Islam and Muslim Life in West Africa: Practices, Trajectories and Influences

Sounaye, Abdoulaye (Ed.); Chappatte, André (Ed.)

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Islam and Muslim Life in West Africa

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Edited by
Abdoulaye Sounaye and André Chappatte

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This publication is the product of a 3-year collaboration between scholars who research, teach and write about Islam and Muslim societies, focusing primarily on West Africa. Coming from different disciplinary backgrounds, these scholars bring together perspectives on contemporary experiences of Islam and being Muslim in the region. We hope it adds to the knowledge of the region and charts new territories in the study of Islam and Muslim societies in general.

The first expression of gratitude goes to these colleagues who accepted to join the adventure that led to this volume. We thank them for their patience with our endless requests and suggestions, their resilience and trust. Most of the contributions are authored by junior scholars some of whom signed here their first academic publications. We hope this fulfils the promise we have made to give them the floor to voice their ideas, one of the goals of this collaboration.

Co-organized by the Laboratoire d'études et de recherches sur les dynamiques sociales et le développement local (Lasdel, Niamey, Niger https://www.lasdel.net/) and Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO, Berlin, Germany https://www.zmo.de/) the workshop, "From Senegal to Nigeria: The Modernity of Islam in Contemporary West Africa – Practices, Influences and Trajectories" (Niamey, 18th to the 23rd of November 2019) started the whole process. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Lasdel for hosting the workshop and Volkswagen (Knowledge for Tomorrow Program, grant 94910) for funding it. Leibniz and ZMO funded the open access option of this volume. Without the efforts of Siddo Moumouni, Professeur Tidjani Alou and Abdoua Elhadj Dagobi at Lasdel, Miriam Reinhardt at Volkswagen Foundation, Rakiya El Matine, Svenja Becherer and Nico Putz at ZMO, this collaboration and the volume would not have been possible. Your attention to details and patience with us made this book. Behind the scenes and quietly, you have helped us take this collaborative project to fruition.

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Abdoulaye Sounaye, André Chappatte

Introduction: Islam and Muslim Life in West Africa – Practices, Trajectories and Influences

Islam has become one of the main themes of research in African studies in the last two decades. In academic engagement with West Africa, in particular, only a few topics have attracted more interest and contributions. Consequently, the literature has grown diverse, multidisciplinary and engaging, while examining topics such as pietism, gender relations, authority, activism and, increasingly, violence and security. On the ground, Islam is highly visible in the media and at the centre of public life because of so-called jihadi attacks on state institutions, widespread religious entrepreneurship, the emergence of new authoritative figures and a dynamic challenge to traditional power structures that shape the experiences of being Muslim. What can we learn from these developments? What dynamics do they draw attention to? What new and local research perspectives are they inspiring? What do these perspectives add?

This volume is informed by these questions and adds to a history of academic engagement with Islam in West Africa. Inspired by a locally framed agenda, it offers the floor to scholars from the region, providing them with visibility and urging them to elaborate on their insights.

As the initiators of major political entities (e.g. Ghana, Mali, Macina, Songhay, Sokoto), Muslim communities in West Africa have been shaped by their encounters with European imperialism, which organized their lands into possessions, protectorates, territories and then colonies. Imperialism was a process of social subjugation that led to the establishment of the modern state: an institution that subordinated political logic to its regulatory power. Prior to European imperialism, however, Muslim traders and scholars developed ties and connections across and beyond West Africa, illustrating the fact that Muslims have regularly engaged in educational networks, economic exchanges and cooperation beyond the confines of their polities. While historic ties with the Maghreb, Egypt and the Hijaz contributed to the making of Muslim West Africa, connections with modern

Abdoulaye Sounaye: Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient, Kirchweg 33, 14129 Berlin, Germany, e-mail: abdoulaye.sounaye@zmo.de

André Chappatte: Global Studies Institute, Université de Genève, 30, Quai Ernest-Ansermet, 1211 Genève 4, Switzerland, e-mail: Andre.Chappatte@unige.ch

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Islamic polities – such as Saudi Arabia (Freitag, in this volume) and Turkey (Binaté, in this volume) – provide evidence that Islam remains an avenue for diplomacy and constitutes a powerful geopolitical tool.

