

Original Research Article

Normative Entanglement and the Identity Construction of Landed Belongings: A Socio-Anthropology of Legitimacies in Semien (Côte d'Ivoire)

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Article History

Received: 12.06.2025

Accepted: 16.08.2025

Published: 19.08.2025

Journal homepage:

<http://www.easpublisher.com>

Quick Response Code



Abstract: Situated within a socio-anthropological framework of land dynamics, this qualitative inquiry conducted in Semien examines the interweaving of customary, institutional, and memorial normative regulations in the identity construction processes related to land belonging. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with both autochthonous and allochthonous actors, it unveils competing legitimisation configurations, wherein access to land becomes the site of a symbolic struggle articulating autochthony capital, genealogical narratives, and communal recognition. The analysis reveals that land, far from being a mere asset, functions as a marker of identity and a vector of social distinction. The discussion emphasises tensions between inherited normativity and contemporary reconfigurations of land rights, within the Ivorian context of legal pluralism and deeply contested memory. The study concludes with a call to urgently rethink land recognition mechanisms through situated practices and territorial subjectivities.

Keywords: Land Legitimacy, Customary Norms, Territorial Identity, Autochthony, Normative Pluralism, Côte d'Ivoire.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The empirical data gathered in Semien reveal a plurality of normative frameworks mobilised to justify the acquisition, use, and transmission of land. Alongside state law, customary logics, religious discourses, founding settlement narratives, land improvement contracts, and matrimonial alliances together shape a composite land tenure order. This heterogeneity produces an unstable normative configuration in which regimes of legitimacy frequently come into competition.

The paradox lies in the fact that this normative plurality ostensibly designed to ensure flexibility and inclusion often generates forms of exclusion and identity-based hierarchisation. Far from fostering harmonious land cohabitation, the entanglement of norms becomes a strategic resource in the contest over the definition of the “true” native, the “good” migrant, or the “legitimate” heir. Here, the norm emerges as an instrument of social distinction, and landed belonging is redefined through identity-based trials and negotiations.

This raises a central question: how do the various normative regimes articulate to produce, challenge, or stabilise land-based legitimacies in Semien, and according to which identity logics? Addressing this

requires moving beyond a purely legalistic or conventional land tenure analysis, in favour of a socio-anthropological perspective attuned to the mechanisms of recognition and subjectivation.

From a scientific standpoint, this research contributes to illuminating the social fabrication of landed belongings as a dynamic, relational, and situated process. It highlights the differentiated activation of norms, their performativity in the production of land-based identities, and the forms of conflict they underpin. From a societal perspective, it offers an understanding of the invisible drivers of land-related tensions beyond the visible disputes by probing the symbolic foundations of territorial belonging.

This approach draws upon a close dialogue with several major authors. Bayart (1996) emphasises the interstitial and pluralistic nature of the African state, where norms overlap rather than exclude one another. Bourdieu (1980) provides a framework for analysing the relationship between habitus, symbolic capital, and legitimacy, demonstrating how the rules of the land tenure “game” are both embodied and strategically mobilised. Le Roy (1991) underscores the “diffuse juridicity” of African societies, where norms are not

fixed but are subject to bricolage. Lund (2008) advances the notion of *de facto* authority to elucidate actors who produce law without formally holding the power to do so. Ayimpam (2014) shows that land transactions are embedded in moral economies in which affective and political registers are inseparable. Butler (2004), in her reflections on the performativity of identity, enables us to conceive of land-based belongings as discursive effects of a perpetually precarious recognition. Finally, Ferguson (2006) reminds us that all territorial belonging is also a political production of the subject.

Thus, in Semien, landed belongings stem neither from a singular legal order nor from a shared collective memory. They are fashioned in the interstices of a fragmented normative order, where rights, affects, and statuses intertwine. This research seeks to decipher this complex grammar of legitimacy by bringing to light the voices, tensions, and strategic manoeuvres of the actors who, in their daily practices, negotiate both their right to land and their right to be recognised upon it.

1.1 Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The analysis of land tenure dynamics in the Ivorian context, and more specifically in Semien, mobilises intersecting theoretical perspectives situated at the confluence of the sociology of law, political anthropology, and the sociology of recognition. In a perspective inspired by Elias (1965), the land tenure order is conceived here as a historically crystallised relational configuration, traversed by tensions between competing norms customary, statutory, and community-based within which the recognition of landed belonging is continually negotiated. Rejecting any substantialist conception of land-based identity, this approach treats identity formation as a situated, performative, and relational construction, anchored in a long-term system of interdependence.

