

DANGEROUS PURSUITS: HUNTER ASSOCIATIONS (*DONZO TON*) AND NATIONAL POLITICS IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Thomas J. Bassett

Since the 1990s initiated hunters (Jula: sing. *donzo*, pl. *donzow*) and their associations (*donzo ton*) have become increasingly visible in national political and social life across West Africa.¹ *Donzow* play a prominent role as private security guards in rural and urban areas of Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso (Bassett, 1999; Hagberg, 1998: 121–6; Hellweg, 2001), as militia men fighting alongside government troops in Sierra Leone's civil war (Richards, 1996: 166–83; *Figaro*, 12 May 2000), as auxiliaries to defence forces operating along unstable borders of Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, and as conservation agents in protected areas and natural resource management projects in Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso (Caspary, 1999: 108; Leach, 2000; Petit, 2000: 400–8).² The culture and history of hunter associations in the Mande diaspora have been the subject of numerous studies (Bird and Kendall, 1987; Cashion, 1984; Cissé, 1964, 1994; McNaughton, 1982). However, with the exception of the *kamajor* of Sierra Leone, comparatively little has been written about the role of Mande and Mande-influenced hunter associations in contemporary politics. Taking the case of Côte d'Ivoire, I argue that the revitalisation of the *donzo ton* is linked to the combined effects of game depletion and a dysfunctional state in a context of economic and political crisis. While game depletion signifies a decline in hunter status, protecting communities from crime and other malevolent forces enhances their reputation as powerful social actors. Economic crisis, high crime rates, and staggering unemployment provide a secular backdrop to the widespread employment of hunters as rural and urban security guards. Their effectiveness in

THOMAS J. BASSETT is Professor of Geography at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He is the author of *The Peasant Cotton Revolution in West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire, 1880–1995* (2001) and co-editor of *Land in African Agrarian Systems* (1993) and *African Savannas: global narratives and local knowledge of environmental change* (2003).

¹ *Donzo* (*donso*, *dozo*) in Jula or Bamana refers to a hunter who has been initiated into the mystical brotherhood of the hunter's association (*donzo ton*) in Mande and Mande-influenced societies. In northern Côte d'Ivoire, hunters of both the Mande Jula and the Mande-influenced Senufo ethnic groups belong to the same *donzo ton*. Non-initiated hunters are simply identified as *kongosogo fagalarw* (Jula: 'the killers of bushmeat'). Unless noted otherwise, I use Jula terms for hunting association activities in this article.

² The international dimension of hunter associations is also receiving recognition, as witnessed by the meeting of scholars from six West African nations in Mali in January and February 2001 to discuss the 'importance of hunter brotherhoods, their long history, and the roles they occupy in the modern world' ('Rencontres des chasseurs de l'Ouest Africain', <http://www.culture.gov.ml>).

reducing crime is popularly credited to their spiritual expertise, notably the possession of mystical powers and potent amulets. Because they generally use these special powers for the benefit of society, the *donzow* are widely respected by the general public in their role as crime fighters. However, a concern that some *donzow* might use their prowess for socially disruptive ends (crime, *coups d'état*) produces some fear and ambivalence towards the invigorated *donzo ton*. This is especially true of government officials, who have alternatively embraced and restricted the *donzow*'s activities for fear they constitute a parallel armed force that one day might rise up against the state. I situate this ambivalence and its repercussions for the *donzo ton* movement over the period 1990–2001 in the shifting positions of successive governments that have sought to control *donzo* activities for largely political purposes.

Africanist scholars have written widely on what appears to be a revival of 'traditional' religious beliefs and practices in the context of contemporary social, political, and economic change in sub-Saharan Africa. Far from representing Africans as exotic peoples clinging to traditional beliefs in the face of modernising forces, this literature focuses on the ways that both ordinary and extraordinary people seek to empower themselves and 'to assert a measure of control over worlds often perceived to be rapidly changing' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993: xiv). This resurgence in cults is especially strong in countries where the secular state apparatus is dysfunctional (Geschiere, 1997, 1998). As Ellis and ter Haar suggest, religious revivals are particularly common in countries 'where the state is unable to fulfil its expected functions in regard to the law and public order' (1998: 193). In cases where priests, prophets, *marabouts*, and other spiritual experts are able to use their special powers to bring order to a chaotic world, they are capable of attracting a large and potentially politically important following. The broad appeal and expansion of the *donzo ton* in Côte d'Ivoire during the 1990s is linked in large part to hunters' success in deploying their esoteric knowledge to control crime and thus restore some order and stability where public law enforcement has failed to do so.

The Ivoirien case is linked to the revitalisation of Mande hunter societies across the West African region, in which states and aid donors seek the services of hunters to combat a variety of social, political, and environmental problems (crime, insurgencies, insecure boundaries, biodiversity loss). As Melissa Leach shows in the case of Guinea, the structural-functionalist tendency to view indigenous organisations as unchanging 'traditional' institutions that can be reinforced and built upon to implement conservation and development projects and national security programmes overlooks the diversity of these groups and how their objectives might conflict with those of their sponsors (Leach, 2000). This view also fails to consider how these organisations are transformed as a result of their interactions with the state and development agencies. The Côte d'Ivoire case illustrates how the politicisation of hunter associations changed the *donzo ton* from an organisation that assisted a dysfunctional state in restoring public order to one that took up arms against the state in the context of heightened

political instability. In the end, the basic *donzo ton* goal of securing employment for its members in the booming private security sector conflicted with the state's goal to contain the *donzo ton* to its 'original cultural and geographical sphere' for political purposes. I show how this scalar politics has been achieved through the government's suppression of *donzo ton* activities in Côte d'Ivoire's major cities. The shifting geographical scale of the *donzo ton* from the regional to the national level and then back to the regional scale demonstrates how scale is produced through social, economic, and political processes which are in turn shaped by scalar configurations (Delaney and Leitner, 1997; Marston, 2000; Swyngedou, 1997).

The following section discusses the origins of *donzow* knowledge and power in relation to religious beliefs, initiation into the *donzo ton*, and hunting. This is followed by an examination of *donzo* identity within the context of game depletion. I then look at the creation of a national hunters' association (Binkadi) within the deepening economic and political crises of the early 1990s. Subsequent sections examine the activities of the *dozon ton* movement during four different administrations, while the conclusion points to the lessons of these dangerous pursuits for both hunters and the state in West Africa. This study is based on field research at multiple sites in Côte d'Ivoire, ranging from the village level (Kalikaha) to major urban areas (Bouaké and Abidjan), the reading of Côte d'Ivoire newspapers, and discussions with colleagues in the United States, Europe, and Côte d'Ivoire.

DONZO KNOWLEDGE/POWER

The *donzow* are reputed to possess the ability to negotiate the spiritual world of the bush, where they hunt wild animals and collect plants for the preparation of medicines and amulets. Bush spirits (Jula: *jinèw*; Senufo: *tugubélé*) reside among the rocks and forested slopes of plateaux and inselbergs and in small forest islands in the savanna. They are viewed largely as ambivalent forces that are capable of both kind and vengeful acts. Humans are intruders into the domains of these spirits. One hunter compared the relationship between bush spirits and wild animals to livestock owners and cattle. The bush spirits herd wild animals as if they were their domesticated animals. Any attempt to exploit their space (e.g. establishing a settlement, hunting, farming, extracting natural products) requires that sacrifices be made to appease these place-specific spirits. If such rituals are not performed, intruders and their kin risk misfortune (poor harvest, illness). It is through initiation into the hunters' association (*donzo ton*) that hunters learn how to minimise these dangers.

In addition to placating bush spirits, hunters must also learn how to protect themselves from the vital forces (*nyama*) that inhabit all living and even some non-living things. When an animal is killed, its *nyama* is released and, if not controlled, can be very harmful to the hunter and, by extension, his family. Some animals contain more or less of this vital force. For example, the duiker, anteater, and hippopotamus are known

to possess particularly potent amounts of *nyama* (Cissé, 1964: 205). The danger of hunting is not necessarily related to the size and ferocity of a particular animal. It is relative to the amount of *nyama* the animal possesses. As Patrick McNaughton notes:

Many of the wilderness's more delicate and vulnerable animals are the ones that possess the largest stores of *nyama*, which protects them from some of the hazards human beings present. Duikers, for example, the smallest antelopes in the bush, are believed to be so full of this life force that they are immensely dangerous to kill. Powerful Mande hunters therefore kill them as often as they can, to demonstrate their prowess as masters of the bush and masters of the energy of action. Indeed, each time they succeed their own power grows. [1988: 16–17]

Only hunters possessing the knowledge/power to control these animals' life forces can hunt them without experiencing adverse consequences. As McNaughton indicates, a hunter's personal *nyama* increases in proportion to the number and types of animals he successfully kills.

Figure 1 illustrates this circulation of power that characterises the relationship between hunting and the flow of *nyama* in the world. A prerequisite to 'seeing' and eventually killing animals is linked to a hunter's arcane knowledge and management of these occult forces. A



FIGURE 1 The *donzo* circulation of power

failure to see game may be explained as resulting from ineffective amulets or medicines, ritual oversights, or not following the hunters' code of conduct (Cissé, 1964; Hellweg, 2001; Sidibé, 1998). Hunters believe that animals, like them, know how to use plants for magical purposes such as becoming invisible. Just as a hunter selects and prepares medicines and amulets to ensure a successful hunt, an animal grazes/browses certain plants to shield itself from hunters and other wild animals. Thus a hunter may not see game because his mystical powers are not as strong as those of his prey. In summary, the process of hunting and returning to the village with game demonstrates to others that the hunter possesses the knowledge and skills to undertake these precarious activities. The fact that hunters repeatedly ply the dangerous spiritual world of the bush enhances their status. The possibility that a hunter might use his special powers to inflict harm on fellow humans induces most people to maintain a respectful demeanour in the presence of a *donzo*. In the past, hunters also played important social and political roles as protectors of communities against warriors and bandits and were elite soldiers in pre-colonial armies (Cissé, 1964: 189).