Over the last two decades, a substantial amount of literature using a multiplicity of scales (local, national, transnational, regional and global) has been produced to make sense of the connections that shape Muslim societies in West Africa. As a tradition and source of norms, Islam finds itself entangled in a diversity of scales, which, as we see in the contributions that follow, affect communal life, social dynamics and political developments in the region. We need then to understand the connections between the different scales and take on the challenge of reading the articulations of Islam along different and within multiple perspectives.

This volume is the outcome of a conversation that started at the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient of Berlin and culminated in a workshop ("From Senegal to Nigeria: The Modernity of Islam in Contemporary West Africa: Practices, Influences, and Trajectories") organized in collaboration with the Lasdel (Laboratoire d'Etudes et de Recherche sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local) of Niamey, Niger in November 2019. Funded by the Volkswagen foundation, the workshop intended to promote empirical research and conversations among and with scholars from West Africa. It brought together academics from the region and offered the opportunity for a critical examination of Islam *from within*. As an academic venture, it postulated the need to prioritize research questions born *in* the field as a way to encourage both empirically and locally based insights.

To question a common mapping of Islam and Muslim societies in West Africa, the title of the workshop signals two major foci of the literature: Senegal and Nigeria. Senegal has often been depicted as a country of tolerant Islam; Nigeria as a country of rigorous, even violent Islam. This dichotomy has marked the popular representation of, and, to some extent, academic literature on Islam in West Africa. While the two cases (Nigeria and Senegal) may be viewed as the result of important sociohistorical trajectories, the workshop suggested to go beyond them and open to alternative mappings and readings of the dynamics of Islam and Muslim life in the region. Participants in the workshop were then invited to approach their contributions through three conceptual signposts: trajectories, practices, and influences.

The precolonial era, colonial rule, post-independence and democratization governance all nurtured a development of Islam that ushered new dynamics into the region. Despite constraints imposed by different forms of political subjugation, Muslims across West Africa have maintained important common features both at the institutional and the cultural levels. For centuries, Islam has provided a powerful normative framework and source of values that shape and inspire both

private and public life. How this process is made possible, unfolds and is effectively maintained should be documented and critically assessed. Throughout this volume, a concern with these trajectories is intended to acknowledge the importance of temporalities and the agency of actors – individual and collective – that shape the pathways of Islam and Muslim identity in the region.

Practice(s) encapsulates the concreteness of life and marks the human experience. Thus, this volume calls for attention to the practices that ground Muslim identity and the making of Islam as a normative framework. What practices do Muslims engage in to forge their identity? To be Muslim is not only a diverse, but contested experience: what are the practices through which these expressions are articulated in social life? How do people give materiality and meaning to their religious experiences? In short, the focus on practice is intended to highlight the individual and collective agency of Islam and being Muslim, as well as to underline the diversity of these experiences. The conceptual signpost of practices points then to culturally complex relationships in Islam: its different appropriations and the multiple interpretations that emerge in different social contexts. Practices help us grasp what those contexts share, but also what distinguishes them from each other, further calling our attention to social and historical trajectories of the forms of life that claim to be Islamic or Muslim. Theoretically, such a perspective allows us to establish that Islam is an open field subject to multiple interpretations, and that the experience of being Muslim is a product of dynamics triggered by encounters, shaped by political agendas, sustained by social aspirations and enacted by specific actors and institutions (Malefakis, Ameen, Binaté in this volume). A sensitivity to such historicity cannot overlook the fact that some practices have become contemporary expressions of traditions from the past, but others are more recent and have emerged through various modern influences.