Furthermore, the Foucauldian approach to regimes of truth (Foucault, 1976) illuminates the ways in which categories of land legitimacy are instituted through discursive regularities, evidentiary devices, and practices of social memory. Land thus becomes a site of techniques of social control, where the production of belonging is inscribed within differential strategies of power and territorial inclusion. The embedding of land identities in plural normative matrices also recalls the approach of legal pluralism, as articulated by Griffiths (1986), which conceives law not as a unified system but as a constellation of heterogeneous norms in interaction, permeated by implicit hierarchies.

In addition, Honneth's (1992) work on recognition provides a valuable anchor for conceiving land disputes as struggles for visibility, status, and dignity. Claims to "autochthony", precedence, or communal loyalty are not merely strategies for accessing resources; they are also quests for symbolic recognition

within a social space marked by normative uncertainty and statutory ambivalence.

This tripartite framework Eliasian, Foucauldian, and Honnethian allows us to conceptualise normative entanglement as a nested system of legitimacies in which actors mobilise differentiated registers to validate or contest land rights. It also enables an understanding of the performativity of land belonging as a process of subjectivation, selective memory, and normative codification within a context of juridical hybridity. This lens sheds light on the power dynamics surrounding land discourse, the social fabrication of proof, and the tacit hierarchisation of rights.

Yet these frameworks are not without their limitations. The Foucauldian perspective tends to reduce land conflict to a mode of governance, at the risk of effacing the affective, emotional, or sacrificial dimensions of the relationship to land. The recognition paradigm, for its part, may appear overly normative or idealistic, underestimating the symbolic violence produced by certain regimes of legitimacy. Finally, while the sociology of configurations is invaluable for situating processes within the *longue durée*, it may be less effective in capturing the institutional ruptures induced by legal reforms or political crises.

The choice of Semien, in the Nawa region, is justified by its strategic position at the intersection of several dynamics: (i) the coexistence of multiple normative orders customary, religious, and statutory in land regulation; (ii) a long and layered migratory history rendering land belonging particularly contested; and (iii) the recent intensification of disputes linked to the formalisation of land rights (land certificates), which reveal tensions between state legality and local legitimacy. This locality thus constitutes a privileged observatory for interrogating the social fabrication of land legitimacy in a context of normative entanglement.

Participant selection followed a purposive and contrastive sampling strategy designed to elicit a plurality of regimes of land justification. Three principal criteria were applied to ensure analytically relevant diversity. The first concerned the landholding status of individuals: natives, first arrivals, descendants of allochthones, and landless youth. The second related to the institutional position of respondents, including traditional chiefs, customary administrators, state officials, religious leaders, and land mediators. The third concerned specific experience with land disputes or negotiations, targeting participants in litigation, direct witnesses, and members of local regulatory bodies.

Particular attention was paid to subaltern voices those of women, youth, and migrants without formal land recognition who are often marginalised in dominant discourses. This approach sought to capture the

complexity of power relations and to avoid a unilateral reading of land dynamics.

The data collection tools combined multiple complementary techniques. First, fifty semi-structured interviews both biographical and thematic were conducted, focusing on narratives of land access, trajectories of recognition, and the normative devices mobilised. Second, direct observation was carried out in arenas of land regulation such as family councils, customary deliberations, and meetings of local notables. Third, documentary analysis drew upon diverse written sources, including deeds of land transactions, codified customary texts, court judgments, litigation minutes, and cadastral plans.

Sampling adhered to an inductive logic of emergence, following the grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Case selection respected the principle of maximum variation in order to capture differential logics of legitimation. Data collection ceased at the point of theoretical saturation that is, when analysis no longer yielded new interpretative categories.

The analytic strategy rested on inductive thematic analysis, with an initial open coding followed by axial coding, facilitated by NVivo software. Units of meaning were grouped into three principal analytical axes: regimes of legitimacy (ancestry, precedence, loyalty, contractualisation); evidentiary devices (testimony, collective memory, mediation); and effects of recognition or social disqualification. This analytical structuring, juxtaposed with the theoretical frameworks, allowed for the relational modelling of normative tensions around land belonging.

In Semien, normative entanglement in landed belonging has constituted a contentious figuration of legitimacy, where the law has never been univocal and land identities have never been natural but have always been strategically constructed. This study underscores the necessity of an intersectional reading of land tenure at the crossroads of law, memory, recognition, and power relations. It contributes to a critical anthropology of land politics in Africa, attentive to tacit orders, indigenous categories of legitimacy, and differentiated territorial subjectivities.