A hunter's clothes are an important sign and source of his knowledge and mystical power (Figure 2). Cashion (198: 135–64) and McNaughton (1982) detail the variety of shirts, trousers and hats worn by hunters and the many amulets which impart power to them. Each amulet has its unique magical properties. Some protect a hunter from the *nyama* of a specific animal, while others might protect their wearer from knife wounds and even make them invulnerable to bullets. It is widely believed that hunters possess the ability to become invisible and transform themselves into elements of the landscape in order to approach their prey or escape danger more easily.

A hunter begins to acquire his spiritual and practical knowledge during his initiation into the *donzo ton*. Initiation is open to individuals from all social and ethnic groups. This contrasts with recruitment into the endogamous blacksmith, leatherworker, or praise singing (*griot*) groups into which one must be born. Nor is age important in determining seniority; what counts is how long one has been a member of the *donzo ton* (Travelé, 1928). Senior hunters (*donzoba*) of Kalikaha contrasted their initiation with those of the present generation of *donzow*. Just thirty years ago, initiation took place over a three-year period. During this time, apprentice hunters gave all their game to their teachers, who acted as if it was they, not their apprentices, who had successfully hunted. This was a public display of the successful transmission of knowledge/power from a *donzoba* to his apprentice. Today the initiation process has become greatly simplified. The standard initiation for contemporary *donzow* entails three basic steps: first, select a *donzo* who will introduce one to the *donzo ton*; second, give him a red rooster and twelve red kola nuts to make a sacrifice; and third, spend FCFA 1,000 (about US\$2) to obtain a membership card of the Binkadi hunters' association (see below). One senior hunter summed it



FIGURE 2 *Donzo* security guard employed by Abidjan hotel, June 2000

up by saying, 'Today, all you have to do is give a rooster to a *donzo*, buy a rifle, and kill animals and you call yourself a *donzo*.'³

While describing these changes in the initiation process and the range of activities in which the *donzow* participate, senior hunters commonly

³ Interview with T.T., 2 June 2000.

distinguished two types of *donzow*: true hunters (*kongosogo fagala donzow*, or game-hunting *donzow*) and hunter association hunters (*donzo ton donzow*, or simply *ton donzow*). As the names suggest, the main criterion for these distinctions is whether or not one hunts. 'Real hunters' (*donzow bèrè bèrè*) are experienced hunters who have distinguished themselves for their knowledge/power as hunters. In addition to hunting, some *donzow* are highly regarded traditional healers and diviners. *Donzo ton* hunters, on the other hand, typically stay in the village or city and engage in security work. They will likely possess a rifle but use it for security work rather than for hunting in the bush. These distinctions are made by the *donzow* themselves, who view *donzo ton* hunters as less knowledgeable about hunting and 'the way of the *donzo*' or *donzoya* (see below).

GAME DEPLETION AND HUNTER IDENTITY

Information on market hunting was collected in the village of Kalikaha,⁴ a community of some 3,200 people located in a sparsely settled zone 70 km from Korhogo (population 142,000), the principal city of the region. Data were gathered twice weekly when bushmeat vendors came to the village from Korhogo. Bushmeat merchants have regularly visited Kalikaha since the mid-1970s. They buy game at prices ranging from 25 per cent to 100 per cent higher than local prices. Demand for bush meat is high in Korhogo from African restaurant owners whose menus include game dishes. Game is also sold openly in the Korhogo central market area.⁵

Detailed information on the bushmeat trade was collected for two periods, 1981–82 and 1997–99. The type of information collected for these years included date of sale, game species marketed, a confidential hunter identification number, and selling price. Interviews with the top hunters of Kalikaha focused on hunting techniques, why certain animals were declining and others increasing in market sales, and the relationship between habitat change, hunting pressure, and species abundance. The number of hunters selling game did not significantly change between these two years.⁶ The research results point to significant pressure on wildlife populations, a finding that is supported by wider regional and national level research (Caspary, 1999).⁷

⁴ Kalikaha is a fictitious name used to protect informants from prosecution by Ivoirien authorities. Hunting was declared illegal in 1974, although farmers can shoot and trap animals if they are causing crop damage.

⁵ The commercial bushmeat circuit extends as far as Paris, where game can be purchased in shops in the Château Rouge *métro* stop area. A cane rat that sells for US\$5–US\$8 in Côte d'Ivoire fetches up to US\$50 in Paris (personal communication, Paris, 14 May 2001).

⁶ A total of forty-four hunters sold game to the merchant in 1981/82. They numbered forty-seven in 1997.

⁷ For a more detailed discussion on game depletion indicators and dynamics in the study area see Bassett (1999).

The evidence for game depletion is fourfold. First, the total number of animals sold to bushmeat merchants in Kalikaha dropped by nearly one-half between 1981 and 1997–99. Second, the top three species sold in 1981—grivet monkey (*Cercopithecus aethiops*, var. *sabaeus*), cane rat (*Thryonomys swinderianus*), and guinea fowl (*Numida melagris*)—had virtually disappeared by 1997–99. Third, there was a notable increase in the number of small game animals (Gambian rat, genet, hare) appearing in the 1997–99 markets. When asked why they did not market these animals in 1981–82, hunters replied that larger game was more plentiful then. As larger game became more scarce, hunters have focused on smaller mammals. Fourth, hunters spend more time hunting today but bring home less game. Hunters expressed more than a little frustration about this declining return to effort.

When asked to explain the decline in grivet monkeys, guinea fowl, and cane rats in the 1997–99 period, the top seven hunters of Kalikaha gave two general reasons. 'We have killed everything' and 'there are more fields and cattle in the bush, which has caused the animals to move away.'⁸ Cattle are widely viewed as major agents of habitat change. 'There used to be areas that were so closed in [by vegetation] you couldn't get inside them. That's where the animals hid. Cattle have opened up all of these areas, causing wild animals to flee.'⁹

Some hunters offered an alternative explanation for the decline in game numbers. They suggested that animal populations had not declined but that animals were simply 'hiding' better. One senior Senufo hunter stated that the bush spirits were angry at hunters for killing animals that they 'protect'. As a consequence, they were hiding them from hunters who could not 'see' them. He also remarked that bush spirits were angry at Fulbe pastoralists because their cattle were modifying the environments in which wild animals lived.¹⁰ For these two reasons, animals were being hidden from the view of hunters.

Game depletion diminishes hunter status and identity as knowledgeable and powerful individuals. Unsuccessful hunts are interpreted by many hunters as related to tense relationships with bush spirits and the failure of their esoteric knowledge and spiritual powers. One of the top Jula hunters of Kalikaha explained that, when you come back from a day's hunting with little to show for your efforts, 'it will seem that the medicine you use for hunting doesn't work, and people will think that the elders who gave it to you are not knowledgeable.'¹¹ Just as this crisis in *donzo* identity and livelihoods was unfolding, they were called upon to provide services to the community that would catapult them and their organisation into national prominence.

⁸ Interviews with hunters No. 4 and No. 28, Kalikaha, 28 June 1998.

⁹ Interview with hunter No. 2, Kalikaha, 2 July 1998.

¹⁰ Interview with S.T., Kalikaha, 21 July 1995.

¹¹ Interview with B.T., Kalikaha, 31 May 2000.

MOBILISATION AGAINST CRIME

Beginning in the early 1990s, initiated hunters (*donzow*) of northern Côte d'Ivoire began to take an active role in fighting the crime that was plaguing both urban and rural areas (*Fraternité Matin*, 30 July 1996, p. 12). Communities and travellers across the country were under siege by gun-wielding bandits who robbed merchants in broad daylight and stopped buses at night-time to rob passengers of their valuables. Local and national police forces (police, gendarmes,¹² forestry police, customs agents) were popularly viewed as fearful and ineffective in the face of this rampant crime (*Fraternité Matin*, 9 August 1996, p. 9). Assuming their historical role as community guardians, the *donzow* took up their muzzle-loaders and shotguns and began to patrol villages and towns and to man checkpoints along major intersections in order to stop the circulation of criminals in the north.

This *donzo*-led anti-crime movement began in the Odienné area of north-western Côte d'Ivoire, the cultural hearth of the Mande-speaking Malinke. In 1991, *donzow* in that region organised a chapter of Binkadi (a.k.a. Benkadi; Jula: 'Getting along is good'). The Binkadi hunters' association first emerged in Mali (Hellweg, 2001). After spreading to Côte d'Ivoire, other associations organised in Burkina Faso and Guinea (Petit, 2000: 402). The Ivoirien chapter of Binkadi called itself the Hunters' Association of Vandougou.¹³ Hunters joined in large numbers in part because possessing a Binkadi card was like having a gun permit. In the past, if a hunter carrying a rifle was stopped by a gendarme, he would have to pay a large fine because he had no permit. Now all that they had to do was produce their Binkadi card and they were left alone.

One of the first activities in which hunters became visibly involved was mediating conflicts between farmers and herders over crop damage. Uncompensated crop damage caused by Fulbe herds in local farmers' fields has been a major source of conflict between these groups since the early 1970s (Bassett, 1988). In the majority of cases, the field owner never received compensation for the damage, either because the trespassing herd had fled the region or because the subprefecture-based crop damage committee organised to resolve the problem was ineffective or corrupt.¹⁴ Hunters' ability to track cattle to the corrals of trespassing herds and their carrying arms resulted in higher rates of

¹² As in France, gendarmes are military personnel who serve as an armed police force in Côte d'Ivoire.

¹³ Hunters of the community of Vandougou in the subprefecture of Goulia in the Department of Odienné are credited with forming Binkadi, the first anti-crime hunters' association in the north. Reference to 'The Hunters' Association of Vandougou' appears on the membership cards distributed to dues-paying members.

