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as a Mode of Non-Violent Action among Ex-combatants
in Côte d'Ivoire**

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KAMINA DIALLO

A »PURELY ADMINISTRATIVE STRUGGLE« ?

Bureaucratization as a Mode of Non-Violent Action among Ex-combatants in Côte d'Ivoire

In this article I examine the case of an association of Ivoirian rebel ex-combatants, Cellule 39 des anciens combattants de Côte d'Ivoire (Cell 39 of combat veterans of Côte d'Ivoire, hereafter »Cellule 39« or »C39«). This association was created in 2014 to pursue political demands. Its claims to legitimacy are based on its members' possession of a registration number that was assigned to rebel ex-combatants in the course of DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration) operations in Côte d'Ivoire that began in 2007. This number reflects its bearers' early involvement in the Ivoirian crisis, at its beginnings in 2002; but above all, it shows that the members of C39 were among the first to be profiled following the 2007 Ouagadougou Political Agreements by the programme that was in charge of DDR at the time.

Côte d'Ivoire is classified by national and international actors as a country in a phase of post-conflict reconstruction. Since the early 1990s, it has experienced protracted socio-political unrest, leading to a spiral of violence that progressively took hold at the centre of the country's social and political relations. In 1999, Côte d'Ivoire experienced its first coup d'état¹. Three years later, an armed insurrectionary movement broke out against President Laurent Gbagbo and his regime, with demands including an end to the ethnic exclusion of the populations of the north of the country.

This rebellion, which occupied the northern half of the country from 2002 to 2011, set up parallel bureaucratic, military, paramilitary, and politico-economic structures, leading to the emergence and establishment of a new economic, social, and political order. Its stronghold was Bouaké, a city in the centre of the country. The 2010 presidential election between Laurent Gbagbo and Alassane Ouattara² was followed by a violent post-election crisis, which only ended when Gbagbo was arrested and Ouattara sworn in as President. This period of crisis was punctuated by numerous attempts at mediation, both regional and international. As part of operations aimed at ending the crisis, peace agreements were negotiated and public policies allowing combatants to be reintegrated into society (DDR) were implemented with the support of the international community.

Since 2008, a number of organizations have been created by demobilized ex-combatants (also called »démobilisés« or simply »démos«) who are frustrated and disappointed by the public DDR policies targeted at them. These organizations have used various modes of collective action to make demands and protest, including violent demonstrations, road blockades³,

1 Marc LE PAPE, Claudine VIDAL (eds.), *L'année terrible*, in: EID., Côte d'Ivoire. *L'année terrible*, Paris 2003, p. 7–11, p. 7.

2 Alassane Ouattara was supported by the transformed rebellion, renamed the »Forces Nouvelles« (FN).

3 See Felix D. BONY, *Manifestations éclatées de la Cellule 39: des ex-combattants bloquent les corridors de Korhogo*, in: *L'Infodrome*, 26 October 2017, URL: <https://www.linforome.com/vie-politique/34592-manifestations-eclatees-des-ex-combattants-de-la-cellule-39-des-ex-combattants-bloquent-le-corridor-de-korhogo>, last accessed 23 December 2020.

and collaboration with the authorities in charge of DDR operations, to whom they have presented themselves as intermediaries. But Cellule 39 and its members have also been using another mode of action for some years: the »purely administrative struggle«, a process of reappropriation of bureaucratic practices and materialities.

This article focuses on this »purely administrative struggle«, describing it as a collection of bureaucratic processes and practices used by the ex-combatants in C39 as a collective mode of non-violent action to pursue their demands. This focus on the purely administrative struggle will lead me to explore the following points: what does this struggle consist in? What mechanisms and practices does it involve? What are its political and social meanings? What imaginaries does it draw upon? How does this mode of action relate to other logics? What are its impacts and its limitations? More specifically, I will seek to answer the following two questions: What does »administrative struggle« teach us about bureaucracy? Can bureaucracy be used as a weapon? To answer these questions, I will analyse the »purely administrative struggle« and its meanings and objectives for its creators. I will then examine its limitations.

