won by Laurent Gbagbo, a historical opponent of the development scheme described above, however, failed to create discontinuity and pacify the political context poisoned by *ivoirité*. In 2002, an armed rebellion tore the country in two parts: a southern part, controlled by the loyalist forces supporting Laurent Gbagbo; a northern part controlled by the insurgents. The latter were evidently in contact with Alassane Ouattara (Popineau 2022), a political entrepreneur well-connected to the network of international interests that weighs down on Côte d'Ivoire today as in the past.

The centrality of national citizenship in the context of the crisis, made of identification, i.e. recognising who was Avorian and who was not, a crucial issue. Identity cards, in their materiality, became an object of contention and, at the same time, a central element of the political imaginary. In a conflict that has been called 'the war of the who's who' (Marshall-Fratani 2006), the rebels explicitly declared that they were 'fighting for the documents', in order to emancipate the citizens of the north from the state of insecurity in which they had come to find themselves as a result of the politics of *ivoirité*. The 'patriots' who defended Gbagbo, for their part, spoke of an 'identification war' intended to detect the foreigners who, having come to the country to exploit its resources, also wanted to seize political power at the expense of the 'natives' through armed intervention, undermining national sovereignty (Banégas 2006, Dozon 2000).

The conflict ended in 2011. It was won first electorally and then militarily by Alassane Ouattara, thanks to the rebel militias supporting him and French military support. The issue of identification, however, remained central to the public space, albeit in a new key. Following the destruction of civil registry archives in the course of the war, and above all in order to definitively close a decade in which the *Carte Nationale d'Identité* had become a fiery political issue, administrative reforms were carried out in order to modernize civil status services and create a new digitalized and centralized database of identities: the *Registre national des personnes physiques (RNPP)*. Technically based on biometric identification, i.e. taking fingerprints and other bodily traits as the basis of legal identity, the registry creates a 'unique national identification number' for each citizen.

Thus, the post-war period took the form of a major identity reset process, structured on the basis of the new biometric technologies, promoted by the World Bank as a panacea capable of simultaneously resolving the shortcomings of the civil state, securitising the identities of nationals by preventing their 'theft' (in french, *bradage*) by foreigners, preventing further conflict, and finally supporting development. Biometric reforms were supposed to make a clear cut with the past.

Biometric identification is radically opposed to the social forms of recognition of the person. It does not envisage recognition by the Other, and operates instead through electronic machines capable of scanning, coding and reading bodily signs. Creating an 'Identity without person' (Agamben 2007), and removing it from the social dynamics of recognition, biometrics consequently removes identification from the political sphere (Cutolo 2017). This is particularly evident in a country like Côte d'Ivoire, where the technological nature of biometric devices breaks with the interpretative and enquiring attitude shown by the policemen at roadblocks – and by ordinary citizens in many contexts - of reading the first name, the family name and the place of birth of the bearer of an ID card in order to discover his/hers 'ethnic' identity often with the intention of 'unmasking' his 'real' nationality (Zoro-Bi 2004. 2008).