¹⁴ When multi-party politics were sanctioned by the government in 1990, community-based crop damage committees affiliated with political parties were organised and began to compete with each other to resolve crop damage cases. Surveys with farmers on the issue of crop damage revealed the most satisfaction with *donzow*'s involvement in resolving crop damage cases.

compensation. The *donzow* were also very effective in reducing cattle theft in rural areas.

National crime rates soared between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s in the context of economic recession, high unemployment, and declining public-sector spending (Sindzingre, 2000). Armed robberies in Abidjan increased from 275 in 1980 to 5,784 in 1991. In an interview with *Jeune Afrique*, General Joseph Ehuney Tanny, head of the Côte d'Ivoire National Security Council, linked the crime wave to 'the economic crisis and uncontrolled immigration' (*Jeune Afrique*, 12–18 March 1997, pp. 30–3). In 1993, bandits were regularly holding up buses and private vehicles along major roads. It was not safe to travel at night. Criminals brazenly robbed people in broad daylight in the city of Korhogo. Police rarely responded to appeals for assistance. They had a reputation for racketeering and of being afraid of armed criminals. Desperate to restore order to a chaotic situation, government administrators (subprefects, prefects) mobilised the *donzo ton* as a crime-fighting force. In the Niofoin area, the subprefect convened the region's hunters and empowered them to patrol public streets with their hunting rifles. In the community of Kalikaha, where cattle theft was the most common crime, the village *donzo ton* organised seven groups of five to seven hunters each to man roadblocks on the outskirts of the village. Each group was responsible for doing guard duty one night per week from midnight to 5.00 a.m.¹⁵ Similar groups of *donzo* crime fighters were organised throughout the Korhogo region. In areas where the *donzow* patrolled neighbourhoods and thoroughfares, crime began to fall noticeably.

By the mid-1990s, the *donzow* were popularly acclaimed for having put an end to the crime wave in the north. As a result of their success, they received requests for their services from cities and towns across the country. In November 1994, government administrators of the subprefecture of Danane, near the Liberian border, requested the *donzow*'s assistance in halting crime in this area of Liberian refugee concentration (*Fraternité Matin*, 12 December 1995). Recognising a new employment opportunity, individuals from other ethnic groups (Baoulé, Bété, Guéré, Gourou, Yacouba) travelled to Korhogo to become initiated into the local hunters' society. Inspired by the Odienné-based 'Hunters' Association of Vandougou (Binkadi)', the Korhogo hunters decided to organise themselves and their new initiates into a national organisation called the 'Hunters' Association of the Greater North'. The Korhogo hunters announced that their association was open to anyone interested in fighting crime, hunters and non-hunters alike.¹⁶ New recruits received some training and took an oath

¹⁵ Guard duty ended at 5.00 a.m. because many people were getting up either to pray or to do household chores such as meal preparation.

¹⁶ The Korhogo-based hunters' organisation is linked to the Hunters' Association of Vandougou in that its members pay FCFA 1,000 to obtain a Binkadi card which proves they participate in a hunters' association.

before a secret power object that they would carry out their work in an upright manner.

Local police and administrative authorities initially welcomed this indigenous private security force and supported its activities. For example, despite not having gun permits, the *donzow* were permitted to carry arms openly in the streets while engaged in guard work. The chief of police of Korhogo praised the *donzow* for their part in reducing crime rates. One police officer referred to the *donzow* as a 'parallel force which complements our activities' (*Fraternité Matin*, 12 September 1997c, p. 19). If they found someone on the streets late at night, the person was taken to the police station if his or her reason for being out was suspect. Sometimes individuals were roughly handled or humiliated for being out past the hunter-imposed curfew. These abuses fuelled criticisms that the *donzow* were acting outside the law. Yet, despite these excesses, the *donzow*'s role in curbing crime and restoring peace was popularly acclaimed. Ordinary citizens particularly appreciated the *donzow*'s prompt response to calls for assistance. In sharp contrast, the police rarely showed up when called to a crime scene. Even police officers acknowledged that 'the population, instinctively first thinks of the Dozo before thinking of the police' (*ibid.*). As the *donzow*'s reputation grew, so did calls for private security work, and the *donzo ton* boomed.

ELECTORAL MANIPULATION, IVOIRITÉ POLITICS, AND CONTAINMENT

As the 1995 presidential and legislative elections approached, politicians tried to exploit the popularity of the *donzow* to boost their electoral campaigns. For example, Balla Keita, the former Minister of Scientific Research and personal adviser to Interim President Henri Konan Bédié, mobilised the Hunters' Association of the North to parade through the streets of Korhogo to show their support for the Bédié campaign. The government newspaper ran a story and photographs proclaiming that 10,000 hunters supported President Bédié and his government's policies. The since discredited president of the Hunters' Association of the North, Edouard Coulibaly, was quoted as saying that it was not by chance that the *donzow* had entered the national political scene. 'It was divinely authorised by the master hunters after a thousand and one nights of reflection . . .' (*Fraternité Matin*, 4 September 1995). However, interviews with *donzow* informants indicated that many hunters were unaware when they came to a meeting that it would turn into a political rally for Bédié. Since individual *donzo* support candidates from different parties, many resented being manipulated by the leadership of the Hunters' Association to march in support of the Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI).¹⁷

¹⁷ According to one informant who was present at the rally, many *donzow* left the gathering once they became aware of its overt political nature.

Ivoirité politics

In the months leading up to the 1995 presidential elections, the question of whether foreigners should be allowed to vote was hotly debated in the press as well as among presidential candidates. During the first multi-party elections, held in 1990, President Houphouët-Boigny extended the franchise to foreigners. Immigrants from Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea comprise more than a quarter of the population living in Côte d'Ivoire. Partly indebted to Houphouët-Boigny's open-border policy, and partly fearful that they would be forced to return home if he lost the election, foreigners voted overwhelmingly to return Houphouët to his seventh and final term. Opposition candidates cried foul and called for reform of the electoral law. Sensing that he had more to gain than to lose, Interim President Bédié proposed changing the electoral law that would give only Ivoirien citizens the right to vote. He also sought to prevent his main rival, Alassane Dramane Ouattara, of the Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR) party from running for election. At Bédié's bidding, the National Assembly passed an electoral law in December of 1994 that not only specified who could vote but also who could run for President. To be eligible, a candidate's parents had to have been born in Côte d'Ivoire. Although Ouattara held the post of Prime Minister during the last administration of Houphouët-Boigny, Bédié claimed that Ouattara's father was born in Burkina Faso. The 1995 presidential elections thus saw a deepening of the divide-and-rule politics which had begun during the first multi-party election in 1990 (Crook, 1997). This focus on who was an 'Ivoirien' became a national obsession for the remainder of the decade as Bédié tried to prevent Ouattara and the RDR party from gaining power.

It was within this context of competitive party politics that the ideology of *ivoirité* was born. First pronounced by President Bédié at the August 1995 PDCI congress, *ivoirité* was defined as a national cultural identity in the making. In Bédié's words, it was to be 'an original and fecund synthesis between our traditions and modernity' (Loucou, 1996: 23). The construction of this new identity was to be built upon a shared history and geography, and a common set of values that distinguished Ivoiriens ('us') from peoples of other countries ('them') (Koffi, 1996: 26-7). This national identity project was rationalised on three grounds: the preservation of cultural identity against the homogenising processes of globalisation; as a way to position the Ivoirien economy and people at the 'frontier' of development; and as a mechanism for building social cohesion for reasons of national security and defence of the nation against its enemies. The ideologues of *ivoirité* gave an urgency to their project in light of the 'hegemonic' and 'massive' presence of foreigners who 'threaten[ed] to break up the socio-economic equilibrium of the country' (Loucou, 1996: 20; Touré, 2000). The vagueness of such constructions was not lost on its critics, who quickly interpreted *ivoirité* as a poetic expression of xenophobic sentiments. To RDR partisans, it was a barely disguised attack on the eligibility of their party's leader for the office of the President. The focus of *ivoirité*'s ideologues on 'true Ivoiriens' (*Ivoirens de souche*) and the

pure blood eligibility requirements of the electoral law were unambiguous steps aimed at keeping the ruling PDCI party in power (Niangoran-Bouah, 1996: 49).

The main opposition parties protested Bedié's attempt to eliminate his primary opponent. Mass protests in Abidjan were repressed, and opposition party leaders and journalists were arrested and jailed. The two main opposition parties, the RDR and FPI (Front Populaire Ivoirien) joined to form the Republican Front (RF) and declared an 'active boycott' of the presidential election. To prevent the RF from disrupting the election, the government called upon *donzo* groups to guard ballot boxes at polling stations. The leaders of the Hunters' Association of the Greater North, Sériba Coulibaly and Edouard Coulibaly, travelled throughout the *département* to inform the *donzow* of the government's official request. On the morning of election day, an altercation between unarmed RDR supporters and *donzo* guards at a polling station in M'Bengué ended in the shooting to death of one person and the wounding of two others.¹⁸ Despite the claim to political neutrality made by the *donzo* leadership, the *donzow* had become entangled in national politics.

As Jean-Pierre Dozon notes, the 1995 electoral law had the 'pernicious effect' of redefining Ivoirien citizenship by creating two types of citizens: those whose parents were born in Côte d'Ivoire, and those who had only one or no parents born in the country (Dozon, 2000a). This distinction between 'true Ivoiriens' and 'others' specified differences not only between Ivoiriens and foreigners but also among Ivoiriens themselves. For example, distinctions were now being made between Ivoiriens who were born and lived in a particular region (autochthons) and those who were born in one part of Côte d'Ivoire but had migrated to another region (allogens). Such distinctions and ambiguities over who was and who was not a true Ivoirien would have important repercussions in determining who could legally register land under the terms of the new rural land law (Chauveau, 2000). The expulsion of Ivoirien citizens (e.g. Lobi) from forest areas in the second half of the decade indicated that *ivoirité* politics was being interpreted at the grass-roots level as vindicating the land rights of 'autochthons' over Ivoirien citizens born in other regions of the country. This definition of northerners as quasi-foreigners who could barely be distinguished from the Lobi, Senufo, and Jula ethnic groups of Mali and Burkina Faso was the outcome of Bédié's divide-and-rule politics enshrined in the national cultural identity project of *ivoirité*.