»Because we have no defence other than to write«: A strategy for collective action

During my first meeting with the members of the national executive of Cellule 39, which is based in Korhogo, a city in northern Côte d'Ivoire⁴, in April 2017, they presented me with a bound collection of around fifty pages of documents⁵. This document, entitled »Lutte purement administrative. Démarche pacifique de doléance et de revendication 2014–2017« (»Purely administrative struggle. Peaceful process of grievances and demands 2014–2017«), consists of several sections, each introduced by a small explanatory note. It is introduced by a text addressed to the political authorities and the international community, in the name of the members of the group. In it they present themselves as part of a generation that has been sacrificed, but also as a »mass« upon which Côte d'Ivoire should be able to rely. They emphasize their association's peaceful and civic character, and present their various grievances.

This collection of documents offers a chronological register that can be used to retrace a history of Cellule 39. It also acts as an archive, preserving the memory of collective administrative and bureaucratic actions taken by the members of the association since its creation. In it the members present their precarious living situations, their various demands, and their activities. It consists of a range of documents, such as a set of letters exchanged with the political, administrative, and customary authorities, a *cahier de doléances* (register of grievances), explanatory notes on the organization of the cell, minutes of meetings, a diary (»*journal intime*«) of the group, etc.

It thus portrays the »purely administrative struggle« as a tool for both communication and advocacy, which allows them to convey their message. They seek to be heard and understood by each other, the authorities, national opinion, and the international community, as they know that »it is often possible to push international opinion to lobby the state of Côte d'Ivoire«⁶. Above all, it is a mode of action that they use to assert their rights. As Béatrice Hibou explains, bureaucratization can be seen »as one of the dominant repertoires of the political, one of its main reference points [...] around which, today, social relations, conflicts, and negotiations are

4 The city was occupied by rebels throughout the crisis, from 2002 to 2011.

5 ASSOCIATION DES ANCIENS COMBATTANTS DE CÔTE D'IVOIRE DE LA CELLULE 39, *Lutte purement administrative. Démarche pacifique de doléance et de revendication 2014–2017*, private collection, field research in April 2017.

6 »Souvent on peut pousser l'opinion internationale à faire un lobbying sur l'État de Côte d'Ivoire«. Interview with El Diablo, president of Cellule 39, Korhogo, 27 November 2017.

formed, and inequalities and exclusions take shape⁷. Bureaucratic processes and practices are ubiquitous, and are used by different actors for different purposes. Through this collection of documents, then, the association was following a model propagated by state authorities as well as NGOs and international organizations: bureaucratizing in order to be able to carry out its activities, unite its members, and communicate with and address demands to the authorities in a legal fashion. It also reflects a tactical use of non-violence.

In the present case, the members of Cellule 39 use bureaucratic practices to express their social and political demands, attempting to communicate with different institutions that could potentially help them. In their day-to-day practice, the members of the association, and in particular the members of the executive, have transformed themselves into bureaucrats. They have used, reinvented, and reformulated bureaucratic practices, particularly in applying standardized rules and procedures to facilitate interactions with the authorities. To do so, they rely on the bureaucratic know-how of the members of the association's executive committee, and especially its leader, nicknamed *El Diablo*. He acquired this know-how, first, through various experiences within international NGOs before he joined the rebellion, and second, through administrative posts that he held within the rebel organization. In the latter context he worked as a project manager in the entity in charge of demobilization within the rebel administration, the *Bureau régional des démobilisés* (Regional Office for the Demobilized). No longer having weapons, unlike fellow former rebels who went on to be integrated into the national army, their »only defence is to write«, he said in an interview. They thus put down their struggle on paper, as the present of the association recalled. He went on:

«Parce qu'on n'a pas d'autres défenses que d'écrire. Les écrits arrivent ou n'arrivent pas, on ne sait pas, mais quoi qu'il arrive, on passe par plusieurs chemins pour que les gens puissent lire nos écrits et que les autorités à qui nous écrivons puissent recevoir nos courriers. Quand on écrit, on écrit aux autorités et aux différents chefs de corps d'armes. Aux différents chefs de corps d'armes c'est pour les avertir de nos remous, les envoyer les procès-verbaux de nos réunions et quand ils ont besoin de nous pour des renseignements on vient toujours à leur niveau⁸.»