It has been observed that one of the most relevant implications of biometric identification lies in its 'de-linguistic' power (Breckenridge 2021); that is, in the erasing of the active, contractual, language-driven dimension of identification and recognition that is found in the 'paperwork' of the documentary state. In the latter, declarations, testimony, depositions are written on paper by civil servants in order to produce official truth concerning identity, status, recognition. In the working of biometric identification, instead, only a passive, muted, presence of the body is required for stating truth. Our ethnographic research has used this conceptual (and inherently political) opposition in order to bring to light the specific features of biometric identification, comparing it to the materiality of 'papers'. The latter, however, continue to play a fundamental role in attesting civil identities and in situating them in the social space. This is all the more important when it is considered that, in Côte d'Ivoire as elsewhere in Africa, the production of 'papers' isn't reserved to the state, but it is appropriated in peculiar ways "from below". Cards of membership to 'chiefdoms', to urban ethnic groups, to home-village associations, to traditional healers associations, to associations of residents of precarious shantytowns or of 'victims of toxic waste', cards attesting the status of demobilized combatants, of belonging to 'patriotic movement', of traditional hunter brotherhoods etc. The kinds of handcrafted 'cards' are many, and of course we cannot describe them here; what matters, in our ethnographic frame, is the contrast opposing the materiality of those popular 'bureaucratic writings of the self' (Awenengo Banegas 2021) to the digital abstraction of biometric identification. Indeed, compared to the latter, handcrafted, unofficial cards express specific claim of recognition in the social space. In many ways, they seem to continue at another level the logics of belonging through which nationality is imagined by many Ivorians - where belonging to one of the 'autochthonous ethnic groups' is required for being recognized as a citizen. These "papers from below", documenting voluntarily membership to associations – such as the home-town association or the 'chiefdom associations' - engender particular declensions of belonging. In some way, they reconstruct the political space enunciating the identities inhabiting it. They oppose the logics of biometric IDs with a mechanical, social, resistance. They respond, as a form of popular creativity, to the social engineering projects that have invested the country in the years of post-crisis reconstruction, trying to depoliticize identification.

We are confronted here with the same kind of popular creativity that has allowed Ivorians to appropriate the bureaucratic state since colonial times, tuning it to their needs through a multitude of practical arrangements. Concerning identification, one of the best known arrangements consists in making different registrations of the same individual under different names. This is often done in order to lower one's age by a few years and thus making him able to overcome the limits of age and participate to recruitment into the state sector or into a military corps. Another well-known practice is that of exchanging identity cards between siblings or cousins, often under the injunction of family elders, in order to make school enrolment possible for those who have grown too old to do so (Banegas, Cutolo, 2024 *in press*).

The individuals that have changed their legal identity using this kind of arrangements (there are many others that we cannot summarize here) are jokingly referred to in Côte d'Ivoire as '*René Caillé*'. Reference is made here, of course, to the well-known French explorer of the 19th century who, thanks to his mastery of the Arabic language and a forged identity, managed to reach and intrude in Timbuktu. At the same time, "*rené*" means also "reborn", alluding to the rebirth of the subject at the registrar with a new legal identity and with a younger age. These illegal but widespread tactics, meant at overcoming bureaucratic and administrative rules, are known by everyone. It might be said that they are part local 'cultural intimacy' (Herzfeld 1997) concerning local relations with bureaucracy. It is said that every family as a René Caillé among its members.

We are confronted, here, to a popular mode of appropriation of the State that the biometric reform, sponsored by the *World Bank* and implemented by the *Office National de l'Etat Civil de l'Identification* (ONECI), have to deal with. Moreover, the new identification technologies have to struggle also against the logic of social mediation and the corruption taking place in the production of "papers". This is illustrated by the ever-active role of so-called "*margouillat*" middlemen who, in return for payment, help citizens in a hurry to make the "nationalities come out" or to establish a "René Caillé", a falsified birth certificate. In Côte d'Ivoire, document forgery has become so widespread that the Ouattara government has decided to "legalize fake IDs" by passing a law (in November 2018) granting amnesty to all persons using forged civil status documents to make use of this law. which aimed to break out of the documentary informality. But in fact, very few citizens have decided to do so. The (biometric) irony of History remains nonetheless to be underlined: Laurent Gbagbo had dreamed of this: the overhaul of civil services was at the heart of his project of "Refondation nationale", which aimed to break out of the documentary informality of Houphouëtisme. Alassane Ouattara did so, but by legalizing precisely this informality!