Containment

As the popularity and activities of the *donzo* organisation spread to all

¹⁸ Three years after the event, the main suspects in the case were still at liberty (*Le Jour*, 13 May 1998). The *donzow* were not asked to guard polling stations during the National Assembly elections held on 26 November or during the municipal elections held on 17 December 1995.

parts of the country, the Bédié government began to fear its political implications. In some places, *donzo*-state relations had grown tense. For example, hunters were expelled from the Danané region near the Liberian border in December of 1995 after the prefect decided that local police could ensure security among the population. The prefect alluded to altercations between the police and *donzow* a few months earlier and raised the issue that hunters had not been given a clearly defined mission by the administration. Government officials feared that this 'structured armed force' was beyond their control and ran 'the danger of its being exploited by undesirable movements or associations' (*Fraternité Matin*, 12 September 1997b). Interior Minister Emile Constant Bombet told a reporter of *Jeune Afrique Economie*, 'We have to see to it that the Dozo phenomenon does not turn against us like the Sierra Leone Kamajor' (*Jeune Afrique Economie*, 4-17 January 1999, p. 107).¹⁹

That the *donzow* might not throw their support behind the PDCI became all too apparent to the Bédié government in 1997 and 1998. At a PDCI political rally held in Bouaké in December 1997, more than 100 *donzow* were present (*Fraternité Matin*, 22 December 1997, p. 6). The press reported that the *donzow* 'entertained' the crowd by firing their muskets into the air. The ruling party became alarmed, however, when a much larger number of *donzow* appeared at a RDR party rally in Korhogo a few months later. The government realised that inviting the *donzo ton* into Ivoirien politics was a dangerous game. The *donzo ton*'s base in the north coincided with the area of strongest support for Alassane Ouattara. Bédié and his national security advisers must have feared that his political rival would draw upon the well-organised and armed *donzo ton* for support if his party's bid for the presidency was squashed by the *ivoirite* politics of the PDCI government.²⁰

In interviews with the government-aligned daily newspaper *Fraternité Matin*, the *donzo* leadership of Korhogo denied that their organisation supported a particular political party. Sériba Coulibaly, the president of the Korhogo hunters' association, noted that its membership was made up of members from all political parties, although he freely admitted that he and his family were '100 per cent PDCI'.²¹ My own interviews with the heads of *donzo ton* branches in Korhogo, Bouaké, and Abidjan

¹⁹ In fact the *kamajor* have fought alongside, not against, government troops in Sierra Leone in its protracted battle with rebel forces. See Richards (1996: 169-83).

²⁰ The government's 'reorganisation' of the *donzo* association's activities in the spring and summer of 1999 can be seen as a prelude to its repression of the RDR's political activities and leadership in the fall of 1999. The RDR meeting scheduled to take place in Dabou on 11 September 1999 was cancelled, owing to local PDCI party opposition to it taking place in that community. RDR Secretary General Henriette Diabate was arrested and jailed the following month for organising a demonstration in Abidjan which the government declared to be illegal. She was charged with inciting a riot.

²¹ It is worth noting, however, that the past president, Kouana Edouard (a.k.a. Edouard Coulibaly), had earlier stated that 'our brotherhood is mobilised for the chief of state' (*Fraternité Matin*, 18 August 1999).

in May–June 2000 confirmed this ‘official’ apolitical stance of the *donzo ton*. The political party of their employer was not a criterion in deciding for whom they would work. The *donzo* leaders (*donzotonkuntigi*) insisted that the association’s No. 1 goal was to receive government recognition of the association as a legitimate private security organisation.

Notwithstanding the commitment of the *donzo ton*’s leadership to political neutrality, the Bédié government felt that ‘it is good to codify what is permissible and what is not’ concerning the *donzo ton*’s involvement in private security work. Specific concerns about the *donzo ton* as a potentially destabilising political force led the Ivoirien National Security Council and Ministry of the Interior to examine more closely ‘the delicate question of the *dozo*’ (*Fraternité Matin*, 12 September 1997a, p. 19). While deliberations took place in the Ministry of the Interior over the legal status of *dozon ton* organisations like the Hunters’ Association of the Greater North, a legally established environmental non-governmental organisation called Afrique Environnementale was actively organising *donzow* into an environmental conservation force with the goal of ‘protecting our forests and animal species’ (Afrique Environnementale, 1992).²² However, a series of government actions in the spring of 1998 threatened to preclude this hoped-for national wildlife conservation role for the traditional hunters of Côte d’Ivoire.

On 30 April the President’s Cabinet of Ministers issued a five-point proclamation aimed at severely restricting the activities of the *donzow*. Rather than extend legal status to the *donzo ton*, the Bédié government decided to ban all *donzo ton* activity ‘outside of its original cultural and geographical sphere’. The decree also forbade the formation of *donzo* groups ‘outside of the savanna zone of the central north and north and generally in the areas of the national territory where this practice is not a part of ancestral tradition’. Third, all non-Ivoiriens were to be excluded from *donzo* activities. The government also declared that it would undertake a census of the *donzow* and forbid ‘the use of modern weapons by practising *donzow* in their cultural and traditional spheres of origin’ (*Fraternité Matin*, 4 February 1999). In sum, the government’s ultimate response to the *donzo ton*’s nationwide crime-fighting initiatives was a combination of surveillance and containment of its activities to the eleven *départements* comprising the savanna region.

The *donzo* containment policy introduced a very narrow cultural geographic interpretation of *ivoirité*. Rather than emphasising the importance of the Mande diaspora to Ivoirien history and culture, the Bédié administration sought to restrict its diffusion, for mainly political reasons.²³ The desire to control people by fixing the scale of their

²² Created in 1992 by former ambassador Fanny Inza, Afrique Environnementale held a workshop in Kaniasso in April 1993 on how the *donzo ton* might contribute to environmental conservation in north-western Côte d’Ivoire. In light of the *donzo ton*’s national visibility and achievements in fighting crime, the association appeared to have both the basic capacity and the legitimacy to assume a clearly defined role as a wildlife preservation organisation in the eyes of Afrique Environnementale.

activities is evident in a statement made by Minister of Presidential Affairs and government spokesman, Paul Akoto Yao, in an interview with *Jeune Afrique Economie*: 'The Dozo brotherhood, which is a cultural specificity of the ethnic composition of the nation *when it remains confined to the strict limits of its traditions and its region of origin*, is one of the aspects of *ivoirité* that the government encourages' (*Jeune Afrique Economie*, 4–17 January 1999, p. 107, my emphasis). The state's explicit involvement in scale-making illustrates Swyngedouw's main point that 'scale . . . is not socially or politically neutral, but embodies and expresses power relationships' (1997: 140). The rescaling of the *donzo ton* constructed an imaginative geography whose makers' ultimate goal was to contain the political geographical influence of the main opposition party. Yet the Bédié government did not simply declare its intention to circumscribe the *donzo ton*'s activities; its spatial strategy was accompanied by a series of administrative interventions that made it increasingly difficult for the *donzon ton* to operate.

The implementation of the *donzow* containment policy was three-pronged: eliminate legitimate hunter organisations; create new rules and regulations governing the formation of private security firms; and conduct a census of the *donzow* as a first step towards restricting and monitoring their activities. On 12 June 1998 the government issued a decree (No. 239/INT/AAT/DG) that specifically banned *Afrique Environnementale*, the only legally recognised hunters' organisation. Three days later the President issued a decree (No. 98-323 of 15 June 1998) regulating private security activities that established criteria that made it virtually impossible for *donzo ton* branches involved in security work to operate legally.²⁴

The *donzo* census was preceded by an information campaign. A delegation of government Ministers (Interior, National Security, and Defence) toured the north in August of 1998 to explain the government's containment policy and upcoming census. Interior Minister Emile Bombet denied that the government was trying to suppress the traditional *donzo* brotherhoods. Its actions were motivated, he said, by the desire to root out 'individuals with dubious morals and criminal intentions'. Everywhere he went, he emphasised that the *donzo ton* had opened its doors too wide and let in 'false' as well as 'true' *donzow*. In his Séguéla speech Minister Bombet said that 'pseudo-dozo' were more numerous than 'true *donzow*'. That is, the majority of *donzow* had not been 'initiated and had their characters formed by the virtues of honesty, equity, altruism, and generosity' (*Fraternité Matin*, 2

²³ The restriction on freedom of movement was promptly criticised by the Ivoirien League for Human Rights as contrary to UN statutes on basic human freedoms.

²⁴ Article 13 of the law requires private security firms to have a minimum balance of 5 million CFA francs (US\$10,000) in a bank account; Article 24 states that the government may determine which uniforms can be worn, and Article 30 forbids the use of firearms. The combination of the exorbitant sum of money and restrictions on the *donzo* wearing their traditional dress and carrying arms makes it abundantly clear that this decree was written with the goal of controlling the activities of the *donzo ton*.

August 1998, 29–30 August 1998, p. 11). Contrary to earlier criticisms of the *donzow* movement, which suggested that just a few *donzow* might have been criminals in disguise, the Minister was now implying that the majority of *donzow* were suspect for simply not being 'true' *donzow*.