The executive members of the association present the »purely administrative struggle« as a strategy that allows them to avoid disorder, marches, sit-ins, and meetings which can degenerate into violence. The bureaucratization of ex-combatants' associations and of their struggles in Côte d'Ivoire »is part of a broader bureaucratization of society in which behaviour is increasingly structured by standards, rules, procedures, and formalities, a process which is not only imposed from above, but which also involves voluntary participation by individuals⁹, as the present article highlights.

Cellule 39's preferred collective mode of action for making its members' voices heard is the administrative route, and in particular through letters. The group's president described this

7 Béatrice HIBOU, *The Bureaucratization of the World in the Neoliberal Era. An International and Comparative Perspective*, New York 2015, p. XXI.

8 »Because we have no defense other than to write. What we write arrives or doesn't arrive, we don't know, but whatever happens, we use different channels so that people can read what we write and so the authorities we write to can receive our letters. When we write, we write to the authorities and to the various heads of armed forces. For the heads of armed forces it's to alert them to our troubles, to send them the minutes of our meetings, and when they need us for information we always come to them.« Interview with *El Diablo* (president of C39, based in Korhogo), Korhogo, 27 November 2017.

9 Laurent FOURCHARD, *Trier, exclure et policer. Vies urbaines en Afrique du Sud et au Nigeria*, Paris 2018, p. 209.

process as »a challenge« and »the best method«, and explained their desire to be »the most civilized *démobilisés* in the world«¹⁰. Through a grievance process that he described as »peaceful«, they try to facilitate interactions with the authorities, but they warn that »if the grievances are not addressed, they become demands«¹¹.

Their strategy revolves in large part around bypassing administrations that ignore them, particularly on the basis of the charge that they lack organization. The group told me of their difficulties in obtaining *récépissés* (official documents issued by administrations to acknowledge the receipt of paperwork) or approval for the application that would allow them to legally gather and act as a collective. They attributed these to the authorities' reluctance to authorize the creation of associations of ex-combatants. And indeed, during my interviews with staff members of local administrative authorities and former employees of DDR programs, all expressed their mistrust of associations of *démobilisés*. They particularly underlined the transitory nature of the ex-combatant status conferred by the DDR programmes, which was intended to last only until the return to civilian life. Creating and joining associations of *démobilisés*, they thought, risked hardening members' status in this supposedly transitory position as ex-combatants.

The president of Cellule 39 explained that the »purely administrative struggle« allows the group to open a dialogue with the authorities, to »create openings for discussion«¹². Some of these authorities were previously their leaders in the armed struggle. He underlined the peaceful nature of the demands set out in the various documents in the collection, in order to reassure their interlocutors: »We've read the constitution of our country and the constitution says that everyone is free to demonstrate, but the demonstration must be peaceful. That's why when we say »administrative«, we add »peaceful« to that. Everyone is free to make demands, but peacefully«¹³. Despite the announcement of the peaceful nature of their efforts, their relations with the authorities remain tense, and are often marked by violence. This is evidenced for example by the violent demonstrations of *démobilisés* in Bouaké in 2017, where several were killed following clashes with the police. Nevertheless, the members of the executive committee promote their peaceful mode of action, saying: »We say to ourselves that the administrative struggle must become a school!¹⁴«

He also explained that the booklet has been widely distributed, including to members of all the administrative authorities they hope will hear their demands (Presidency, the office of the Prime Minister, ministries, National Assembly, prefectures, municipal governments). They also gave a copy of the booklet to »all those who need it because often we have people who leave [places] outside the country to meet us because they are also interested in our situation«¹⁵. The aim of the dissemination of the document was to make their struggle public and to popularize it, demonstrating that they are neither warmongers nor their opponents. This was directed at the national level, but also the international level: copies of the collection were also sent to international journalists and researchers. The association's executive uses the language of the state and of international organizations to seek their recognition of the group's legitimacy. This language is constantly being adapted and renegotiated within the association.

10 »Un défi«; »la meilleure méthode«; »les *démobilisés* les plus civilisés du monde«: Interview with El Diabolo, the president of Cellule 39, Korhogo, 27 November 2017.

11 Ibid.: »Si les doléances ne sont pas prises en compte, ils entrent en revendications«.

12 Ibid.: »[...] créer des ouvertures pour discuter«.

13 Ibid.: »Nous avons lu la constitution de notre pays et la Constitution dit que chacun est libre de manifester, mais il faut que la manifestation soit pacifique. C'est pourquoi quand on dit administratif, on ajoute pacifique dessus. Chacun est libre de revendiquer, mais pacifiquement«.