2. RESULTS

2.1. Land as Socio-Economic Capital and a Vector of Exclusion: A Critical Sociology of Land Legitimacy Regimes and Modes of Allogeneic Appropriation in Semien

In Semien, land has been endowed with a value far exceeding its productive function: it has constituted a veritable socio-economic capital, structuring power relations, social hierarchies, and trajectories of accumulation. It has served as a marker of status recognition and as a support for communal legitimacy, while crystallising tensions around belonging. Land

legitimacy regimes have been mobilised selectively to consolidate certain rights while disqualifying others, in accordance with logics of seniority, ethnicity, or political allegiance. Modes of allogeneic appropriation have often been perceived as forms of intrusion or predation, provoking local resistance and reactivating memories of injustice. Thus, land has played an ambivalent role: offering opportunities for upward mobility to some, while serving as an instrument of exclusion for others, in a context shaped by normative plurality and post-crisis conflictuality.

Verbal Data Collected:

"Land is everything for us, you see; it is from it that we get our food, it is from it that we get money to meet our needs. Land is an undeniable asset for us; it is wealth... Here in Semien, we do not refuse forest land to a stranger, but well, everyone has their own understanding of the matter. To have the right to land here as a stranger is not easy. You come, and you have the right to land through the cession that is made to you. Well, since you are my stranger, I give it to you; live on it, it is yours. Otherwise, apart from that, to pay and say that I am the owner of this land this is really not possible." (Chief of the indigenous community)

This statement reveals a deeply embedded understanding of land as the central pivot of material subsistence and social reproduction. Here, land is conceptualised not merely as an economic asset, but more fundamentally as a vector of survival and existential security. Such a holistic vision reflects a form of territorial *moral economy* in which land is inseparable from collective identity and social bonds, transcending its purely market value.

The distinction drawn between indigenous and non-indigenous actors in land access manifests a rigid normative configuration, grounded in criteria of relational proximity, trust, and social recognition. The right of use accorded to outsiders is explicitly framed by customary modalities, which are intended to safeguard internal cohesion. Land cession thus appears as a bounded act circumscribed by limited temporality and tacit obligations preserving the continuity of territorial ties while minimising the risk of long-term dispossession.

The reference to the impossibility of acquiring full land ownership through an "official" purchase reflects a reluctance towards the complete commodification of land, and a preference for regimes of usufruct or customary tenancy. This rejection of capitalist property modes reveals a profound ambivalence towards legal formalisation, perceived as potentially delegitimising and destabilising to traditional social relations. It underscores the persistence of an alternative land rationality, grounded in collective stewardship and community-based resource management.

Moreover, the invocation of “knowledge of the matter” signals the existence of a tacit regime of local knowledges and normative competencies regulating the modalities of land appropriation. This empirically situated knowledge acts as a hermeneutic filter, ensuring the reproduction of customary practices in the face of an increasingly heterogeneous territorial landscape. It embodies a form of community-based regulatory mechanism a micro-physics of territorial power in which knowledge serves as both a tool of legitimation and a means of exclusion.

In conclusion, this extract illustrates the complexity of land access regimes in a context marked by normative plurality and identity tensions. The dialectic between cautious openness and protective closure reflects a multi-scalar regulation of land tenure an architecture of land governance operating across several institutional levels where strategies of local control intertwine with compromise and resistance to commodification. This constitutes a critical paradigm for understanding the socio-political dynamics of contemporary African territories.

2.2. Family Networks and Mechanisms of Land Distribution: A Sociology of the Dynamics of Patrimonial Appropriation in Semien

Family networks have played a central role in structuring land distribution in Semien. They have organised the mechanisms of patrimonial appropriation according to logics of filiation, alliance, and generational hierarchy. These networks have legitimised certain transfers to the detriment of others, mobilising narratives of precedence, rootedness, or service rendered to the community. Land distribution mechanisms have thereby reproduced forms of internal inequality, while masking their selective character behind customary or moral justifications. In this framework, patrimonial appropriation has been less a simple transfer of assets than a socially negotiated process, in which land has crystallised tensions between private interests, collective norms, and strategies of differentiated accumulation.

Verbal Data Collected:

"We do not have difficulties in obtaining land, since my brothers who came here well, they received land. Some have had ten (10) hectares, others five (5) hectares, and so on."