The census was conducted by the National Statistics Institute between September and October 1998. Figure 3 shows the distribution of *donzow* in the northern and central savanna regions of Côte d'Ivoire. According to hunters interviewed in both rural and urban areas, the census teams failed to record accurately the actual number of hunters and the types of guns they possessed. In Kalikaha, 20 per cent of the hunters refused to participate in the census. Many of those who came forward left their twelve-gauge shotguns at home and presented a muzzle-loader when asked to show their weapon. Hunters were given a receipt indicating they had participated in the census and were told to

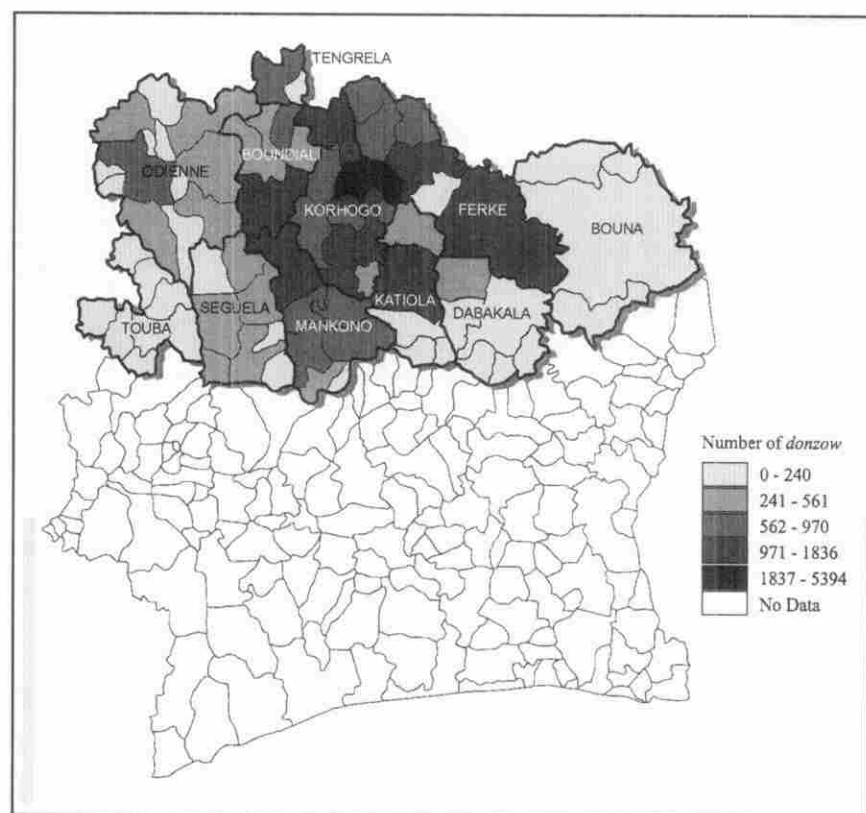


FIGURE 3 The 'original cultural and geographical sphere' of the *donzow*, according to the Ministry of State and the Ministry of the Interior and of Decentralisation (Ouattara, 1999: annex 1). Source: RCI, Institut national de la statistique, 1998

carry it with them any time they carried their rifle; otherwise they risked being arrested.²⁵ In the end, census teams recorded some 42,000 hunters, only 800 of whom were non-Ivoirien (*Le Jour*, 29–30 August 1998). They possessed nearly 33,000 rifles, more than two-thirds of which were 'modern'.

The decentralised structure of the *donzo ton* made it difficult for the government to control hunters' activities. Although a senior *donzo* residing in the Odienné area was widely recognised as the head of the Côte d'Ivoire *donzo ton*, considerable authority and initiative resided at the local level. Every rural community and urban residential neighbourhood where *donzow* resided had its own leader (*donzokuntigi*). In Abidjan alone, there were more than two dozen *donzo ton*, each headed by a *donzokuntigi*. Some of the hunters' associations co-operated while others were rivals.

In response to the government's attempts to strangle their organisation, some Abidjan-based *donzo ton* leaders approached presidential adviser Balla Keita to lobby for the *donzow*'s interests at the highest levels of government (*Le Jour*, 11 August 1998). One of Keita's initiatives was to create yet another hunters' association, the *Confrérie traditionnelle des dozos de Côte d'Ivoire* (Traditional Brotherhood of the Dozos of Côte d'Ivoire). Although many hunters perceived this organisation as a scarcely disguised attempt on the part of the government to control the *donzo ton*, they nevertheless became card-carrying members of the new association.²⁶ Keita also vigorously defended the *donzow*'s basic right to live where they wished. His open criticism of Bedié's containment policy resulted in his being dismissed from his post as special adviser to the President. The Bedié government eventually planned to issue its own hunter identity cards to *donzow* who participated in the census.

The distribution of government-controlled identity cards to 'true' Ivoirien hunters and the attempt to corral the *donzo ton* into its purported homelands showed *ivoirité* to be an ideology aimed at rationalising the control of people, especially foreigners, through the deployment of modern state mechanisms such as a census and territorialisation (Sack, 1986; Scott, 1998). As the 2000 elections approached, the country's newspapers engaged in a bitter and extremely divisive debate over whether Alassane Ouattara was qualified

²⁵ Indeed, three hunters without census receipts were later stopped by gendarmes who confiscated their rifles. In Bouaké the largest *donzo ton* group did not participate in the census. They were aware of what had happened in other communities in the south where the *donzow* were counted. In Vavoua, for example, the *donzow* reported to a central location to meet with census takers. Before entering the building, they were told to leave their weapons outside. In the course of the meeting, soldiers from the Daloa military base arrived and confiscated their rifles. When the *donzow* emerged from the meeting, they discovered their loss. *Donzow* of Soubré, Daloa, San Pedro, and Gagnoa were also disarmed.

²⁶ It was not uncommon for individual *donzow* to be members of two to three national hunters' associations. If stopped by the police or gendarmes, they could present any one or all membership cards to legitimate their presence or activities.

to run for political office. It seemed as if the country was on the brink of civil war when, on 24 December 1999, a *coup d'état* removed President Bédié from office and ushered in a transition government—the Comité National de Salut Public (CNSP), headed by General Robert Gueï, a former chief of staff of the Ivoirien armed forces under Henri Konan Bédié.

RAPPROCHEMENT AND COLLABORATION

The Christmas Eve *coup* cut short the *donzo* containment policy of the deposed Bédié administration. Under the military government of General Gueï²⁷ the *donzow*'s status dramatically improved as they were again valued as auxiliaries to the police and gendarmes in the maintenance of public order. While commander of the Fourth Military Region in the Mande heartland of Côte d'Ivoire, General Gueï had come to appreciate the *donzo ton* and their crime-fighting activities.²⁸ Some hunters reported that Gueï was initiated into the *donzo ton*, that 'bullets cannot enter him, and he washes himself with powerful medicines'.²⁹ In the early days of the *coup*, he asked the *donzow* of Abidjan to guard public places and commercial areas to prevent looting and rioting.³⁰ The *donzow* also manned roadblocks along the major highway between Anyama and Adzopé, north of Abidjan (*Fraternité Matin*, 2 February 2000). General Gueï even employed a dozen *donzow* to guard the presidential palace in Abidjan. A military truck would pick them up every morning in the Adjamé district of Abidjan to transport them to work. They wore their traditional hunting clothes and were issued with automatic weapons while on guard duty. Balla Keita, the self-proclaimed 'sponsor' of the *donzow*, assumed his old post as special adviser to the President. Meetings took place between General Gueï and the *donzoba* of Abidjan in which they reportedly pledged their support to the government and their political neutrality.³¹ The president of the Association de Binkadi de Côte d'Ivoire wrote to General Gueï to express the membership's desire 'to support the police force on all levels with a view to protecting people and property throughout the Ivoirien territory'.³²

The *donzow*'s return to national prominence was not welcome in all quarters. Presidential hopeful Laurent Gbagbo commented publicly on the 'shameful spectacle' of often illiterate *donzow* stopping vehicles at

²⁷ General Gueï came to power on 25 December 1999 and was removed from office by a popular uprising on 25 October 2000 following his attempt to rig the 22 October presidential election in his favour.

²⁸ The Fourth Military Region included the *donzo* heartland regions of Savanna, Denguélé, and Worodugu.

²⁹ Interview with A.T., Abidjan, 11 June 2000.

³⁰ Interview with S.C., Korhogo, 5 June 2000.

³¹ Interview with A.T., Abidjan, 11 June 2000.

³² Letter from Moussa Fofana, President of the Binkadi Association, to President Robert Gueï, 18 January 2000.

checkpoints along the country's major highways to check vehicle registration and inspect papers. Echoing the sentiments of former President Bédié that the *donzo ton* constituted a potential militia force at the disposal of his rival, Alassane Ouattara, he declared that 'a Côte d'Ivoire governed by *dozos*, I cannot accept that' (*Fraternité Matin*, 2 February 2000). The *donzow* curtailed their checkpoint activities shortly after when General Lassana Palenfo, junta member and Minister of State responsible for security, issued a statement 'inviting' *donzo* leaders to 'immediately cease all activities related to maintaining public order and security, or else be subject to vigorous prosecution' (*Fraternité Matin*, 8 February 2000). This did not mean that the *donzow* could not work as guards in the booming private security business.

Based on interviews with *donzo* security guards in Korhogo, Bouaké, and Abidjan, a typical guard was a young man in his mid-twenties to mid-thirties who had been recently initiated into the *donzo ton*. *Donzow* were employed as guards at luxury hotels, private residences, markets, restaurants and government buildings. Depending on the location, monthly salaries ranged between FCFA 60,000 and FCFA 100,000 (US\$120–US\$200) per month. On an annual basis, this income amounted to twice to three times the average national income (GNP *per capita*) of Côte d'Ivoire in 1999.³³ Guards typically paid FCFA 10,000 per month to the *donzo* 'office' that found them employment. They were also obliged to attend weekly meetings where they discussed their work and other *donzo ton* activities.