14 Ibid.: »Nous, on se dit que c'est la lutte administrative qui doit devenir une école!«.

15 Ibid.: »[...] tous ceux qui en ont besoin parce que souvent on a des personnes qui quittent hors du pays pour nous croiser parce qu'intéressées aussi à notre situation«.

Multiple demands for the recognition of their status

The various letters in the collection present information and grievances to political authorities, traditional leaders, and international organizations who have been involved in DDR operations in Côte d'Ivoire. The demands they contain are clustered around three main themes.

The first is linked to the vicissitudes and tribulations¹⁶ of DDR operations in Côte d'Ivoire, which, they said, failed to ensure the social and economic reintegration of the demobilized members of Cellule 39 into society. The letters highlight the great financial precariousness of the *demobilisés* of Cellule 39, who, since the end of the conflict, have had to deal with family expenditures that they describe as beyond their means. They describe a context where the reintegration projects proposed by the Authority for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (ADDR¹⁷) have failed, and explain that they consider the amount of the reintegration payment¹⁸ offered to them by the ADDR (800,000 FCFA in three instalments, the equivalent of €1,200) insufficient. Moreover, they state that some of their comrades are still awaiting this payment (alleging it was misappropriated by their former leaders and accomplices) as well as the sums owed to them as war wounded. In addition, they demand the completion of integration programmes, including the integration of certain comrades into the civil service or into state military and paramilitary bodies. They seek the payment of a war bonus of between 5 and 17 million FCFA (approx. €7,600–€26,000) per person on the same basis as the sums received by their fellow rebels¹⁹, with the amount demanded varying depending on the interlocutors and the documents presented.

The leaders of Cellule 39 explain that they are seeking »the inclusion of the ex-combatants of C39 in the payment of bonuses for war efforts« as a »matter of justice and equity«. The government's payment of bonuses to their former comrades who were integrated into the army following the mutinies of 2014 and 2017 encouraged the group to persist in their demands and their struggles. It even led some to renew their involvement in the association, in an attempt to try and obtain what they consider their due, like their integrated former rebel comrades. But the justification of Cellule 39's claim that they are owed a debt by the state relies heavily on an incomplete and biased reading of the 2007 Ouagadougou Political Agreements. An analysis of these agreements shows that they include no mention of a war bonus for combatants. However, article 2 of the third complementary agreement of the Ouagadougou Political Agreements specifies that

16 Magali CHELPI-DEN HAMER, *Le mythe du jeune désœuvré. Analyse des interventions DDR en Côte d'Ivoire*, in: *Afrique contemporaine* 232 (2009), no. 4, p. 39–55; EAD., *Les tribulations du dispositif Désarmement, démobilisation et réinsertion des miliciens en Côte d'Ivoire (2003–2015)*, in: *Hérodote* 2015/3, no. 158, p. 200–218, p. 218.

17 The Autorité pour le désarmement, la démobilisation et la réintégration des ex-combattants is the last program in charge of DDR in Côte d'Ivoire, created in 2012.

18 »Filet de réintégration«, a sum allocated to ex-combatants under DDR programmes.

19 Note that from Bouaké to Korhogo, via Daloa, Man or Abidjan, »le pays a tremblé« (»the country shook«) when some 8,400 disgruntled soldiers – mostly ex-rebels who were integrated into the army under the peace agreements of 2007–2010 – demanded that the government grant them a bonus for the war effort, nicknamed the »prime ECOMOG« (named after the ECOWAS armed forces which could have intervened in Côte d'Ivoire during the post-election crisis), for their actions against the forces fighting on the side of President Laurent Gbagbo and their involvement in the resolution of the crisis of 2011. An agreement was finally reached to pay twelve million CFA francs (€ 18,293) to each of the soldiers involved, and for their seniority, rank, and entitlements (according to the pay scale) and related benefits to be re-evaluated.

»Aux fins de facilitation du processus de Désarmement, de Démobilisation et de Réinsertion (DDR), prévu au paragraphe 3.2.1. de l'Accord politique de Ouagadougou, les deux Parties conviennent de faire verser par le Gouvernement une allocation forfaitaire mensuelle, dont les montants seront précisés par décret pris en Conseil des ministres, pour assurer les opérations de démobilisation, l'alimentation et la prise en charge des ex-combattants, jusqu'à leur réinsertion ou leur intégration dans les nouvelles Forces de Défense et de Sécurité (FDS) ou dans la vie civile«²⁰.

