

CHILDREN OF THE WORLD / 1

# Prisca, from Ivory Coast







**Prisca, from Ivory Coast**

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# Prisca, from Ivory Coast

Texts by Marcelo Mendoza  
Photos by Álvaro Hoppe and Thibaut Monnier



Africa





Ivory Coast

Gohou-Zagna

Man





**We live in a process of epochal change** to make the great leap towards a more just society, where diverse cultures are respected and encountered. Because of its relevance, educational institutions must advance in this challenge and allow spaces for these voices to break down the barriers that keep us away from our own identity and knowledge that is built from everyday life. For this reason, this government enacted the law that creates “a new public education system, which establishes that children, young people and adults in each and every locality of the national territory will be educated in learning environments that foster the development as integral persons and subjects of rights of the country we all dream of”.

JUNJI (Spanish acronym of National Board of Preschools) has been translating into books the reality that children live in different corners of Chile, where they express the feelings, customs, games and culture. Learning about the world

from children themselves, is an inexhaustible source of inspiration for the development of education with a social and human sense.

Today we are taking a new step, which has allowed us to enter a world beyond our country. Prisca, a girl from Ivory Coast, in Africa, shows us in the most genuine way her day to day, her family, community, rites, games and the richness of her culture, where the wonderful opportunity to find equality between the apparent and great difference is opened to us.

The publication of this book, distributed in our kindergartens, opens new horizons of learning, respect and better coexistence among people.

**Desirée López de Maturana Luna**  
*Executive Vice-president*  
National Board of Preschools  
(JUNJI, by its Spanish acronym)



**Prisca, through her history**, family, friends and environment, immerses us in the daily life of a cocoa-producing community in Ivory Coast. A life of striking contrasts: material poverty with cultural richness; ancestral traditions with dreams and traces of modernity; generosity and creativity in the face of precariousness.

With our Transforming Education in the Cocoa Community (TREC) program, we work to improve educational opportunities for Prisca and 200,000 other children in Ivory Coast.

We support quality education, in partnership with the cocoa and chocolate industry and the government. The Bernard van Leer Foundation (TREC's strategic partner) supports this initiative both financially and with its expertise. Our goal is to strengthen public policies in favor of early childhood, education and vocational training, increasing the quality of education in sustainability strategies.

We want to improve the conditions of the rural population, acting from the birth to offer children a fuller life with educational opportunities, because the early years are a key to their future as adults.

We are touched by the interest shown in the children of West African cocoa communities by JUNJI in Chile, and by the publishers of this book, which will be distributed (in addition to Ivory Coast) in Chilean public kindergartens. This initiative gives children and families the opportunity to illustrate life in their communities and create memorable educational books. May it be the beginning of many more.

**Sabina Vignani**  
TREC Director

*Abidjan, November 2017*





**Prisca and her cousin Febe** are inseparable. They hold hands, laugh and walk through the family cocoa plantation to help their parents and siblings in the cultivation of cocoa.

*They are part of the Gohouo-Zagna community in western Ivory Coast. More than 17,000 inhabitants live there, most of them of the Guéré ethnic group, but there are also Baoulé and Dioula natives and foreigners from the bordering countries of Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea.*



**“I like to draw” –says Prisca–.** “Everyone likes it: no matter where” –and she jumps in with Febe and her father to draw lines and curves with colored pencils, on leaves and cocoas, in a big book they gave her, because in the houses of her tribe there are hardly any books...

Prisca is 5 years old and attends first grade at the Gohouo-Zagnasc school. Her father is Yehé Gninhin Roger (52) and he taught her to read. Her mother’s name is Djea u Sieh Elyse (42).

Their community is in the region of Guémon, in the area of the 18 mountains, in the department of Bangolo: 12 kilometers from Bangorou and 67 kilometers from Man, the big city in the west of the country. This is far from Abidjan, the largest and most important city in Ivory Coast: 9 hours away.