When General Gueï came to power, he assured the public that his sole intention was 'to clean house'. He criticised President Bédié's *ivoirité* policies for producing a xenophobic climate and bringing the country to the brink of civil war. He assured everyone that elections would be held as planned and that a new constitution would be written which would clarify, among other things, the eligibility requirements to run for President. His transition government included a cross-section of the Ivoirien political spectrum, with strong representation of Alassane Ouattara's RDR party. However, it soon became evident that General Gueï had become accustomed to power, and rumours circulated that he might even run for President himself. When the new constitution was drafted, these suspicions were confirmed. The requirement that not only the presidential candidate but also his parents had to have been born in Côte d'Ivoire signalled the return of *ivoirité* to national politics. Tensions immediately rose as the partisan press anticipated the Supreme Court's ruling on Alassane Ouattara's eligibility. On 3 October 2000, General Gueï abruptly dismissed the *donzow* from guard duty at the presidential palace. Informants stated that General Gueï feared the *donzow* might turn on him in the event that the Supreme Court declared Ouattara ineligible. The court's ultimate

³³ The GNP *per capita* income for Côte d'Ivoire in 1999 was US\$710. *Donzo* annual salaries ranged between US\$1,200 and US\$2,000. (US\$1 = FCFA 600.)

ruling disqualified not only Ouattara but all the candidates of the former ruling PDCI party. In the end, none of the five candidates originating from the north was allowed to run for President.

The north's marginalisation from presidential politics heightened the perception that the nationalist ideology of *ivoirité* had taken an increasingly exclusionist turn. Public speeches given by General Gueï and Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI) presidential candidate Laurent Gbagbo served to fuel anti-immigrant sentiment. They depicted immigrants as attempting to take land as well as the office of President from true Ivoiriens (AFP, 19 October 2001). In the two months leading up to the presidential election, simmering land conflicts in the south-western forest region pitting local Kroumen against Burkina immigrants exploded into unprecedented violence and the emigration of thousands of Burkinabe.³⁴ The label of 'foreigner' was not just applied to non-Ivoiriens, it was also being used to discriminate against Ivoirien nationals who lived outside of the area where they were born. In some cases, these so-called 'allogens' or 'allochthons' were viewed by locals ('autochthons') as invaders and usurpers of scarce resources. This was the case in the south-western town of Bonon, where local Gourou young men accused 'northern' Jula of monopolising the trade and transport sectors. A violent confrontation left twenty-three people injured and more than a dozen homes burned.

In sum, tensions were high on the eve of the controversial 2000 presidential election. Both the RDR and the PDCI parties, whose candidates were disqualified, were boycotting the elections, xenophobic sentiments were strong, and international observers stayed away as General Gueï positioned himself to steal the election. Before the final vote was tallied, Gueï declared himself victor. In a Belgrade-style uprising, Gbagbo's FPI militants hit the streets in a massive protest against the rigged elections. When junta leaders and gendarmes decided to support Gbagbo, Gueï fled and Gbagbo declared himself the winner. RDR officials refused to recognise Gbagbo's victory and called for fair elections. When unarmed RDR militants took to the streets to protest Gbagbo's rise to power, they were met by FPI supporters backed by police and gendarmes. The bloodshed took an ethnic—religious character as 'northerners' were hunted down and mosques burned to the ground.

On 26 October 2000, the day Gbagbo was to assume the presidency, a dozen *donzo* guards successfully repulsed an attack on Alassane Ouattara's private residence by a mob of FPI supporters backed by gendarmes. According to Agence France-Presse, Ouattara's home was encircled by a hundred supporters. A confrontation ensued during

³⁴ Seventeen deaths were reported in the Grand-Béréby area in September and October 2000 during violent clashes between local Kroumen and Burkinabe. In November 1999 land conflicts pitting 'autochthons' against foreigners in the Tabou area led an estimated 15,000 Burkinabe to leave the country (*Libération*, 5 July 2001).

which the gendarmes returned slingshot fire with bullets, killing six RDR supporters. One RDR militant gave this account:

The gendarmes arrived with the FPI militants and fired tear gas at the RDR supporters. We counter-attacked with rocks. They fired at us. Then the *dozos*, who were hidden in the grasses, suddenly rose up. The gendarmes yelled for help and took off. They know that the mystical power of the *dozo* is more than just talk. [AFP, 29 October 2000]

An inhabitant of the residential area who observed the clash reported:

The *dozo* advanced, firing; they had no fear. It was the gendarmes who were forced to hide themselves because they knew it wouldn't do any good to shoot. The *dozo* chased after them in the street, yelling, 'Come here, come here; we're waiting for you.' [*ibid.*]

Another observer commented, 'The gendarmes are Africans, they cannot deny the mystical power of the *dozo*. Everyone knows that they are protected against firearms, knives and machetes' (*ibid.*).

The following day, *donzo* guards provided security to RDR supporters at a demonstration in Odienné, in north-western Côte d'Ivoire. During a confrontation in which gendarmes fired at the crowd, the *donzow* fired back. Three people were wounded, including a gendarme. Amnesty International warned that a civil war was hovering over Côte d'Ivoire. Ethno-religious clashes continued over the next week until Gbagbo and Ouattara called for calm. The political violence surrounding the October elections left 206 dead, 1,027 wounded, and hundreds imprisoned (AFP, 30 August 2001). The 'vast majority' of victims were Ivoiriens from northern Côte d'Ivoire (Human Rights Watch, 2001).³⁵

A reprise of the political-ethnic violence took place in the week leading up to the 10 December legislative elections, in which Ouattara was again prevented from running for office because of his contested genealogy.

VILIFICATION AND REPRESSION

When the Supreme Court ruled that Ouattara was ineligible, the news sent shock waves throughout the north. Many northerners felt that their national identity was also at stake. The Forum of Associations of the Greater North, an organisation representing some 104 non-political associations, gave the Gbagbo administration seventy-two hours 'to assume its responsibilities before passions are unleashed' (*Inter*, 9 December 2000). It warned the prefects and subprefects in all of the north's thirteen *départements* that their safety was at risk and asked them

³⁵ For details on the systematic violation of human rights by Ivoirien security forces and mobs see <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/ivorycoast>.

to leave. The Forum also expressed its readiness to demonstrate against the upcoming legislative elections.

Journalists, both national and foreign, increasingly painted the north in broad brush strokes as predominantly Muslim and a RDR stronghold. The south, in contrast, was depicted as Christian and anti-RDR. These representations masked the complexity of religious and political affiliation. Even a cursory look at the results of the 1995 legislative elections reveals that the political geography was far more complex (RCI, 1997).³⁶ But as the divide-and-rule strategy of politicians played itself out, people did become alienated, divided, and felt collectively disenfranchised as their candidates were not allowed to run for President. For example, the RDR party leader for Korhogo reported to the French daily newspaper *Libération* that:

People here are really disappointed; they don't want us in Côte d'Ivoire; it is a reality that we live each day. It is no longer something that concerns just one person; it is a regional issue. [*Libération*, 4 December 2000]

Despite a ban on all demonstrations in Côte d'Ivoire, the RDR planned a national protest over the exclusion of Ouattara, and thus the north, from the legislative elections. As a compromise, the Gbagbo government agreed to allow Ouattara's supporters to hold a rally in Abidjan's major soccer stadium. Despite the last-minute arrangement, RDR protestors hit the streets of the country's major cities on the morning of 4 December.

Donzo guards provided security for protest marches throughout the country. When demonstrators were fired upon by police and gendarmes, the *donzow* fired back. In Abidjan two gendarmes were wounded on the streets outside the national television station by *donzo* guards protecting demonstrators. Violent demonstrations continued over the next few days during which *donzo* guards returned fire when fired upon. Eighty-five persons died and hundreds were wounded (AFP, 30 August 2001). In an interview with a *Libération* reporter, a gendarme on patrol in the Adjamé neighbourhood talked about the presence of the *donzow* in the following terms, including an aside made by the reporter:

When one kills one of our colleagues, as happened yesterday, we must react; it is normal, do you understand? Might there have been police misconduct, overzealousness here and there? It is the traditional hunters, the Dozos, who attack the law enforcement officers. Our bullets do not kill them; they have mystical powers. When we catch them, we take off their clothes in order to remove their amulets ('gris-gris'), at which point we take them to the police station. [Libération, 7 December 2000]

³⁶ For example, the PDCI claimed broad representation throughout the country, as evident in its majority standing in the National Assembly. Its supporters come from all the major regions and religions of Côte d'Ivoire.

Northerners began to fear for their lives as they were systematically harassed, beaten, and imprisoned. Wounded civilians with surnames common in the north and in neighbouring Burkina Faso and Mali were refused treatment in public hospitals. *Donzo* security guards stopped wearing their hunting attire in public for fear of being victimised. After a truckload of police officers from the twenty-seventh *arrondissement* descended on the *donzo ton* office of Adjamé and sprayed machine-gun fire at the padlocked metal doors, the *donzo* leadership decided to end security work altogether. Some went into hiding (personal communication, Abidjan, 2 October 2001).

Reports of unrest in northern cities suggested an insurrection was taking place. In Korhogo, *donzow* and gendarmes exchanged fire during a demonstration which left three gendarmes wounded and two *donzow* dead (*Inter*, 9 December 2000). Newspaper accounts of *donzow* deaths explained the circumstances of their passing in mystical terms (AFP, 7 December 2000). In the frontier towns of Tengréla and Ouangolodugu, gendarme stations were burned to the ground (AFP, 8, 10 December 2000). All government employees and law enforcement agents fled for their safety from the fabled city of Kong, where Alassane Ouattara attempted to run for the National Assembly. In symbolic protest at the Supreme Court's decision that Ouattara was not a full-blooded Ivoirien, the Burkina Faso flag was raised all day Tuesday 5 December 2000. On the outskirts of the city, the checkpoint was manned by *donzow* who had taken the place of gendarmes (*Libération*, 11 December 2000; *SoirInfo*, 14 December 2000; Charuel, 2001). The pro-Gbagbo press vilified the *donzo ton* as an 'urban guerilla' force of the RDR, recruited 'to accomplish its destabilisation mission' (*SoirInfo*, 6 December 2000).