Hence the third conceptual signpost: influences. With this signpost we take stock of the agency and impact of the various actors, connections and both social and geopolitical conditions that influenced the formation of Muslim societies in West Africa and connected them across the region and beyond. We have already suggested that Islam as a religious tradition and a source of norms cannot be understood in isolation from the rest of the world or the value systems that inspire social life. Accounts of the Islamization of West Africa have demonstrated the interconnectedness of Muslims across the region and their transnational links and alliances. In addition to the Haj and the Umra, trade routes, territorial conquest and the quest for Islamic learning shaped the spread of Islam and the experience of being Muslim in West Africa. Freitag and Binaté, both in this volume, remind us of these conditions.

In reality, neither practices nor trajectories are static and isolated; they assume contact, interactions and interdependent relations. That is why – in

the ways in which we conceptualize them – both practices and trajectories are subject to influences which not only connect them, but can also shape, change and even radically transform them. Influences may be local or global, internal or external, structural or interstitial, but they always suppose relationality and illustrate the intricacies of life. In our concern with trajectories we would like to encourage consideration of the historical conjunctures, and of the different and at time divergent routes through which Muslims have experienced and understood their tradition.

By focusing on the social, the political, and the cultural, this volume intends to highlight not only the variety of Islamic formations, but also the divergent and contradicting trajectories of Islam we can observe today. We point to Geertz's seminal work (*Islam Observed*) and its methodological invitation to stress comparison in our approach to Islam and Muslim societies. Academic ways of making sense are always about deploying conceptual and methodological tools. We tried to use these tools at the regional level which, as we have already suggested, could also benefit from a comparative lens. Contrasting the experiences of Islam and being Muslim in Nigeria and Senegal, for example, offers an opportunity to unearth and map divergent genealogies of political Islam in West Africa; it also establishes a frame that can help us read the dynamics of Islam transversally: beyond one single trend, country and sociopolitical environment.

In general, these signposts – trajectories, practices, influences – have been conceptually fruitful and analytically productive. They helped us to examine the experience of Islam and its socio-empirical character this volume aims to capture and show.

Engaging with Islam and Muslim Life

The academic study of Islam and Muslim societies warrants an approach that is critically probing and grounded in actual practices. This volume responds to this challenge by stressing the diverse meanings and understandings of Muslim identity one finds with individual Muslims (for example, Diomandé, Ameen and Issaka-Toure, in this volume), state officials, members of Islamic associations, and so on. In this context, the critical question scholars face remains methodological: how do we study Muslim life? What do we pay attention to in this endeavour? What interpretive tools do we mobilize to ground our analysis?

The examination of Islam and Muslim life in West Africa is nothing new, generations of scholars contributed to making it a strand in the study of Africa.[1] It is a well-established field of study that can be traced back at least to the colonial powers who set out to control, dominate and rule over the populations of the region. It is worth noting that one of the key concerns of the colonial administrations, both French and British, was the authority of Muslim leaders and their influence over society.[2] Consequently, many suspected Muslim leaders were not only under watch and incarcerated,[3] they were also deported by the colonial rulers. Under such conditions, the perceptions of the influence and ambitions of Muslim leaders played a significant role in the policies of both British and French colonial powers.

Any scholarship concerned with the socio-political specificities and religious history of the region must examine West Africa as a set of peoples, communities and political units and understand how the region has produced, contributed to and redefined Muslim practices. *Islam Noir* was one of the first attempts to conceptualize the longstanding presence of Islam in the region and its encounter with local traditions.[4] Other conceptualizations have focused on the local specificities and regional features of the Sahel, stressing the interplay between recent dynamics and older socio-political influences.[5] Demonstrating the need to examine socio-political dynamics historically and the articulation of human life in the region within its lifeworld, these conceptualizations should be taken as evidence of an ongoing effort among scholars to capture and theorize the characteristics that make Muslim practices and societies in the region part of Islam as a discursive tradition, as Asad would say.