**“I want to be an obstetrician” –exclaims Prisca–.** “And then work to buy a house for mom and a car for dad. And for my brother to travel to study. I am the youngest of six siblings: and the only girl! Only my mom can't read, but she wants to learn!”.

Many in the community do not know how to read and write, especially women. But in the new generations the differences between ethnicity and gender are disappearing. Prisca is an example.

Her brothers help to grow not only cocoa, but also bananas, yucca, coffee, mango, avocado and cassava. The eldest, Amos Rodolphe, is finishing his high school in Bangalo. The second, Romaric, wants to be a gendarme. The others are Armand, Ridrigue and Fabricé. Their grandfather is Yehé François.



**Ivory Coast is a beautiful country** typically African: is in West Africa, in the Gulf of Guinea. It is the world's leading producer of cocoa (40% of the total), although it was only introduced in the 1960s. There are also large crops of coffee, bananas, cassava and cola, the kind used in sodas. But it is cocoa that employs the most people: it is the raw material for the world's chocolate production.

The strange thing is that neither Prisca nor Febe, nor any other child in the community, have ever eaten what they call chocolate.



**“We plant the cocoa** and grow it” —explains dad Roger—.

“We take the seeds out, let them dry in the sun and put them in sacks. Buyers arrive and take them to warehouses in Abidjan and from there they go to Europe and the United States”.

Thousands of tons of sacks of cocoa beans are shipped in the Ivory Coast to produce chocolate in their factories of origin. Chocolate is desired all over the world...







**Cocoa is a small tree** that bears fruit at 5 or 6 years of life. At a year and a half, they begin to produce. One hectare can yield 300 kilos, in two annual harvests. With the enriched varieties, they can reach one ton.

It is the main source of income in Ivory Coast. Almost all producers are small farmers living in community, like Prisca's family. They own the land and the trees. The payment per bag is very low. However, cocoa is called "black gold".



**In Prisca's country its people** are cheerful and colorful. It is called Ivory Coast because during the French colonization (the first missionaries arrived in 1637) elephants were hunted to traffic their ivory tusks, ship them and sell them at high prices in Europe.

“The remaining elephants are now protected in nature reserves” –says Roger-. “Although there are still clandestine hunters”.

As happened in other African countries, Ivory Coast suffered human and environmental exploitation by the colonizers. It was not until 1960 that it became independent. In 20 years, thanks to coffee and cocoa, there was a great development: “the African miracle”. But prices fell and the dispute over land led to a civil war with many deaths. In the cocoa area there are traces of the conflict.





**”Once we went to visit the Cascades** and we were also playing with the monkeys” –says Prisc a, very happy.

The beautiful waterfalls are near Man, the main town in the cocoa region, in the most mountainous and greenest part of the country.



# Cascades

NATURELLES  
DE MAN

*Bienvenue*









**“We are ten siblings,** from three different mothers, because my dad has three wives: he is a Muslim” –says Kei Madoché.

Kei Madoché (his name means *Warrior of the Future*) is the same age as Prisc a. He is her neighbor. His father’s name is Doué Kémonsia Urban, 30 years old. His mother, Tia Alice, 25.

**“My days are like this:** I wake up at 6:30, get cleaned up and stand by the brazier to warm up, have breakfast and play soccer with my friends” –tells Kei Madoché–. I don’t go to school yet, and I help my mom clean the house and cook.

When he grows up, he wants to be a footballer and become like his idol Didier Drogba, the historic scorer of the Ivorian national team who won the Champions League with Chelsea in the United Kingdom.

“My dream is for Kei Madoché to go to Europe or North America” –says his father–. And if he stays in Ivory Coast, then let him become chief of police.



**“When I play, I forget to eat lunch”** –says laughing Kei Madoché–. “But what I like the most is to eat Kplé sauce with rice. On TV, I watch karate movies. Of the other games, I’m fascinated by a unique box: this toy that my older brother invented for me. I like it because it’s entertaining. It’s used to sieve sand. Ah: my best friends are Angel and Eric”.

In the afternoons, he helps his parents grow bananas and cassava. He also collects cocoa.