This statement attests to a landholding experience mediated through the prism of consolidated social capital, revealing the centrality of kinship networks in shaping differentiated access to territorial resources. The reference to “my brothers” signals a relational inscription that transcends mere physical presence, anchoring itself in a system of reciprocal obligations and mutual recognition which guarantees preferential access to land. This dynamic illustrates the persistence of logics of social reproduction through

patrimonial redistribution within extended kinship groups.

The quantitative reference to the areas allocated (ten hectares, five hectares) points to an implicit hierarchy of land endowments, reflecting a differentiated socio-spatial order. This territorial subdivision appears structured according to an internal matrix in which land allocation correlates with relational factors such as seniority of settlement, family rank, or affective proximity. Thus, land is not a homogeneous asset but a differentiated capital, lying at the heart of dynamics of social ascent or maintenance.

This account highlights a regime of access grounded in the personalisation and particularisation of land rights, standing in contrast to universalist or juridico-formal models. Land allocation here emerges as a contextual process embedded within a mesh of customary norms and social interdependencies. This specificity underscores the limitations of positivist approaches, which tend to abstract land from its socio-cultural and political logics.

Moreover, the discourse reveals a form of internal “distributive equity” within groups, based on mechanisms of controlled sharing and adjustment of holdings, without opening the door to random redistribution or excessive commodification. Such a system appears to ensure relative stability while maintaining differentiation that crystallises social positions. Access to land thus falls within a continuum between inclusion and exclusion, contributing to the reproduction of local hierarchies.

Ultimately, this socio-landholding configuration calls into question the position of migrants and non-indigenous actors within such distributive regimes, underscoring the importance of lineage connections and blood-based solidarities. It invites a more nuanced analysis of the mechanisms by which territoriality is constructed, not solely through formal ownership but above all through relational rootedness and differentiated social recognition.

2.3. Agro-Territorial Cooperation and Ethnic Configurations: A Sociology of Inter-Community Land Regulation in Semien

Agro-territorial cooperation in Semien has fostered forms of land-based cohabitation between groups of differing ethnic origin. It has enabled the emergence of pragmatic mechanisms for regulating access to land, often grounded in informal arrangements, oral contracts, or customary mediation. These dynamics have established provisional equilibria in which ethnic configurations have been continually redefined in accordance with shifting power relations, migratory flows, and economic conjunctures. Inter-community land regulations have thus relied upon an ongoing negotiation of belonging and usufruct rights, while

simultaneously reactivating symbolic hierarchies and asymmetries of authority between the “autochthonous” and the “allochthonous.” Land has therefore functioned as the locus of a cooperation under tension at once a space of agrarian solidarity and a terrain of identity surveillance.

Verbal Data Collected:

"Here, we do not know land problems when we come (...) they say that we, the Baoulé, cultivate extensively and work well, so we have no problems with them." (Chief of an allochthonous community).

This statement illuminates a dynamic of socio-economic integration within local land regimes, wherein productive capacity emerges as an implicit vector of land-based legitimacy. The claim to an absence of “land problems” appears contingent upon the demonstration of a recognised economic utility, revealing a pragmatic system of valorisation in which land is granted in proportion to a proven contribution to the local agrarian economy. This mechanism operates as a form of differentiated recognition, situated at the intersection of agricultural yield and social acceptability.

The explicit invocation of the ethnic category “the Baoulé” and the emphasis upon their “good work” underscore an implicit hierarchy grounded in the moralisation of agrarian practice. This representation points to a normative apparatus of legitimation wherein productive efficiency becomes a socially valorised criterion and, by extension, a factor of integration into the circuits of land access. Such a performative agronomic referential inscribes land differentiation within a socially constructed aptitude logic, conferring a form of symbolic authority upon certain groups.

Moreover, the statement reflects a local social order structured around tacit modalities of interethnic cohabitation, premised upon forms of mutual recognition articulated through both economic production and social reciprocity. It highlights a mode of pragmatic arrangement which transcends ethnicity per se, anchoring itself in functional relations and socio-economic alliances that serve to pre-empt potential conflicts over territoriality.

In essence, this discursive material invites a reconceptualisation of regimes of land ownership and appropriation as situated configurations, in which social relations, agricultural performance, and collective identities are interwoven within a flexible normative order. It thereby illustrates the plasticity of territorial recognition regimes, marked by a constant dialectic between inclusion and social differentiation within socio-territorial spaces profoundly shaped by migratory histories and appropriation strategies.