The photographs presented below illustrate the complexity and ambivalence of this post-conflict political process of reordering social and legal identities. As stated in the introduction to this text, photography had not been conceived as a central tool in our initial research design, and in fact it remained relatively marginal in our corpus of data, which consisted mainly of interviews and archives. Our surveys in Côte d'Ivoire were part of a collective, comparative project entitled 'The social and political life of identification documents in Africa', which brought together some fifteen researchers working in a dozen countries on the continent¹. As part of the project, it was planned to compile a comparative database of identity papers and personal documents collected in each of the countries surveyed. But for technical and legal reasons, linked in particular to privacy issues, this ambition was abandoned. The members of the team did, however, put together a body of photographs for documentary purposes, without any particular aesthetic or artistic vocation, or even any technical skills - none of the members of the project had any photographic training, or even adequate equipment. Two amateur photographers in the team went out into the field with their Canon and Nikon, but most of the others captured images with their smartphones. A photo exhibition and a video web series were produced from these comparative investigations².

In Côte d'Ivoire, we used both types of camera to build up our corpus: the majority of images were taken with a telephone, on the spot, during informal exchanges, interviews or ethnographic observations that had not been conceived as moments of photographic documentation. This was a rather 'opportunistic' form of photographic documentation, linked to the opportunities that presented themselves to us. In a minority of cases, we mobilised the photographic approach as an integral part of the survey, with a much more substantial and visible technical set-up: Nikon D90 reflex and Nikon Z50 hybrid cameras, several lenses, including a 50mm fixed focal length 1.8 which was used for most of the

1 <https://piaf.hypotheses.org>

2 <https://www.science-spo.fr/ceri/en/content/identification-and-citizenship-africa-presenting-book-and-project.html>

photos presented in this article. In this second configuration, our approach was twofold and based on a form of division of fieldwork: Armando Cutolo conducted the interviews and ethnographic observation, while Richard Banégas was behind the Nikon viewfinder. The presence of the photographer brought a different rhythm, if not a different spirit, to the survey. This was the case, for example, with the surveys we carried out at the offices of the National Identification Office in the commune of Yopougon in Abidjan, or in the sub-prefecture of Bouaflé in central Côte d'Ivoire. Whole days were spent on these premises, where our presence gradually became routine, enabling us to photograph the work of the agents in complete confidence and transparency. In other situations, it was less easy, if not impossible, to photograph the activities of our interlocutors: for example, during our interviews with former rebels or demobilised militiamen, who were very angry with the government, or with the “margouillats” who conducted their corrupt “business” clandestinely.

“Identifying the mass”

In Africa, where about half the population is “undocumented” according to the World Bank, biometrics are seen not only as a technology for monitoring migration flows, but also as the promise of better governance, transparent elections and access to rights for the “invisible”, with no legal identity. New identification technologies have become a huge international business. This “ID-ology” of liberal “emergence” is however far from succeeding in its bid to modernize the state and achieve social inclusion. It even sometimes produces new forms of exclusion (cf. Mauritania, Kenya, South Africa, North Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, among others) and renewed tension around the issues of citizenship.

In Côte d'Ivoire, new technologies of identification have been presented as a central tool to end the “ID war” of the 2000's. Ouattara's government implemented ambitious reforms to “identify the mass”. During our field research, we spent time with administrative teams and civil servants in charge of registering people by biometric means. Photographs #1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 give an insight of their daily identification work.



Photo 1 An employee of Côte d'Ivoire's *Office national d'identification* (ONI), wearing an official ONI T-shirt, works on the biometric registration of people at ONI offices in Yopougon, one of Abidjan's most densely populated communes. When we visited it, the entire ONI team in Yopougon, made up of around thirty agents, were wearing these T-shirts calling for the “mass identification” that the Ouattara government has been carrying out since the end of the war.



Photo 2-3 In a room of Bouaflé sous-préfecture (center Côte d'Ivoire), biometric suitcases of the *Office national d'identification* (ONI) are used by the local ONI's team to register individuals. Facial (#1) and fingerprint (#2) biometric data are captured into a national database which is supposed to eradicate ID forgery and make much more reliable legal identities.