In Gohouo-Zagna both children and adults have few possessions. Each toy can be a unique asset. Building their own toys makes them very creative.



**Prisca knows it is a special day:** the wisest of the community, called *Le Rouade Jean*, turns 100 years old. In his honor, the *masks* appear to celebrate it. He is the one to maintain the memory, to pass on the traditions and to communicate the good life of his ancestors.

The *masks* are the magical characters that come to give news. They are not humans, but gods. ***Nemeyoué*** is a *mask* that dances joyfully: it represents childhood and youth. Everyone celebrates. Children and young people dance. They follow him. They sing.

There are also comic *masks*: ***Zone min*** and ***Peroquet de Zagna***. They make people laugh. Others dance with acrobatic movements: ***Zadjé*** and ***Dibahau***. To make the *masks* come out, they offer them wine and money. Everyone is amazed. Then the *masks* leave the way they came.







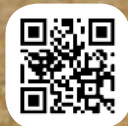


**In Ivory Coast the soil is red.** And the sunsets too.

Oceana is 5 years old. She lives near Prisca and Kei Madoché. She is the sister of Jasmine (13) and Syntiche (1). She plays with her blonde doll, and with her friends Melisa and Sephora they “cook” under a mango tree that gives them shade. They put red dirt on the dishes, pretending it is an exquisite dish.

Oceana adds “fish” to the soup.

Other children have fun with the typical local game: *agua k*. They compete in pairs.













**Prisca knows that in Africa** women carry burdens on their heads. Sometimes also the children. You see that a lot in the cities and on the roads.

“Before, only the men took care of the fields and the women took care of the house and moving things around” –explains her mother-. “But now the women and children also help with the crops. And we peel the rice”.



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## **In Gohouo-Zagna different beliefs are professed:**

animists, Evangelicals, Catholics and Muslims. There is no fighting.

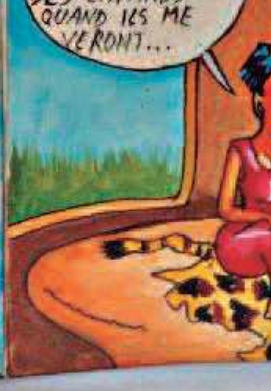
Animist is the African religion. They worship several gods: the *masks*. Nobody is authorized to talk to them. Only a mediator. Gnionao Leon is the chief of the people. He was selected for life and can communicate with the *masks*. He solves the conflicts of the community in relation to land, social coexistence and couples. There is only oral tradition. There are no papers.

“I cannot belong to a political party and I must have religious tolerance. My role is to unite the people and to be just” –says Chief Leon–. If my own son commits wrongdoing, I must do justice, even if I rule against him.



**“My dad is my teacher”** –says Prisc a, happily–. “He teaches me to read, but not only me: he also teaches my friends. That’s why he made a big blackboard and bought chalk to teach us.

He does it on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday afternoons, after dad Roger returns from the cocoa plantation”.



**The older ones have the mission** of telling the history of the village, for the children to follow. Since “years” are not used, it is not possible to know how old the origin is.

“The tribe was somewhere else” –says Chief Leon–. “But there was a war. Fleeing, our ancestors walked many miles in search of better land. They were led by *Nizonhi*, an elephant and boar hunter. He came and said: here we will stay. He returned to his parents at the origin: Doguó. The first to arrive here was the Goody family. A long time ago. Then came the Zonedy family. The third family was the Gunhigolo. And the fourth, the Zroho. The main culture is represented in the figure of the ***Gla***: a *mask* that has the function of ending conflicts”.





MA  
MME GNAHE HERMANN  
Scanner crâne encéphalique

**“It’s kind of weird to eat chocolate.** I only ate it once: it’s very sweet, tasty, but the children don’t know it” –says Roger

During the cocoa harvest season, families help each other: the reciprocity of barter. It is the main livelihood activity: this allows them to improve their quality of life.

The cocoa fruit is yellow and elliptical, like the Milky Way, whose white pods hide the tasty seed that will be the base of the chocolate.