A new wave of violence followed an unsuccessful *coup d'état* on 7–8 January 2001 (*Libération*, 10 January 2001). President Gbagbo insinuated that neighbouring countries were implicated in the *coup* attempt, led by dissident Ivoirien soldiers. His comments played to the xenophobic sentiments of his supporters, who chanted, 'Côte d'Ivoire for Ivoiriens,' during a demonstration outside the presidential palace (AFP, 13 January 2001). In the weeks and months following the aborted *coup*, Malian and Burkinabe residents of Abidjan were subject to random threats and beatings. Some fled the country in fear of their lives (AFP, 12, 15 January 2001, 28 April 2001).

On 15 January 2001 a group of soldiers surprised a monthly *donzo ton* meeting taking place in the bush outside of Bouaké. After the unarmed *donzow* refused to lie prone on the ground, the soldiers opened fire. In the end, two soldiers died from knife wounds. The press, almost in unison, agreed that the Bédié government's predictions had come to pass. The *donzow* were accused of being a 'parallel army at the service of a diabolical cause' (*Notre Voie*, 18 January 2001). Feature stories appeared that chronicled the evolution of the *donzow* from simple hunters of game 'to the hunters of men at the service of a politician' (*ibid.*). The pro-government press concluded that the only solution to the '*dozo* problem' was to pursue the containment and disarmament

policies of the Bédié regime. The Gbagbo government also sought to place the 'dozo problem' within a wider regional context during a meeting of the West African Entente Council held in Yammasoukro on 25 January 2001. In the final communiqué of the meeting, the Foreign Ministers committed themselves to 'controlling illegal immigration as well as to sensitise traditional hunters whose deviant actions constitute a menace to the security of states' (*SoirInfo*, 31 January 2001).

In retaliation for the soldiers' deaths outside Bouaké, the police randomly rounded up four *donzo* security guards and imprisoned them without formal charge. Following these arrests, the *donzo ton* leadership of Bouaké deemed it too dangerous for its security guards to appear in public wearing their hunting clothes, which telegraphed their 'northern' origins. Overnight the number of *donzo* security guards employed in the city dropped from 180 to zero. Ten months later, when I met with the *donzo ton* leadership of Bouaké, the *donzow* were still not working as security guards. It was only in the northern savanna region, the so-called 'original cultural and geographical sphere' of the *donzow*, that *donzo* security guards were openly working and wearing their traditional hunting clothes. It seemed that the containment strategy conceived by Bédié and implemented by Gbagbo had succeeded. Yet the results of the municipal elections held on 25 March 2001 revealed that the underlying goal of both Bédié and Gbagbo, to contain the political influence of the RDR party, was less successful. After boycotting the presidential and legislative elections, the RDR were victorious in the municipal elections, winning a third of the seats and gaining the largest number of votes nationwide. Even more impressive were the RDR's victories in the central and southern cities of Bouaké, San Pedro, Daloa, and Gagnoa—the latter located in President Gbagbo's home region. The vote indicated that the RDR was building a national base and was not simply a regional ethnic-based party (AFP, 28 March 2001).³⁷

CONCLUSION

Initiated hunters (*donzow*) in Côte d'Ivoire are reputed to have formidable spiritual powers that protect them in dangerous situations. Whether hunting in the bush or protecting communities against criminals, *donzow* are highly respected for their ability to neutralise the malevolent forces of wild animals, bush spirits and criminals. In the past, when game was more abundant, a hunter's status was proportional to the type and number of animals he killed. In the context of game depletion, a hunter's identity as a powerful social figure is at stake. Returning to the village with an empty game bag signifies that he lacks the requisite knowledge and power to see and slay animals. The mobilisation of *donzow* as a parallel police force during the 1990s crime wave had the effect of enhancing their status. Donning their traditional

³⁷ Significantly, the centre and southern cities where the RDR won seats are places where there are large Julia and Senufo immigrant populations.

hats as protectors of communities, the *donzow* easily assumed this role. Their prowess in handling malevolent forces was widely acclaimed by beleaguered citizens. Press reports and interviews with ordinary people paint the *donzow* as possessing great mystical powers which instilled fear in criminals. Even the police and gendarmes admit they are at a disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the *donzow*'s potent amulets and arcane knowledge.

The *donzow*'s relationship with the state dramatically changed over the 1990s. At the beginning of the decade, they were embraced by the Houphouët-Boigny government as a force complementary to the police and gendarmes in fighting crime. The *donzow*'s success in reducing crime and their national popularity drew the attention of Interim President Henri Konan Bédié, who sought to manipulate the *donzon ton* for his personal political gain. Bédié was unsuccessful for two reasons: the decentralised structure of the *donzon ton* and the diverse political leanings of its membership made it difficult to control. The example of the *kamajor* in Sierra Leone raised the spectre of the *donzow* becoming a militia that one day might turn against the state. That day appeared to be drawing close in the extremely divisive political atmosphere and social unrest leading up to the 2000 presidential elections. The deployment of *ivoirité* ideology to block opposition RDR candidate Alassane Ouattara from running for President intensified latent ethno-regional and religious divisions.

The divisive debate over who was a true Ivoirien citizen was mirrored in the polemic against the *donzow* as being infiltrated by foreigners and 'false' *donzow*. The policy of containing the activities of the *donzon ton* to its 'original cultural hearth' was an attempt to restrict the national influence of northerners in Ivoirien social and political life. The expulsion of northern Jula and Lobi from commerce, transport, and farmland in the south, and the systematic harassment of northerners in Abidjan during the 2000 presidential and legislative elections, suggests that there is considerable popular support for *ivoirité* in the context of economic crisis and conflict over land rights. The tragic outcome of *ivoirité* politics was that the *donzow* turned their guns not on bandits but on the police and gendarmes who fired on unarmed RDR demonstrators throughout the country. At the turn of the millennium this recasting of northerners as essentially second-class citizens had the paradoxical effect of transforming the *donzon ton* into a private security force to protect northerners against the state.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article has greatly benefited from discussions with Joseph Hellweg, Stan Hagberg, Yacouba Konaté, Fatoumata Coulibaly, Jean-Michel Pavy and Richard Schroeder. However, the opinions and views presented here are entirely my own.

REFERENCES

Afrique Environnementale. 1992. 'Présentation'. Abidjan, mimeo.

- Bassett, T. 1988. 'The political ecology of peasant-herder conflicts in northern Ivory Coast', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 78 (3), 453-72.
- 1999. 'Game Depletion, Hunting Associations, and Wildlife Conservation in Northern Côte d'Ivoire'. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the African Studies Association, Philadelphia, 11-14 November.
- Bird, C. S., and Kendall, M. B. 1987. 'The Mande hero: text and context', in I. Karp and C. Bird (eds), *Explorations in African Systems of Thought*, pp. 13-26. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Cashion, G. A. 1984. 'Hunters of the Mande: a behavioral code and worldview derived from the study of their folklore'. Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University.
- Caspary, H-U. 1999. *Utilisation de la faune sauvage en Côte d'Ivoire et Afrique de l'Ouest : potentiels et contraintes pour la coopération au développement*. Eschborn: GTZ.
- Charuel, M. 2001. 'Côte d'Ivoire : les dozors mettent le feu à la brousse', *Valeurs actuelles*, 26 January 2001, pp. 44-5.
- Chauveau, J-P. 2000. 'Question foncière et construction nationale en Côte d'Ivoire', *Politique africaine* 78, 94-125.
- Cissé, Y. 1964. 'Notes sur la société des chasseurs malinké', *Journal de la Société des Africainistes* 34 (2), 175-226.
- 1994. *La Confrérie des chasseurs malinké et bambara*. Ivry : Nouvelles du Sud/Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique.
- Comaroff, J., and Comaroff, J. 1993. *Modernity and its Malcontents: ritual and power in postcolonial Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Conseil économique et social. 1998. 'Extraits du rapport du Conseil économique et social (octobre 1998). Immigration en Côte d'Ivoire : le seuil du tolérable est largement dépassé', *Politique africaine* 78, 70-4.
- Crook, R. 1997. 'Winning coalitions and ethno-regional politics: the failure of the opposition in the 1990 and 1995 elections in Côte d'Ivoire', *African Affairs* 96, 215-42.
- Delaney, D., and Leitner, H. 1997. 'The political construction of scale', *Political Geography* 16 (2), 93-7.
- Dozon, J-P. 2000a. 'La Côte d'Ivoire au péril de «l'ivoirité» : genèse d'un coup d'Etat', *Afrique contemporaine* 193, 13-23.
- 2000b. 'La Côte d'Ivoire entre démocratie, nationalisme et ethnonationalisme', *Politique africaine* 78, 45-62.
- Ellis, S., and ter Haar, G. 1998. 'Religion and politics in sub-Saharan Africa', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 36 (2), 175-201.
- Geschiere, P. 1997. *The Modernity of Witchcraft: politics and the occult in postcolonial Africa*. Charlottesville VA: University of Virginia Press.
- 1998. 'Globalisation and the power of indeterminate meaning: witchcraft and spirit cults in Africa and East Asia', *Development and Change* 29, 811-37.
- Hagberg, S. 1998. *Between Peace and Justice: dispute settlement between Karaboro agriculturalists and Fulbe agro pastoralists in Burkina Faso*. Uppsala Studies in Cultural Anthropology 25. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.
- Hellweg, J. 2001. 'The Mandé Hunters' Movement of Côte d'Ivoire: ritual, ethics, and performance in the transformation of civil society, 1990-97'. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Charlottesville VA: University of Virginia.
- Human Rights Watch. 2001. *The New Racism: the political manipulation of ethnicity in Côte d'Ivoire*, Human Rights Country Report 13, No. 6(A). Available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/ivorycoast>.