Photo 4 Biometric technologies are supposed to dematerialize database and registries; they bet on digital and mathematical recognition to identify individuals through their body traces. But these biometric identities need to connect to legal and social identities which are encapsulated into civil registries, national identity cards and other IDs. In photograph #4, a civil servant in Bouaflé ONI's office enters the civil status and personal data of a person applying for a new biometric identity card into a register. After this long bureaucratic red tape, the biometric registration can really start. Although theoretically opposed, in practice digital technologies of identification do not make a clear cut with the documentary state bureaucracy.

Biometric identification and the documentary State

The project to “biometrize” identities runs up against many material, economic and political obstacles. In Côte d'Ivoire, the cost (5,000 CFA francs, about €8) of the new biometric cards is experienced by many citizens as an intolerable “toll on nationality”. The resources of civil services contrast sharply with the new identification technologies, underlining the extent to which the utopia of a biometric state must be reconciled with the realities of the documentary State.



Photo 5 In the premise of Bouaflé *sous-préfecture*, the office of civil registry is just next door of the ONI biometric registration office. The desk of the civil registry officer in charge of issuing the old national identity cards is in harsh contrast with the display of digital technologies of identification. Behind the desk, two ancient typewriter and hundreds of files gathering dust on shelves, plus an old filing cabinet for storing cards.



Photo 6-7 At the counter of Bouaflé civil registry, people wait for the issuance of a birth certificate and other legal documents which are mandatory for the biometric registration process of creating new identity cards. A huge gap of technical means seems to oppose the biometric portable suitcases of the *Office National de l'Identification*, on the one hand, and the antique typewriter of the civil registry on the other. But actually, these technologies of identification are closely intertwined and deeply embedded in social and political relations.

National IDs waiting for their owners

Despite the modernisation of identification systems and the creation of a dedicated Office, Ivorian identity cards are produced with great delay, forcing people to travel with identity certificates that are valid for one year and have to be paid for. Their delivery is also uncertain, with thousands of ID cards sometimes waiting for their owners for years.



Photo 8 National biometric IDs waiting for their owners in the offices of the ONI, sub-prefecture of Bouaflé, Côte d'Ivoire, 2019



Photo 9 A civil servant looking for a national biometric IDs to be delivered to its owner in the offices of the ONI, sub-prefecture of Bouaflé, Côte d'Ivoire, 2019



Photo 10 National biometric IDs waiting for their owners in the offices of the ONI, Yopougon (Abidjan), Côte d'Ivoire, 2019

Documenting “people at risk of statelessness”

Since the early 2000s, ambitious international campaigns have been rolled out to enable the recognition of the rights of the estimated 10 million “people at risk of statelessness” throughout the world. Côte d'Ivoire is considered by the UNHCR as one of the top countries most affected by this phenomenon. In the Bouaflé region, people originating from the current Burkina Faso were settled by the colonial administration in the 1930s. Under the single-party regime, their nationality was hardly called into question: the PDCI card (photograph # 12) served as a pass and guaranteed access to rights - including voting rights - under the patronage system in force at the time. Since the 1990s, their citizenship has been constantly disputed. The political discourse of “ivoirité” and the war have accentuated their marginalization. In 1995, however, a collective naturalization decree (which the imam of Tenkodogo is holding in his hands in photograph # 11) was issued to enable the recognition of the nationality of 8,133 people. But this was not enough to lift the suspicion of these citizens with Burkinabe roots, who were sometimes perceived as the “fifth column” of the rebellion. After the war, the Ouattara government and the UNHCR proceeded to internationalize and de-politicize their situation by reclassifying these discriminated citizens as “people at risk of statelessness”.



Photo 11 Issa Boundaogo, imam of Tenkodogo village, near Bouaflé sub-prefecture, holds a rare issue of the 1995 presidential decree of naturalization published in the *Journal Officiel*.



Photo 12 A citizen of Garango, a “burkinabè village” near Bouaflé, shows an old party membership card (right) and an old membership card of an association of people coming from the former Haute-Volta, now Burkina Faso (left).