Ivory Coast’s 800,000 small landowners are the world’s leading cocoa producers.



**“My mom Elyse washes me” –says Prisca–.** “And my brothers take me to school. At noon they bring me home for lunch and then they take me back to school until the afternoon, Monday through Friday. There are 60 children in the class”.

Roger gets up every day between 5 and 6 a.m. He cleans himself. He has breakfast with the family: rice and bread. No coffee, no tea, no milk... let alone cocoa. Sometimes there is food left over from the previous day: banana.

Roger and Elyse work Monday through Saturday on the plantation, a few kilometers from the village. They return at 6 p.m. The four male siblings take care of Prisca.

On Sunday they go to the Restoration Church. They are evangelical.



## **Tuba is one hour away from Gohouo-Zagna.**

The *Dan* people live there. It is an ancestral tribe, with children like Prisca, Kei Madoché and Oceana. The tribal council meets in a hut. Kané, the chief, speaks in his language to us, his guests:

“The *masks* want to greet them because they are welcome” –says Chief Kané–. “When the ancients arrived, they were looking for water in jars. To rest in the shade, we have planted these trees” –he shows them: they are full of birds–. They are part of history: they are called *Zonhun*. The *Bouni* (pot) is our symbol. Everything is done in it: we clean ourselves, we fetch water, we eat. There are a fence of wild animal skins and only old people can enter. Before the whites arrived, there were no chairs: the whites brought them along with everything that is not natural, such as plastic.



**“Children are more important than we are, the old”**  
—says Chief Kané—. “If they then leave for other worlds, they will return to support us”.

In Tuba they do not know exactly how many there are, but most of them are children. There are eight family groups and they speak the same language: *Dan Menou*. All the huts are the same, small, and sleep 5 to 10 people. When the children grow up, they build their own hut.

Before, the children went to the fields to work, but now they go to a school, built thanks to international cooperation.







**“The ancients came here because there were** small wars in their place of origin. They found this land and stayed. They were my ancestors” –says Chief Kané.

The huts are made of mud, circular, with reed roofs, with one entrance and one exit, without windows, to shelter from the tropical heat. The children live in them with their parents.

As in Gohouo-Zagna, they have very few things: a brazier for cooking, a pot, a couple of earthenware dishes, a wooden floor and two blankets for sleeping.

Touba is close to Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali, and to the cities of Biamkouma and Gagoune.

**“The masks and the people shout out to them:**

‘Friends!’” –Kané, the tribal chief, says with a smile.

The women, all in white, laugh, inspired and happy. They dance to the rhythm of the drums and chants. Some carry their little babies on their backs.

A *mask* with stilts symbolizes a forest animal. It makes giant leaps. The children launch themselves into the air with great physical dexterity.

Drums and songs resound. The joy is immense. The energy invites foreigners to dance. Possessed.







## TO KNOW AND TELL

### DEATH

The *Guéré* believe in reincarnation. Whether they are animists, Christians or Muslims, when someone dies, they put him or her in the earth as quickly as possible, but it must be in the morning. If the person dies at night, the rite begins at dawn. In order not to lose his family name, the next one born in the family will take his name. When the person who dies is a respected wise man, a great feast is held in the tribe. The old men mark the time. Those who have more money put the dead in a cement tomb, at the entrance of cities and villages. The relatives go there to remember him. It is not well seen that outsiders stop at the tombs.





## ANIMALS

“There were many elephants in this country until recently” –says Ismael, a driver from Abidjan–. “But with the Civil War (2002-2011) they were so frightened by the bombs and gunfire that they fled to Burkina Faso”.

Prisca has not seen many animals in Ivory Coast: only wild boars, pigs, dogs, monkeys, goats, chickens and a couple of horses. Near Man there are monkeys in the trees, waiting for people to show up and give them bananas.

Today it is very difficult to see an elephant in the landscape. But there are nature reserves where they are protected (although clandestine hunting continues). There are other animals that Prisca would like to meet: lions, giraffes, rhinos, hippopotamuses, chimpanzees, zebras, buffaloes, crocodiles...