Conceptual and methodological questions will linger and possibly foster novel perspectives and rigorous approaches in the study of Muslim societies in the region. Refined approaches to the field will ask for analytical nuance, adaptations and even shifts as we seek to stay attuned to complex and intricate sociohistorical developments. Already informative about the current dynamics and ongoing developments, the contributions in this volume show that there is room to expand the literature, but also to refine and sustain conceptual engagements. In line with this agenda, the following chapters invite us to pay attention to the

1 Cf. Soares and Otayek 2007; Loimeier 2016; Hill 2018; Levtzion and Pouwels 2000.
2 Cf. Robinson and Triaud 2012.
3 Robinson 2000; Foster 2013; Hanretta 2009.
4 Monteil 1964.
5 Idrissa 2017; Diouf 2013; Triaud and Villalón 2009.

productive tension between the sociological reality of many Muslim lives and the theological claim that Islam represents one tradition.

Organizing Islam, State Regulation, and Cooperation

As the contributions by Kaboré, Ameen and Fogué Kuaté suggest, the dynamics of Islam in West Africa cannot be understood outside of the frame of the state. As the primary institution through which political governance is conceived and envisaged today, the state deeply shapes the life experiences and the imaginations of the peoples of this region. As subjects, many West Africans exist and coexist through the identities, affinities and rivalries they owe to the state. Nationality has become a major marker of identity while shaping collective mode and sense of belonging. At the same time, across the region Islam remains a major factor that shapes perceptions of selves and feeds aspirations for social status.[6] It inspires visions of social cohesion and serves historical narratives, to the point that some promoters of an Islam-inspired moral order tend to dismiss and even erase alternative historical accounts of the region. An illustration of this selective and ahistorical perspective lies in the current Jihadi claims that naturalize Islam, denude local histories of their non-Islamic substance and reduce the historical trajectories of the region to its Islamic feature. This is particularly acute when Jihadis take the universal claim of Islam for granted, making it the starting point and the end of history. What shall we read behind those claims and narratives?

The contributions in this volume show that Islam is a driving force of political reform, while its dynamics are also affected by political regimes and orders. Politics in this sense refers both to the state and the organizations through which it exists, and through which people, communities, groups and individuals organize themselves to make social life possible (Fogué Kuaté, Malefakis, Issaka-Toure, Kaboré and Ameen, in this volume). Take the case of the post-Cold War era, which ushered not only new political dynamics, but also a rearticulation of the relationship between religious activism and the state across the region. Also referred to as the "second [African] independence",[7] this period has been characterized by shifts that brought new civic liberties in many countries. In Mali, for instance, an increasingly lively public sphere was formed, abetted by new freedoms of the

6 Masquelier 2001; Masquelier 2009.
7 Clark 2000.

press and of association.[8] These two civic liberties promoted the diversity and visibility of Islamic activism in the public arena.

Although the legitimacy of state authorities is regularly challenged and contested, state institutions and logics have proved major factors in shaping Islam and Muslim life (see Ameen, Fogué Kuaté, Kaboré, in this volume). Needless to say, the territorializing and controlling power of the modern state has significantly affected Muslims in West Africa.[9] Some of the violent expressions of Islam in the region should be read as a reaction to the influence of the state and its hegemonic power to regulate not only interactions, but also ways of being Muslim and existing. A good example of such political ordering resides in the shared secular principle that runs across the region, with each country – from Nigeria to Ghana, Senegal or Mali – producing its own framework of the management of Islam in the public sphere.

Therefore, any examination of the changing patterns of Islam in the region must not overlook the state and its logic. Whether it intervenes directly for purposes of regulation in the name of secularism, or directly enforces particular understandings and practices of Islam – therefore taking a side in promoting specific actors and norms – the state remains key to Muslim politics in the region.[10]

This is precisely the process several chapters in this volume highlight. Locating his case within state-informed politics, Kaboré contrasts two Muslim formations in Burkina Faso: La Fédération des Associations Islamiques du Burkina, an umbrella organization that brings together Islamic associations and caters to Muslim interests; and Ansarul islam, another organization that turned violent and embraced jihadism after local notables exiled and excommunicated its leader. Evidence of a local modernity that distances itself from the West, yet influenced by models deemed 'Western', the two Islamic formations, according to Kaboré, demonstrate how politics of social status based on traditional markers of identity have shaped the experience of being Muslim in Burkina Faso. An important dimension of these politics is how they relate the present to the past and continue historical narratives of Islam to this day.