Photo 13 A certificate of nationality, issued in Abidjan, in accordance with due process of law. A long bureaucratic process which can be accelerated with the help of brokers, nicknamed “margouillats” (lizards), who deal with corrupt civil agents to get out legal documents from the Court. Certificates of nationality, the most wanted documents, are considered to be “kamikaze papers”, very difficult to obtain even by corruption.

Identifying and enrolling the dozos as auxiliary forces

In Côte d'Ivoire, alike in other conflicts in Western Africa, the traditional hunters dozos, heirs to the Mandingo empire, became auxiliary police forces and even an armed faction of the rebellion. After the war, at the state's urging, the dozos' brotherhood associations undertook to register and identify their members, in order to control their mobility and their criminal tendencies. The thousands of members registered in their databases are a useful resource in the internal competition between brotherhoods and a lever for public recognition. This process of identification of the dozos bears witness to the strength of the state imaginary and of biometric “ID-ology” even within social spheres that are a priori the most reluctant to legal-rational bureaucratic.



Photo 14 A card of a dozo, member of the FEACODOCI brotherhood of hunters, municipality of Abobo, Abidjan, 2014. This card displays the various activities of dozos, both vigilantes, planters and healers. The most striking is the mention of a "parrain" (godfather or sponsor): Ahmed Bakayoko, the then Minister of Interior and Defense. Most of dozos' brotherhoods are involved in political patronage networks.



Photo 15 A card of a dozo, member of the Benkadi brotherhood of hunters, municipality of Yopougon, Abidjan, 2020. New dozo cards mimic biometric national IDs.



Photo 16 Registry of identification of Binkadi dozo brotherhood, municipality of Yopougon, Abidjan, 2020

Issuance of association cards and urban reinvention of the chiefdom

With the rise of the biometric state, the social person does not fade away before legal identity, as the philosopher Giorgio Agamben assumed. The individualizing and de-politicizing logic of the biometric state 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 social space of knowledge and recognition. Here, the card attests of the membership of an association in the “Jerusalem Abobo Doumé” district of the commune of Yopougon, in Abidjan, bringing together Agni people coming from the Anno region.