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## **ABIDJAN**

Ivory Coast is home to 23 million people, and Abidjan is the most important city. It is on the Gulf of Guinea, from where the traffic of ivory and slaves in the Colony departed. Today, ships full of cocoa departed.

Only 50% of the population can read and life expectancy does not exceed 50 years. The ethnic and cultural diversity of the territory is enormous and is manifested in the coexistence of 65 languages and 60 ethnic groups: the *Mandinga*, *Volta*, *Kru*, *Akán*, *Kwa*, *Baoulé*, *Guéré* (Prisca's ethnic group) and others.



**Prisca does not know Abidjan**, but his father and brother have told her: they want her to study here.

When they arrived, the French settlers stayed on the coast: at Grand Bassam. A museum shows slavery in black and white.

Today, on beaches of palm trees and clear sand, Malian vendors and Ghanaian fishermen share the same place. 30 kilometers away, Abidjan shows color and flavor in its markets.

Cheerful Ivorian reggae can be heard as background music. Writer Marguerite Abouet shows Abidjan with her character *Aya de Yopougon*, famous comic strip with drawings by Clément Oubrerie.









## **YAMO USSO UKRO**

Ya mo usso ukro , the administrative capital since 1983, is a bit of a ghost town, a bit colorless, in a country as colorful as Ivory Coast. The first president after independence (Félix Houphouët Boigny) built a palace and a lagoon with crocodiles. But the most striking thing is a replica of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome in the middle of Africa. It is even bigger: it is the largest Christian temple in the world! With gigantic columns and marble floors, its stained-glass windows are the largest in the world and in these crystals appears a *Last Supper* where Christ shares a table with apostles of known faces: one of them is the president who commissioned the work, others the French architects and builders. The first mass was celebrated by pope John Paul II.



## **EATAS A FAMILY**

**In the villages, people eat in the “maquis”, typical food places. According to the different ethnic groups, there are different dishes. The sauces are the most popular. This dish is one of Prisca’s family’s favorite dishes.**

### **KIAKOU SAUCE**

#### **Ingredients**

- 1 liter of water
- Smoked fish and herring (Magni fish)
- Other smoked meat of choice
- Dried and salted fish
- Shrimp
- Dried palm mushrooms or other (black or yellow mushrooms)
- 150 grams of klakou
- One fresh tomato
- Salt



## Preparation

Clean the fish and meat and let it aside. Soak the mushrooms, shrimp and peppers in hot water. In a pot bring the water to boil, then add the meat and boil for 15 minutes more. Add fish, mushrooms and shrimp. Add salt. Cover and continue boiling. Meanwhile, grind the peppers and half an onion. Add to the pot the paste obtained, the dried fish and

the tomato. Wait 30 minutes, and remove the tomato.

In a frying pan, toast the fresh kaklou. Grind kaklou, add the sauce to obtain a smooth paste. Carefully remove everything in the sauce (fish, meat) to leave only the liquid. Put the ground kaklou and mix it with the sauce with a whisk. Once well mixed, add what was removed from the sauce and mix gently. Cook over low heat for 15 minutes ... and it is ready.













## **PHOTOGRAPHS**

### **Álvaro Hoppe**

pages 6, 11, 15, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27, 29, 30, 39, 40, 43, 44, 45, 51, 55, 57, 67, 68, 71, 73, 74, 75, 83, 84-85, 87, 88, 89.

### **Thibaud Monnier**

pages 8, 10, 13, 17, 19, 32, 35, 37, 41, 46, 47, 59, 61, 64, 69, 86 y portada.

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The **CHILDREN OF THE WORLD** collection reflects the diversity and similarities of childhood all around the world and gives an account, with their own face and voice, of each of their lives.

These stories and photographs show what was before unseen: boys and girls in their everyday lives, cultures and territories, allowing them to be shared in homes, kindergartens and schools, with children and families everywhere on Earth.