This fixed allowance consisted of the 90,000 CFA francs paid to demobilized combatants for three months after they entered into DDR operations, beginning in 2007. The fantasies of war bonuses, which were instrumentalized by various warlords and other political actors, were fuelled above all by false rumours and a lack of communication from the authorities. Beyond the financial aspect, C39 members complain of their status as »pariahs in the community«, which, they argue, attests to the failure of their reintegration into society and thus de facto of DDR programs in Côte d'Ivoire, which had repeatedly been described by the authorities as a »success story«.

The second theme is their claim to the rank of corporal. In this context, they refer to the »*Certificat de démobilisé*«, which they dubbed a »*diplôme*« (degree/diploma). They seek recognition from the state as »corporals« as indicated on the document issued to them by the Forces Nouvelles (FN) at the time of their demobilization, between 2007 and 2010. They hope that this recognition will allow them to benefit from various economic and social advantages linked to military rank, such as a pension and improved social status. This raises the question of the legitimacy and value of a document issued by a rebel organization after some of its members have attained the highest levels of political power. In any case, that political context encourages C39 members in their conflation of the Forces Nouvelles and the new regime of Alassane Ouattara, which notably includes former warlords.

The third and final core theme in the booklet is »the image of the former combatant in the DDR and the community in Côte d'Ivoire«²¹. In a number of letters, C39 calls for the improvement of its members' image in the community, and asserts their status as »new Ivoirians«²², demonstrating their mastery of the rhetoric of the Ouattara regime. The members of C39 consider themselves »combat veterans, demobilized military corporals [*sic*]« (*anciens combattants, militaires caporaux démobilisés*). The name of the association, »Cellule 39 des anciens combattants de Côte d'Ivoire« represents their rejection of the label of »ex-combatant« imposed by the state of Côte d'Ivoire and the international community. They declare:

20 »For the purposes of facilitating the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) process, provided for in paragraph 3.2.1. of the Ouagadougou Political Agreement, the two Parties agree to have the Government pay a fixed monthly allowance, the amounts of which will be specified by decree taken in the Council of Ministers, to provide for demobilization operations, food and other costs for ex-combatants, until their reintegration or integration into the new Defense and Security Forces (FDS) or into civilian life.« Article 2, Third Complementary Agreement to the Ouagadougou Political Agreement, 28 November 2007, <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/fullpeace/IVO%2020071128b.pdf>, last accessed 23 December 2020.

21 ASSOCIATION [...], Lutte purement administrative (as in n. 5).

22 In reference to the concept developed by Alassane Ouattara following his accession to power. See: L'Ivoirien nouveau, un concept beau et creux à la fois, in: JeuneAfrique.com, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/457865/societe/livoirien-nouveau-un-concept-beau-et-creux-a-la-fois/>, consulted on 16 December 2019; Le concept de l' »ivoirien nouveau« expliqué aux populations de Tanda, <https://aip.ci/le-concept-de-l-ivoirien-nouveau-explique-aux-populations-de-tanda/>, last accessed 16 December 2019.

«Nous voulons améliorer notre image. Nous ›ex-combattants‹ sommes stigmatisés, discriminés et paria de la société du fait d'être des ex-combattants ou des ›démobilisés‹, nous souhaitons énormément la dénomination ›anciens combattants‹ et voulons avoir de la considération sociale et financière pour garantir l'avenir de nos différentes familles²³.»