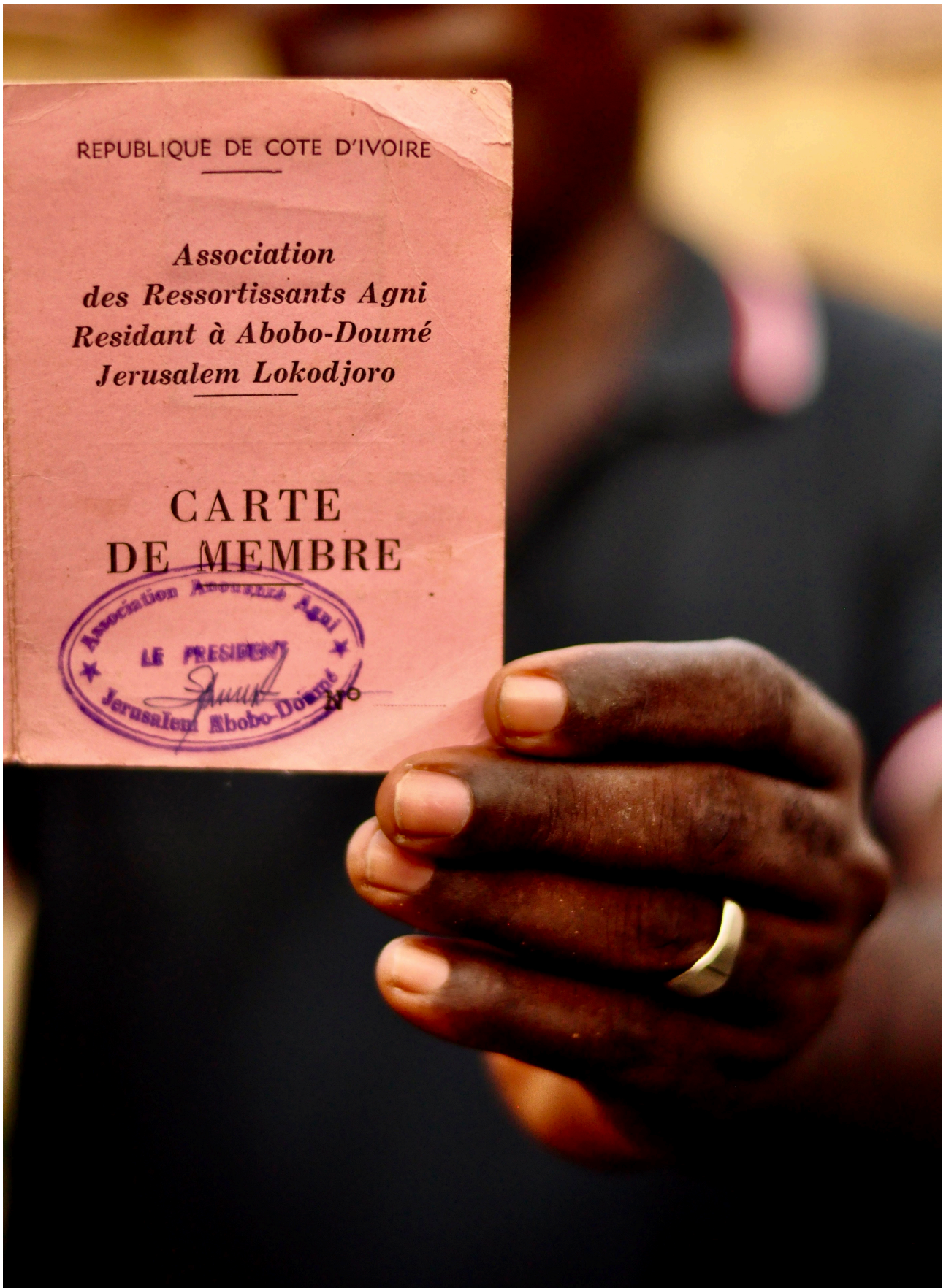


Photo 17 Membership card of an association of people coming from the Anno region, municipality of Yopougon, Abidjan, 2018

JEUNESSE D'AKEVILLAGE COCODY II PLATEAUX



LETTRE D'ADHESION

Je soussigné(e), M., Mme, Mlle Don Akei Sosthème Patrick
Né(e) le 01 Jan 1978 à Montez (Abepe) Fonction Animateur
Commune de résidence Cocody II Quartier de résidence Akévillage
Lot N° 5005 Contact 05-19-22-79 nationalité Ivoirienne

m'engage par la présente à :

- Respecter toutes les obligations prévues dans les statuts et règlement intérieur ;
- Ne poser aucun acte de nature à nuire aux intérêts pécuniaires et moraux du quartier sous peine d'assumer personnellement les conséquences ;
- me soumettre en cas de manquement, à toute sanction ou décision prise à mon encontre par les responsables.

La présente lettre d'engagement marque mon adhésion sans réserve aux principes et objectif du quartier.

Elle est délivrée pour servir et valoir ce que de droit.

Fait à Abidjan le 21 Août 2007

S.A.A.S. Dossier n° 55400

Vu pour légalisation de la

Signature de Mr. Don Akei Sosthème Patrick

Signature du candidat ci-contre

Signature et cachet du Président

C.N.I. N° 211 04 12008 Aff n° 1002-0838

Delivré par Police

a Aghelwaho

COCOD: 14 15 MAI 2008 200

CHEFFERIE D'AKEVILLAGE
Cocody II Plateaux
Tel: 05 19 22 79 / 05 32 06 05
LE RESPONSABLE

LE MAIRE

YVES AMBEE
Maire

Photo 18 Letter of membership of a new urban "village" built from scratch by Young patriots pro-Gbagbo militants who chased away people from migrant descent who settled in the Gobelet slum area of the rich Cocody municipality, Abidjan, 2014.