Focusing on the Office of the National Chief Imam (ONCI) in Ghana, Ameen offers another case that shows the influence of the state in organizing religion and establishing a legitimate umbrella Muslim organization. By imposing a legal framework on religious actors, the Ghanaian government, like its counterparts in

8 Perret 2005.

9 Mustapha and Meagher 2020; Idrissa 2017; Diouf 2013; Samson 2005; Holder and Dozon 2018.

10 Miran 2006; LeBlanc and Gosselin 2016; Kane 2003; Holder and Sow 2014; Holder 2009; Loimeier 2016; Launay 2016; Thurston 2016; Thurston 2017.

the region, has sought to monitor the religious sphere and at the same time create the conditions for coexistence and fair representation of religious communities. Serving state governance of Islam and the aspirations of Muslims to be legitimately represented, the ONCI appears in Ameen's depiction as an interface that speaks to the desire of the Ghanaian state to regulate religious authority and an institution that nurtures the quest for influence among Muslim leaders. Using a socio-historical analysis, Ameen shows how the leadership of the ONCI is contested along doctrinal lines.

Muslim practices in the region are also shaped by connections and cooperation with the rest of the Muslim world, as we have already noted. Freitag discusses West African Muslim politics in relation to Saudi Arabia. Offering a modern history of religious influence, her contribution stresses the specificity of the anticolonial context in which Saudi Arabia's external investment in Muslim institutions started. West African Muslims were attracted by Saudi Arabia as a role model of self-determined modernity. Examining the local conditions and internal factors that created Saudi religious diplomacy, it is important to understand how, in its quest for supremacy, Saudi Arabia projected itself as a major Islamic power through missionary work supported by institutional instruments (NGOs, transnational organizations, foundations) and cooperation strategies (education, scholarships, humanitarian aid). Similarly, by exploring the increasing presence of Turkey in Côte d'Ivoire, Binaté points to the shifting grounds of the Islamic sphere in the region, as Turkey becomes influential by tapping into Islam and so exercising its soft power. Building on organizational acumen, economic ties and infrastructural assistance, the enfolding Turkish soft power, as Binaté describes, is gradually reshaping religious partnership, the terms of being Muslim and the Islamic sphere in Côte d'Ivoire. For both Freitag and Binaté, religious diplomacy plays a significant role in the making of Islam and Muslim actors in West Africa. They both argue that the trajectories of Islam in West Africa cannot be grasped without an understanding of its external promoters and their strategies of influence, often operating within the framework of the state.

Building on Media, Technology, and Publics

Media infrastructures, literacy and savviness have affected the public presence and visibility of Islam in West Africa. Like in many parts of the world,[11] the media

11 Eickelman and Anderson 2003; Eisenlohr 2018; Varzi 2006.

revolution of the last few decades has transformed Muslim lifeworlds in West Africa. As an infrastructure of mass culture, media provide spaces and means of sociality, connectivity, self-assertion and promotion. The chapters in this volume show that, for many actors, media represent more than a stage; they are an avenue where Muslims form publics, construct authority, affect gender roles and emancipate themselves from traditional structures.[12]

The contributions by Malefakis, Ndiaye and Fogué Kuaté are vivid illustrations of the role media play in informing Muslim subjectivities, shaping social interactions and consolidating political positions. In this process, media have been used to channel contestations and public arguments, but also to redraw social roles and relationships. While echoing developments across the region, all three chapters point to the ways in which media have been used to voice and legitimize divergent and discordant views. Ndiaye makes this point by showing how Muslims in Senegal use *flaming* as an expressive mode to challenge each other and express irreverence towards established orders and authorities. In this context, *flaming* becomes both a socioreligious and a media practice. A parallel can be drawn with Malefakis' discussion of a Twitter campaign in northern Nigeria. She observes that Twitter connects local women to a global movement while allowing them to voice their concerns, engage with local politics, frame public debate and seek mobilization against sexual misconduct that has been for too long socially normalized and politically overlooked. Her chapter further illustrates how the global #MeToo movement resonates with the agendas of many Muslim women across Nigeria. Analysing the practice of using social media, as both Ndiaye and Malefakis show, helps us to make sense of processes through which Muslims aspire to effect social change, subvert power structures and establish new moral orders.