- Koffi, N. 1996. 'Le concept de l'ivoirité', in CURDIPHE (ed.), *L'Ivoirité ou l'esprit du nouveau contrat social du Président Henri Konan Bédié*, Actes du forum CURDIPHE du 20-23 mars 1996, pp. 25-31. Abidjan: Presses Universitaires de Côte d'Ivoire.
- Leach, M. 2000. 'New shapes to shift: war, parks, and the hunting person in modern West Africa', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, new series, 6, 577-95.
- Loucou, J-N. 1996. 'De l'ivoirité', in CURDIPHE (ed.), *L'Ivoirité ou l'esprit du nouveau contrat social du Président Henri Konan Bédié*, Actes du forum CURDIPHE du 20-23 mars 1996, pp. 19-24. Abidjan: Presses Universitaires de Côte d'Ivoire.
- Marston, S. 2000. 'The social construction of scale', *Progress in Human Geography* 24 (2), 219-42.
- McNaughton, P. 1982. 'The shirts that Mande hunters wear', *African Arts* 15 (3), 54-8, 91.
- 1988. *The Mande Blacksmiths: knowledge, power, and art in West Africa*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press.
- Niangouran-Bouah, G. 1996. 'Les fondements socio-culturels de l'ivoirité', in CURDIPHE (ed.), *L'Ivoirité ou l'esprit du nouveau contrat social du Président Henri Konan Bédié*, Actes du forum CURDIPHE du 20-23 mars 1996, pp. 45-51. Abidjan: Presses Universitaires de Côte d'Ivoire.
- Ouattara, M. 1999. *La Gestion du phénomène "dozo" en Côte d'Ivoire*. Mémoire de fin de cycle. Abidjan: Ecole nationale d'administration.
- Petit, S. 2000. 'Environnement, conduite des troupeaux et usage de l'arbre chez les agropasteurs peuls de l'ouest burkinabé'. Thèse de Géographie, Université d'Orléans.
- République de Côte d'Ivoire (RCI), Bureau national d'études techniques et de développement and Centre de cartographie et de télédétection, 1997. *Elections générales 1995*. Abidjan: BNETD/CCT.
- Richards, P. 1996. *Fighting for the Rain Forest: war, youth and resources in Sierra Leone*. Oxford: James Currey; Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, for the International African Institute.
- Sack, R. 1986. *Human Territoriality: its theory and history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scott, J. 1998. *Seeing like a State: how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press.
- Sidibé, F. M. B. 1998. 'La confrérie des chasseurs traditionnelles et les valeurs authentiques d'enracinement de la société civile africaine', *Quest* 12 (1), 91-104.
- Sindzingre, A. 2000. 'Le contexte économique et social du changement politique en Côte d'Ivoire', *Afrique contemporaine* 193, 27-37.
- Swyngedouw, E. 1997. 'Neither global nor local: "glocalisation" and the politics of scale', in K. Cox (ed.), *Spaces of Globalisation: reasserting the power of the local*, pp. 137-66. New York: Guilford Press.
- Touré, M. 2000. 'Immigration en Côte d'Ivoire : la notion du "seuil tolérable" relève de la xenophobie', *Politique africaine* 78, 75-93.
- Travelé, M. 1928. 'Note sur les coutûmes des chasseurs bambara et malinké du cercle de Bamako, Soudan Français', *Revue d'ethnographie et des traditions populaires* 9, 207-12.

Newspaper sources in chronological order

- 'Soutien au Président Bédié: 10.000 chasseurs du Grand-Nord prennent position', *Fraternité Matin*, 4 September 1995, p. 6.

- 'Les chasseurs s'en vont', *Fraternité Matin*, 12 December 1995.
- 'Comment les dozos sont-ils devenus agents de sécurité?' *Fraternité Matin*, 30 July 1996, p. 12.
- 'Les dozos sont là', *Fraternité Matin*, 9 August 1996.
- 'Le boom de l'insécurité', *Jeune Afrique*, No. 1888, 12–18 March 1997, pp. 30–3.
- 'Dozos : hors-la-loi mais utiles!' *Fraternité Matin*, 12 September 1997a, p. 19.
- 'L'épouvantail dozo', *Fraternité Matin*, 12 September 1997b, p. 19.
- 'Instituteur et . . . dozo', *Fraternité Matin*, 12 September 1997c, p. 19.
- 'Fanfares, dozos, Am Bi Kôh et les autres', *Fraternité Matin*, 22 December 1997.
- 'Une vengeance se prépare', *Le Jour*, No. 985, 13 May 1998.
- 'Discerner les vrais des faux', *Fraternité Matin*, 2 August 1998.
- 'Plus aucun dozo à Abidjan', *Fraternité Matin*, 29–30 August 1998.
- 'Plus de 100.000 armes circulent en Côte d'Ivoire', *Le Jour*, No. 1072, 29–30 August 1998.
- 'Les dozos sont-ils dangereux?' *Jeune Afrique Economie*, No. 278, 4–17 January 1999, pp. 106–7.
- '41.914 dozos recensés', *Fraternité Matin*, 4 February 1999, p. 2.
- 'Notre confrérie est mobilisée pour le chef de l'état', *Fraternité Matin*, 18 August 1999, p. 13.
- 'Que font les dozos sur les routes?' *Fraternité Matin*, 2 February 2000.
- 'Communiqué du Ministère d'Etat chargé de la Sécurité', *Fraternité Matin*, 8 February 2000.
- 'Premiers combats entre l'ONU et les rebelles', *Figaro*, 12 May 2000.
- 'Côte d'Ivoire : manifestations à risque', *Libération*, 4 December 2000.
- 'Le RDR choisit la guérilla urbaine', *SoirInfo*, 6 December 2000.
- 'A Abidjan, la peur de ceux du Nord', *Libération*, 7 December 2000.
- 'Tirs nourris entre dozos et gendarmes', *Inter*, 9 December 2000.
- 'Au pays des Ouattara, la Côte d'Ivoire se fissure', *Libération*, 11 December 2000.
- 'Kong aux mains des dozos', *SoirInfo*, 14 December 2000.
- 'Putsch raté en Côte d'Ivoire : le Nord montre du doigt', *Libération*, 10 January 2001.
- 'Les dozos, une armée parallèle', *Notre Voie*, 18 January 2001.
- 'Les dozos en conclave', *SoirInfo*, 31 January 2001.
- 'Graines de violence dans les plantations ivoiriennes', *Libération*, 5 July 2001.

Agence France-Presse (AFP) news dispatches

- 'Le "pays aux soixante ethnies" plus divisé que jamais', 19 October 2000.
- 'Ces dozos qui ont défendu Ouattara avec leur "pouvoir mystique"', 29 October 2000.
- 'Sur les traces de la mort d'un chef "dozo"', 7 December 2000.
- 'Sept membres des forces de l'ordre blessés par balles à Tengréla', 8 December 2000.
- 'Situation "globalement positive" selon le Ministre de l'intérieur', 10 December 2000.
- 'De nombreux Bukinabè quittent la Côte d'Ivoire pour leur pays', 11 January 2001.
- 'Les pays voisins s'inquiètent de la situation en Côte d'Ivoire', 12 January 2001.
- 'Le président Gbagbo promet "le feu" sur les ennemis de la Côte d'Ivoire', 13 January 2001.

- 'Moussa, Burkinabè, doit fuir la Côte d'Ivoire après une vie de labeur', 15 January 2001.
- 'Les municipales en Côte d'Ivoire : consécration du vote ethnique?' 28 March 2001.
- 'Retour précipité d'une centaine de Maliens établis en Côte d'Ivoire', 28 April 2001.
- 'Nouveau bilan officiel des violences politico-ethniques en Côte d'Ivoire', 30 August 2001.

ABSTRACT

This article examines the resurgence of hunter associations (*donzo ton*) in Côte d'Ivoire during the 1990s in the context of game depletion, rising crime rates, and a dysfunctional state. Initiated hunters (*donzow*) are widely respected by the general public for their mystical powers and potent amulets which protect them from malevolent forces in the natural and social worlds. The *donzow*'s success in reducing crime in northern rural areas led to an expansion of the *donzo ton* to the national level, as *donzow* were increasingly employed as private security guards in the country's major cities. The government and political parties also employed *donzow* to complement the police and gendarmes in maintaining order during the 1995 presidential elections. The attempt by politicians to manipulate the *donzo ton* during re-election campaigns was frustrated by the decentralised structure of the hunters' organisation and the diversity of its membership. Fearing that the *donzo ton* would become a politically destabilising force, successive governments have attempted to restrict its activities to the northern savanna region. The policy of containing the *donzo ton* to its so-called 'original cultural hearth' is discussed in the framework of the national cultural identity ideology of *ivoirité* and its xenophobic political manifestations around the 2000 presidential elections.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine la résurgence des associations de chasseurs (*donzo ton*) en Côte d'Ivoire au cours des années 1990 sur fond de diminution du gibier, d'augmentation de la criminalité et de dysfonctionnement de l'Etat. Les chasseurs initiés (*donzow*) sont très respectés du grand public pour leurs pouvoirs mystiques et leurs amulettes puissantes qui les protègent des forces malveillantes dans le monde naturel et dans le monde social. Le succès des *donzow* à réduire la criminalité dans les régions rurales du Nord a conduit au développement du *donzo ton* au niveau national, les *donzows* étant employés de manière croissante comme agents de sécurité privés dans les grandes villes du pays. Le gouvernement et les partis politiques ont également employé des *donzows* pour renforcer les effectifs de police et de gendarmerie dans leurs activités de maintien de l'ordre au cours des élections présidentielles de 1995. La tentative par les politiciens de manipuler le *donzo ton* au cours des campagnes de réélection fut contrariée par la structure décentralisée de l'organisation des chasseurs et la diversité de ses membres. Craignant que le *donzo ton* ne devienne une force de déstabilisation politique, les gouvernements successifs ont tenté de confiner ses activités à la région de savane du Nord. La politique de confinement du *donzo ton* à son soi-disant «foyer culturel d'origine» est débattue dans le cadre de l'idéologie identitaire culturelle nationale d'*ivoirité* et ses manifestations politiques xénophobes à l'occasion des élections présidentielles de 2000.