Identifying the victims of an ecological scandal

In September 2006, a European ship illegally dumped highly toxic waste in working-class areas of Abidjan. The victims of this ecological and political scandal have formed associations and taken the company to court in London and Amsterdam. Odile Gonkanou, the Chairperson of one of these associations, has single-handedly identified more than 20,000 victims in the back room of her maquis located in the “cité rouge” of Cocody, which is overflowing with files and records. To avoid suspicions of false declarations, the association cross-references various numbers and official “codes”, takes the victim’s ten fingerprints, civil status documents, and medical certificates, to draw up “forgery-proof” cards that are kept in a “validation pouch”.



Photo 19 Membership cards of a toxic waste victims’ association (AVODETCI), Cocody municipality, Abidjan, 2017



Photo 20 Validation pouch of the identity of victim of toxic waste, AVODETCI association, Abidjan, 2020

Militant cards: passports for political and moral recognition

In Côte d'Ivoire, cards certifying membership of a party or of a political association have historically played an important and peculiar role. During the 30 years of the one-party political regime (1960-1990), the card of the *Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI) was the most widely used identity document in the country. It was distributed capillary from the towns to the most remote villages, where the chiefs were required to purchase a certain annual quantity to resell to each of the adult residents. The PDCI cards attested a de facto economic and political citizenship that did not coincide with national legal-political one. In fact, they could (and had to) also be obtained by foreigners residing in the country. Multi-partyism, of course, radically changed this state of affairs. The 'political' cards were multiplied, while the *Carte Nationale d'Identité* (CNI) became the main document certifying citizenship. However, the intense production and widespread use of 'political identity cards' shows how they continue to work not only as a complementary recognition document but also as means of attesting to the moral credit of those who have fought for a cause with. They could be defined as 'moral credit cards' legitimating the demand for recognition of their bearers.

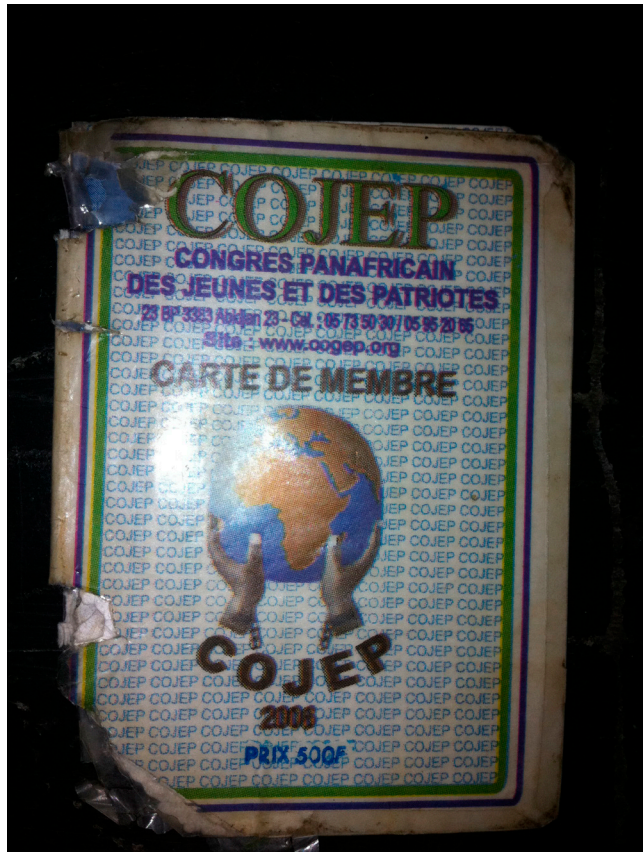


Photo 21-23 Young patriot Sorbonne card.

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