Another good example of the connections between religion, social change and media lies in Fogué Kuaté's attempt to trace and document the trajectories of what he terms the "perpetual reinvention of Islam" (la réinvention perpétuelle de l'Islam) in Northern Cameroon. Approaching his case through the conceptual lens of modernity and media technological development, he shows how over half a century, radio has been crucial to social change in Cameroon. Fogué Kuaté invites us to read both the historical trajectories and the media's infrastructural development he presents as the manifestations of an Islamic claim on modernity.

Overall, as these contributions show, the so-called media revolution has had a major impact on Muslim life in West Africa by offering alternative platforms and affecting the modes of construction of authority and connectivity among

12 Schulz 2011; Larkin 2008; Hackett and Soares 2015; Buggenhagen 2015; Krings 2015.

Muslims. Once invested in group and individual agendas, media create bounds and nurture belonging while their users and audiences redefine loyalties and allegiances.[13]

Enacting Muslim Lives: Agency and Social Change

The issues raised in this volume call us to pay attention to women's agency in the study of Islam, especially from an existential perspective. In this regard, aspirations to lead a good Muslim life should feature prominently in our approach to the lived experience of Islam in the region. At the same time, the fact that women are key players across several of the cases discussed requires a methodological vigilance and conceptual sharpening: how do we *fully* take onboard the fact that women are not dependent, but social actors in their own rights? Similar considerations apply also to the social category of youth (see Diomandé in this volume).

Being Muslim and living an Islam-sanctioned life is informed by prescriptions and norms that are interpreted, debated and experienced contextually. Gender and intergenerational relations, sexuality, aesthetics and morality are key avenues of this experience. The features and conditions we stress to describe humans (for example: gender, marital status, social relations, religious affiliation, education, prosperity) offer empirical sites from where we can grasp the role and significance of Islam in their lives, especially from an existential perspective.

Women's conditions are central to Issaka-Toure's contribution, which examines the personal experiences of women in the trajectory and practice of Islamic law in Accra, Ghana. Muslim lives ask to be understood in concrete, local terms, especially when they concern law and moral principles, as Issaka-Toure reminds us. Her examination of the interconnection between authority and legal practices in the functions of a *Malam* demonstrates how family law can be the site of both constructions of authority and renegotiations of the meaning of Islamic rule. Her case further illustrates how alternative legal regimes coexist in a Ghanaian Muslim context, where civil law is still primarily defined by the state system.

Analysing what we may call the youth effect in contemporary Muslim practices in Côte d'Ivoire, and across the region, Diomandé's contribution introduces us to the world of the *imam chocos*: young modern-day preachers, whose lifestyles and ways of being Muslim break from traditional models and expectations. Muslims strive to construct their lives by embracing social change and a forward-

13 Schulz 2011.

looking perspective, as Diomandé's study demonstrates. The figure of the *imam choco* or imam "à la mode" expresses the spirit of entrepreneurship enabled by the liberalization of Ivorian society in the 1990s. Inspired by pastors, captivating artists and wealthy businessmen, a new cohort of imams approach Muslims by using their public speaking skills and engaging with their audiences' social conditions. In promoting an Islam whose influence is based on the mundane resources of a changing world, the *imams chocos* attempt to professionalize and turn their religious office into a path to prosperity. Building on a prosperity gospel already popular among their Christian counterparts, these Muslims deploy agency and offer new ways of being an Imam or Muslim leader. Adapting to their social environment, they embrace aesthetic forms and discursive practices that set them apart as both religious leaders and showmen. In this context, Diomandé suggests, performance and aesthetics need to be read as signs of a generational shift the office of Imam is undergoing.