The label of »ex-combatant« thus does not contribute to the prestige and social recognition that the members of C39 feel they deserve. Recall that in the Ivorian context, the return of rebel combatants to civilian life did not give rise to a »moral economy of recognition«²⁴. Instead it has led to their stigmatization and marginalization. In the collective imaginary of C39 members, the label of *ancien combattant* (former combatant or veteran) conveys the social prestige accorded to veterans of the colonial army. They draw a comparison with the »Senegalese *tirailleurs*« which is interesting on several levels. According to the leader of Cellule 39, the designation of »Senegalese *tirailleurs*« attributed to Africans who fought in the French army during the two world wars (1914–1918 and 1939–1945) and the colonial wars (particularly in Indochina and Algeria), had a negative, and even degrading connotation, conveying inferiority. They did not enjoy the same rights or the same material and financial advantages as their metropolitan »brothers in arms«²⁵. The members of Cellule 39 hold that the term *ex-combattant* conveys the same evils and anathemas, whereas in their shared imaginary the term *ancien combattant* has a positive connotation, as a marker of recognition from society and the French state²⁶. In this imaginary, *anciens combattants* are in a better financial and social situation: social prestige, pensions, and sometimes even access to French nationality. And yet this cursory, incomplete, and ultimately false interpretation fails to recognize the precarious situation of former combatants from the colonies, as analysed by many researchers²⁷.

It should also be noted that the greater social prestige enjoyed by the *anciens combattants* of the colonies in comparison to the *ex-combattants* from the Ivorian crisis was won through long struggle²⁸.

The members of C39 attribute certain symbolic and material powers to paper documents, and in particular the cards issued during DDR operations from 2007. As the *anciens combattants* card is a token of prestige which grants its holder access to a veteran's pension, while C39 members see the card for *démobilisés* issued through DDR programmes more as a source of stigma, they want new cards to be issued in order to improve their social image. They thus call for the creation of a card and a pension for the status of »demobilized military corporal« (*carte MCD*, for *militaires caporaux démobilisés*), on the example of the *anciens combattants*, in order

23 ASSOCIATION [...], Lutte purement administrative (as in n. 5): »We want to improve our image. We ›ex-combatants‹ are stigmatized, discriminated against, and pariahs of society due to being ex-combatants or ›démobilisés‹; we wish very strongly to be referred to as ›anciens combattants‹, and we want social and financial compensation to guarantee the future of our families.«

24 Guillaume PIKETTY, Économie morale de la reconnaissance. L'Ordre de la Libération au péril de la sortie de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, Histoire@Politique, 2007, no. 3, DOI: 10.3917/hp.003.0005, last accessed 23 December 2020.

25 Martin MOURRE, Thiaroye 1944. Histoire et mémoire d'un massacre colonial, Rennes 2017.

26 The French veterans are called *anciens combattants* as well.

27 Nancy LAWLER, Soldiers of Misfortune: Ivoirien Tirailleurs of World War II, Athens, OH 1992; Gregory MANN, Native Sons. West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century, Durham, NC 2006; Myron ECHENBERG, Colonial Conscripts. The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857–1960, Portsmouth, NH 1991; MOURRE, Thiaroye 1944 (as in n. 25); Ruth GINIO, The French Army and its African Soldiers. The Years of Decolonization, Lincoln, NB 2017; Camille EVRARD, Du gel au dégel des pensions des anciens militaires subsahariens des armées françaises. Histoire politique, combat juridique et difficultés actuelles, Paris 2018; Nathalie DUCLOS (ed.), L'adieu aux armes? Parcours d'anciens combattants, Paris 2010.

28 LAWLER, Soldiers of Misfortune (as in n. 27).

to »reinforce their dignity«²⁹. They are attempting to do this by establishing – as yet non-existent – links with various organizations of *anciens combattants*. My interviews with members of such associations offer a revealing picture of the image and perceptions of rebels within Ivorian society. I asked the leaders of structures dedicated to the *anciens combattants* about the possibility of reconciliation with the members of C39, and the desire of the latter to present themselves under the same label. The interviewees explained that they do not consider the members of C39 to be *anciens combattants*, but rebels, and emphasized that the struggles of the two groups are different.

Finally, the purely administrative struggle is also conducted over the internet. The former rebels use social networks to convey their various messages and communicate with each other. They have a non-public Facebook profile with nearly four thousand followers³⁰, which they use to share information on various subjects, including upcoming meetings and the minutes of past meetings, as well as news concerning members – in particular the announcement of deaths, as well as participation in various events. Finally, the group's Facebook profile also works as a platform for political partisans, who use it freely to promote their preferred political parties. The group's president explained it in the following terms:

»On sait qu'on est beaucoup écouté et puis beaucoup d'entre eux sont toujours sur notre site ici parce que nous fournissons beaucoup au site de la Cellule 39 pour que tout le monde soit au même niveau d'information que nous. Donc à tout moment, quand tu vas lire, tu vas lire, tu vas voir toutes les tendances puisque les gens commentent les choses et même lisez même ce qu'il y a. Donc ça nous permet de juger un peu les états d'esprit«³¹.