2.4. Sociogenesis of Land Boundaries and Ethno-Kin Alliances: A Sociology of Selective Exclusions in Semien

The sociogenesis of land boundaries in Semien has rested upon a protracted process of occlusion, naturalisation, and codification of territorial belonging. Limitations upon access to land have not merely derived from geographical or legal criteria; rather, they have been actively constructed through narratives of precedence, acts of symbolic designation, and mechanisms of differentiated inclusion. Ethno-kin alliances have played a structuring role in this dynamic, reinforcing certain lineage-based affiliations whilst disqualifying alternative forms of land-based legitimacy. Such alliances have consolidated monopolies of access by mobilising networks of allegiance, marriage, or filiation, often to the detriment of groups perceived as external or insufficiently integrated. This process has generated selective forms of land exclusion, ostensibly justified through customary norms but, in effect, reflecting strategies of differentiated capture of land capital and territorial resources.

Verbal data collected: *"In our place, the land is not sold to just anyone. Those others you see the Baoulé and the Sénoufo are our brothers, so we have no problem with them."* (Young out-of-school autochthonous respondent).

This utterance conveys a profoundly endogenous and selective conception of land access, wherein landholding is articulated through bonds of ethno-communal fraternity. Here, land is envisaged not solely as an economic asset but as an identity marker whose transmission is circumscribed by principles of solidarity and cultural alliance. Such delineation implicitly excludes “others” designated as outside this fraternal network, revealing a land governance system deeply rooted in social exclusion mechanisms embedded within the local ethnic structure.

The reference to the Baoulé and the Sénoufo as “brothers” establishes a normative hierarchy governing land rights, in which symbolic kinship becomes a central criterion of legitimation. This categorisation manifests the naturalisation of ethnic belonging within the regulation of land access, creating a performative social boundary that dictates the modalities of recognition and appropriation. In this sense, the land domain is doubled by an operative social frontier—governed less by formal law than by a pragmatic and political customary regime.

Furthermore, this excerpt discloses the persistence of a collective normative matrix structuring intergroup interactions around land, subject to implicit rules of reciprocity and mutual recognition. This matrix contributes to the reproduction of local social relations by channelling potential tensions into a form of conflictual stabilisation, wherein the management of territorial resources becomes a central stake of symbolic

and material power, imbued with a strong affective and memorial charge.

In sum, this configuration underscores the complexity of land regimes, situated within a dialectic between ethno-familial inclusion and the exclusion of external alterities. Such a dialectic illustrates the fragmented and context-bound nature of territorial governance, wherein identity construction is enacted through strategies of differentiated control, thus preserving socio-spatial hierarchies that transcend the purely economic sphere to unfold within the political and symbolic domains.

3. DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals that land, far beyond its utilitarian or economic value, has emerged as a central operator in processes of social identification and the structuring of local hierarchies. Far from being a mere asset for agricultural or residential use, it has functioned as a symbolic marker of communal belonging, mobilised to assert territorial precedence, consolidate inherited status, or legitimise differentiated rights of access. Within this framework, the possession of or entitlement to land has not simply reflected a material relationship to space; it has crystallised relations of honour, prestige, and recognition, operating as a vector of distinction between those able to claim legitimate rootedness often grounded in genealogy, lineage memory, or political alliances and those consigned to positions of waiting, dependency, or precarious tenure. Land has thus played an active role in the production of social boundaries, ranking forms of belonging and sustaining implicit yet deeply internalised logics of exclusion.

This finding converges with Weber's (1922) observation of the capacity of territorial resources to crystallise forms of symbolic domination. In Semien, land operates as a signifier of social authority, conferring prestige and power upon those endowed with genealogical legitimacy. Landholding is thus read as a form of symbolic capital enabling the accumulation of a differentiated social status. This perspective resonates with Bourdieu's (1979) thesis that material goods become instruments of social distinction when invested with symbolic value. In Semien, land functions as a classificatory operator, producing and reproducing boundaries of belonging and exclusion.

Similarly, Chauveau (2000), in his research on Côte d'Ivoire, demonstrates that access to land is embedded in historicised relations of power, wherein lineage memory underpins differential rights. His findings align with those of the present study: access rights are never neutral but are imbued with history, narrative, and filiation. This land genealogy frequently invoked in autochthonous discourse reinforces status asymmetries between allochthonous and autochthonous groups according to a logic of strategic precedence. Kuba (2007), however, tempers this linear reading. Examining

land conflicts in West Africa, he shows that historical narratives are always selective, instrumentalised, and at times contested. Land thus emerges not only as a locus of shared memory but also as a terrain for narrative struggles.