Overall this volume demonstrates how Islam is entrenched in the lives of many West Africans. Revealing different trajectories of Muslim politics and exploring the significance of Islam as a source of norms that inform social practices and political interactions, the following chapters highlight the tensions, ambivalence, connections, and historicity of the experience of being Muslim in West Africa. It pays a particular attention to the empirical sites and features that help grasp and foreground what matters to Muslims in their lives. In the end, its claim is less about revolutionizing the study of Islam and Muslim societies, but more about reasserting the need to weave together the conceptual and the empirical to understand the local appropriation of Islam and the existential forms Muslim life takes in West Africa.

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Mohammed Kasim Ameen

The National Chief Imam of Ghana

Intervention, Collaboration and Contestation

Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad was the best leader that Allah could have sent to them for their well-being. The Prophet demonstrated the best leadership qualities as the head of state, teacher, judge and spiritual guide.[1] However, after his demise, Muslims disagreed with one another over his succession.[2] This resulted in the emergence of different leadership systems in Islam, such as the Sunni Orthodox Caliphate and the Shi'ah Infallible Imamate.[3] Today, the Muslim ummah does not have a global leadership structure to regulate the affairs of Muslims, though individual Muslim scholars continue to play different roles as muftis, imams, ayatollahs, caliphs, sultans and so on at regional levels.[4] Thus, at the global level, the Muslim ummah does not have censorship when it comes to the role of the scholar as a representative of Allah, as any scholar can claim to be speaking on behalf of Islam. This explains why Talal Asad conceptualizes Islam as a discursive tradition that considers the historical nuances that characterized Muslims' understanding and practice of Islam. The puzzle of this discursivity, according to Asad, is that there is a 'correct model' to which all Muslims aspire to conform, yet there have always been different ways of interpreting and presenting this model in any given context.[5] Therefore, Hamid Dabashi draws our attention to the cosmopolitan character of Islam, which brings to the fore the "internal dynamics of Islam itself, breaking it down to its discursive, institutio-

1 Ibrahim 2008, 191; Hodaee 2013, 231.

2 Upal and Cusack 2021, 23.

3 The Sunni Orthodox Caliphate system of leadership argues that the Prophet didn't explicitly choose his successor. Thus, the principle of Shura (consensus) was adopted to choose Abubakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali respectively as the Four Rightly Guided caliphs. According to the Shura concept, any virtuous companion could become the caliph, irrespective of his family ties with the Prophet. On the contrary, the Shi'ah system of Infallible Imamate insists that leadership succession to the Prophet is only valid through divine appointment and that the Prophet had explicitly announced the divine appointment of his cousin, Ali b. Abi Talib, as his successor.

4 Ameli 2002, 109.

5 Asad 1986, 1.

Mohammed Kasim Ameen: Islamic University College, Ghana, P.O.BOX CT3221, Accra, Ghana, e-mail: ameen.mohd@iug.edu.gh

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nal, and symbolic forms – all competing with each other".[6] In his opinion, the discursive nature of Islam implies that we should accommodate every component of the religion as an undeniable and un-exclusionary facet of it, and take into account the totality of its historical development. Shahab Ahmed also invites us to rethink Islam as a meaning-making tradition which takes into account "the entire phenomenon and the matrix of Revelation, rather than just the Text of Revelation (…) [a conceptualization that could] account for, accommodate and understand the relationship between variety and unity in human and historical Islam – and thus (…) conceptualize Islam in terms of *coherent contradiction*".[7] It is against this background that Abou El Fadl pointed out the possibility of authoritarian tendencies in the role of the Muslim scholar as leader and representative of Allah. Abou El Fadl therefore suggests that, since it is impossible to restrict people from speaking in Allah's name, the community of meaning should be measured based on "honesty, diligence, self-restraint, comprehensiveness and reasonableness".[8] Thus, it is within this historical and conceptual framework of Islamic leadership practice that I analyze the dynamics of the Office of the National Chief Imam of Ghana as a contemporary Islamic leadership institution that has not received much scholarly attention. This contribution is an extract from my PhD thesis entitled 'An Appraisal of Muslim Ecumenical Movements in Ghana'.[9] I organize the contribution in five sections: an overview of the Muslim community in Ghana, Muslim-State interactions, the establishment of the Office of National Chief Imam, the functions and challenges of the Chief Imam's Office and the future of the Office of National Chief Imam after Sheikh Osman Nuhu Sharubutu.