Finally, the use and mastery of bureaucratic practices and tools can also distance the members who deploy them from some of the comrades they are supposed to represent. Not all members of the association support the strategy of purely administrative struggle pursued and promoted by the members of the executive in Korhogo. In Bouaké, for example, discordant voices have emerged. Moreover, the peaceful model supported by members of the Bouaké office has also shown its limitation on numerous occasions, as we will see.

The limits of the »purely administrative struggle«

The »purely administrative struggle« has also shown its limits, encouraging the members of C39 to change their action repertoire and opt for more violent methods, as described by the president of the association in an interview:

»Quand nous sommes sortis sur les corridors, on ne comprenait plus rien. Nous nous sommes dit quoi? Les courriers qu'on envoie, ça n'arrive pas au sommet? Donc si ça n'arrive pas, qu'est-ce qu'il faut faire? Donc on a vu que c'est bloqué à un certain niveau? ça veut dire que tout ce que nous faisons comme travail en bas, ça va rester là. Et ça va nous torturer et si jamais on s'amuse, on nous prend et on nous enferme. Peut être sans

29 »militaire caporal démobilisé – MCD«; »renforcer leur dignité«: Interview with the president of Cellule 39, Abidjan, 18 February 2019.

30 Non-public Facebook profile of Cellule 39, consulted on 17 June 2020.

31 »We know that many people listen to us, and then many of them are on our site here all the time because we provide a lot to the Cellule 39 site so that everyone can be at the same level of information as us. So anytime, when you go to read, you'll read, you'll see all the trends, because people comment on things and even read even what is there. So that allows us to judge people's states of mind a little.« Interview with El Diablo, Abidjan, 18 February 2017.

raison même! ce qui a fait que nous sommes sortis sur les corridors, y avait deux grands volets. Dans la mutinerie des militaires, on a un camarade qui a eu une balle, qui est mort, un certain Diawara Yssouf. Donc il y avait son enterrement. Donc on s'est dit, à travers l'hommage qu'on va rendre à notre ami, faire lever quand même notre problème parce qu'on voit que notre problème, il est bloqué et on ne peut pas perdurer dans ça. Donc on a demandé à ce qu'on soit sur les corridors, pour observer les deux à quatre heures d'enterrement de notre camarade, parce que ce camarade devenait déjà un symbole de lutte. Il a pris une balle quand les militaires tiraient de gauche à droite³²«.

The ex-combatants of C39 thus play on the different registers of their knowledge, drawing on their various forms of cultural, economic, and social capital.

During my first meeting with C39 members, I observed significant differences in the forms of discourse used by members of the Bouaké and Korhogo chapters³³ – particularly when the representative in Bouaké, in presenting the cell, explained that it is not an association. The first split was around ideological factors bearing on the strategy to be pursued: violence or the administrative route. Problems around leadership were also apparent during the different interviews, particularly after the demonstrations which led to the deaths of several *démobilisés* in May 2017³⁴. The members of the executive office in Korhogo dismissed the coordinators in Bouaké from their functions, accusing them of having organized clandestine meetings – both amongst themselves and with local political actors, who the executive accused of manipulating them – without informing either the base or some of their comrades. According to members of the Korhogo office, one of the members of the coordinating team in Bouaké even proclaimed himself president of the entire organization, and presented himself as such in interviews with the press. Some of the interviewees said that this member had been encouraged by local political figures (who, they said, had pushed him to assert his independence). The coordinating team in Bouaké was then dissolved and the chapter put under direct supervision of the national executive office in Korhogo. Similar events transpired around the coordinating team in Man, although in this case the local team was not dissolved³⁵. The members of the executive office in Korhogo explained their conflict with their comrades in Bouaké as follows.