From a critical standpoint, Lund (2008) challenges any naturalisation of customary land regimes. In Semien, as in other West African contexts, "custom" is performed, reconstructed, and politicised to affirm or delegitimise land access. This view supports the argument that local hierarchies are not static but redeployed in response to changing conjunctures. In this respect, Berry (1993) emphasises the fluidity of land rights, which are continuously reconfigured according to shifting social relations. This position diverges in part from the findings of the present enquiry, which tend to posit a relative stability of status founded upon lineage memory; Berry's account underscores instead the plasticity of rights and their ongoing negotiation.

Moreover, Geschiere (2009) stresses that in postcolonial Africa, land becomes an object of identity territorialisation: access to land serves as a test of belonging. This intersects with the exclusionary logics identified in the study, particularly with regard to "non-natives". Such testing of autochthony through land resonates with Bayart's (1989) notion of the "politics of the belly", wherein resources are appropriated to consolidate logics of private accumulation and the capture of the state. Even at the local scale, land access thus becomes a strategic lever of power.

In sum, land appears less as a mere productive resource than as a *dispositif* for rendering social relations intelligible. The sociological literature broadly concurs on its symbolic, conflictual, and unstable character. Divergences arise over the degree to which such logics are institutionalised or fluid: whereas authors such as Bourdieu and Weber stress the reproduction of the symbolic order, others, such as Berry and Lund, foreground processes of recomposition. The case of Semien vividly illustrates this dialectic between the permanence of hierarchies and the redeployment of forms of belonging, situating land at the very heart of the most profound social tensions.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has undertaken an in-depth analysis of the modalities through which customary and statutory norms intersect in the organisation of land tenure recognition. Through a socio-anthropological approach, the investigation has shown that these normative regimes, far from being merely juxtaposed, are enmeshed within a complex dynamic that shapes the identity construction of territorial affiliations. This normative entanglement emerged as the structuring core of land-related legitimacies, anchored in symbolic, social, and political *dispositifs* of considerable density.

The findings have highlighted that land-related belonging is constructed through dialectical processes of negotiation between formal norms and customary practices, wherein memory, genealogy, and narratives of precedence operate as strategic resources for the legitimisation of rights. This identity-making process is marked by a normative polysemy in which actors simultaneously mobilise multiple registers of legitimacy, thereby generating effects of competition, redefinition, and at times, conflict. Such normative entanglement has actively contributed to local social differentiation, delineating shifting boundaries between autochthonous populations, allochthones, and various intermediary groups.

From a scholarly standpoint, the research contributes to a renewal of traditional approaches to land tenure regimes by foregrounding the co-construction of norms and territorial identities. It transcends dichotomous frameworks opposing state law and custom, emphasising instead their dialectical articulation in the production of land-related legitimacies. This contribution aligns with the tradition of critical sociological scholarship interrogating the performativity of norms and the plasticity of social belonging in postcolonial contexts.

From a practical perspective, the results offer practitioners and policy-makers a sophisticated analytical framework for apprehending the complexity of land governance in Semien. By illuminating the coexistence and mutual penetration of normative regimes, the study opens the way for land management strategies that are more attuned to identity realities and symbolic stakes, thereby fostering more inclusive interventions adapted to local dynamics.

Nevertheless, the study presents certain notable limitations. Its focus on identity and normative processes may have overshadowed broader structural economic and political dimensions, such as the impact of national public policies or global market forces. Furthermore, the qualitative methodology adopted, while rich in depth, did not allow for a full integration of the diversity of individual experiences within the groups concerned, nor for the quantitative operationalisation of the plurality of legitimacies.

Looking ahead, the research invites a deepening of multidisciplinary engagement, articulating more explicitly the insights of sociology, legal anthropology, and political geography in order to better apprehend the circulations of norms and identities at play. It would also be pertinent to explore the temporal dynamics of land-related belonging by analysing processes of generational renewal and the effects of contemporary social transformations on normative configurations.

In sum, this study has laid the foundations for a critical socio-anthropology of land-related legitimacies in Semien, shedding light on the complexity of normative entanglements and the identity-making of territorial belonging, and thereby opening a major heuristic horizon for understanding tensions and recompositions in land tenure within African postcolonial societies.

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