32 »When we went out onto the roads, nothing made any sense to us anymore. We said to ourselves, ›What? The letters we send, aren't they reaching the top? So if that doesn't happen, what do we need to do?‹. So we saw that it's stuck at a certain level? That means that whatever work we do from below, it's going to stop at that point. And it will torture us, and what if ever someone plays around, takes us and locks us up. Maybe even for no reason! So we went out on the roads, there were two main components. In the mutiny of the soldiers, we have a comrade who took a bullet, who died, a certain Diawara Yssouf. So there was his funeral. So we said to ourselves, through the tribute we pay to our friend, we'll raise our problem anyway, because we see that our problem is stuck, and we can't continue in that. So we asked that people be on the roads, to observe the two to four hours of our comrade's funeral, because this comrade was already becoming a symbol of struggle. He took a bullet when the soldiers were shooting in all directions«.

Interview with El Diablo, Korhogo, 27 November 2017.

33 The association's executive office is located in Korhogo, but several members of Cellule 39 in Bouaké, a former stronghold of the rebellion, tried to take over the leadership of the association. There is thus a rivalry between the members in the two localities.

34 Côte d'Ivoire: 4 morts dans des affrontements à Bouaké entre démobilisés et policiers, in: Africa News, 23 May 2017, <https://fr.africanews.com/2017/05/23/cote-d-ivoire-3-morts-lors-d-affrontements-entre-demobilises-et-policiers-a/> (last accessed 23 December 2021).

35 This decision is explained in particular by the fact that the coordinating team in Bouaké represents a greater competitor for the national executive office than the one in Man.

»La dissension qui est là, c'est que d'autres sont pour la violence et d'autres ne sont pas pour la violence. Nous, nous voulons que notre lutte là soit purement administrative. Mais souvent, il a fallu taper un peu pour que le monde entier puisse s'appropriier notre problème pour qu'on en parle, surtout la société civile ivoirienne. Mais c'est les va-t-en-guerre, ils ne sont pas nombreux et leur source c'est Bouaké. C'est pourquoi Bouaké a toujours des problèmes. Parce qu'ils se disent que si on ne fait pas de violence, d'autres ne croient pas en la lutte administrative. Mais ce qui est intéressant c'est les 95 % qui croient en la lutte administrative³⁶.«

This rivalry, and the lack of a consensus around the mode of action that the group should prioritize in the pursuit of its demands, highlights the limits of the purely administrative struggle.

Conclusion

The discourse of the members of the national executive office in Korhogo, presented as conciliatory, nevertheless appears ambiguous. They spoke not only of the purely administrative struggle but of its limits, and of the alternative of violent mobilizations – without, however, explicitly endorsing this violent strategic position. They thus attempted to discredit some of their comrades who wished to resort to violence in pursuit of the association's demands. This tension between a strategy of »purely administrative struggle«, using bureaucratization as a non-violent mode of action, and collective action through violence illustrates the divisions within the association. The competition between members in the different cities is based in part on this tension, whose origins lie in previously existing political and social divisions between the members in the two localities. The relations of these ex-combatants with the regime are ambiguous, a situation they find all the more uncomfortable as they see themselves as having contributed to the regime's rise to power. Today, some feel betrayed both by politicians and by their former commanders. In this context, there have been shifts and transformations in identities and categories based notably on different individuals' political affinities, which are reflected in collective actions carried out by different members of the group. The limitations of the »purely administrative struggle« drove the demobilized former combatants of Cellule 39 to take a number of sometimes violent collective actions in pursuit of their demands. Here I have analysed the power of the bureaucratic imaginary within C39: an imaginary of the State, rationality, progress, modernity, and security.

The purely administrative struggle thus shows that bureaucratic practices can serve as a strategy for the collective mobilization of marginalized groups. It can allow them to legitimize themselves and their actions in relationship to administrative authorities. It can also be a driver of internal division between members, based in part on the unevenly distributed mastery of administrative tools. The social and cultural capital of different members will thus have an impact on whether or not this strategy is employed as a form of struggle. And bureaucracy also acts as a weapon and a means of domination within the association, enabling those who master it to occupy high-ranking positions.

36 »The disagreement there is that some are for violence and some are not for violence. We want our struggle there to be purely administrative. But often, some blows had to be struck so that the whole world would face up to our problem, so that people would talk about it, especially Ivorian civil society. But it's the warmongers, there aren't many of them and their source is Bouaké. That's why Bouaké always has problems. Because they say to themselves that if we don't do violence, others won't believe in the administrative struggle. But what's interesting is the 95 % who believe in the administrative struggle.« Cellule 39 interview, Korhogo, 27 November 2017.