Composition of the Muslim Ummah in Ghana

Islam is the second largest religion in Ghana. The 2021 Population and Housing Census figures revealed that Muslims constituted 19.9 per cent of the national population,[10] and Muslims in Ghana, despite their doctrinal diversity, identify

6 Dabashi 2013, 13.
7 Ahmed 2016, 405.
8 Abou El Fadl 2014, 272.
9 This paper is a part of chapter four of my ongoing PhD research, which I started in September 2018 at the Department for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana. I am hoping to complete the study in September 2022.
10 Ghana 2021.

themselves as an ummah, which denotes that they belong to one universal community with common interests and aspirations. The advent of Islam in Ghana followed different trends, as acknowledged by several scholars. However, Ghana, like other West African countries, made contact with Islam through the activities of traders, after which scholars (of Maliki and Sufi influences) came to deliberately teach and reform Islam in the region.[11] The doctrinal background of the early scholars, thus, shaped the identity of early Ghanaian Muslims into what may be described as Maliki-Sufi, although some were unconscious of this identity. However, the Ahmadiyya Mission in 1921 exposed Ghanaian Muslims to another Islamic doctrine, which was contested by the Maliki-Sufis. What is more interesting is that after independence in 1957, Ghanaian Muslims went to study in Arab/Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya and Iran, and returned home with different doctrines.[12] Thus, the Ghanaian Muslim community comprises doctrinal groups such as the Maliki-Tijaniyyah, Ahmadiyya, Hanbali-Ahlus-Sunnah, Ja'fari-Shi'ah and the Istiqamah.

It is worth noting that prior to the advent of the Ahmadiyya Mission, Muslims in Ghana practised Maliki jurisprudence alongside Sufi orientation "and were not divided by sectarianism".[13] Thus, doctrinal division among Ghanaian Muslims started with the advent of the Ahmadiyya Mission in the 1920s, as the Maliki-Sufi scholars rejected the theological claims of the Ahmadiyya. Hanson recounts that al-Hajj Umar of Kete-Krachi, "one of the most prominent mallams" in the Gold Coast during the advent of the Ahmadiyya, was 'dismissive' of the movement. For instance, "at a meeting with Maulvi Hakeem, the first residential Ahmadiyya missionary in the Gold Coast who was visiting Kumasi in 1925, al-Hajj Umar stood up, spat on the floor, and abruptly left in the middle of Hakeem's presentation at a British official's residence". Hanson also recounts that in 1934 there was a clash between the Ahmadiyya and the Sunni Muslim community in Wa, and this was the first time that "religious differences have been the direct cause of a riot in the Gold Coast". Notwithstanding the Sunni community's repulsive reaction to the Ahmadiyya, the movement has over the years become a force to be reckoned with as far as the leadership of the Ghanaian Muslim community is concerned.[14]

The leadership of the Ghanaian Muslim community has been characterized by diversity and contestation. For instance, Bari recounts that the Muslim community "encountered religious and social leadership crisis intermittently" to the

11 Hiskett 1984, 282.
12 Dumbe 2013, 20; Ahmed 2010, 26.
13 Hanson 2017, 9, 229.
14 Samwini 2006, 92.

extent that the state had to "intervene in the affairs of Muslims to ensure peace and unity". Over the years, the leadership crisis among Muslims resulted in the formation of several organizations, each of which aimed at providing leadership to their local members and were desirous of becoming the mouthpiece of the Muslim community. However, as the organizations often challenged one another in their quest to lead the ummah, they "failed to make any endurable headway" towards sustaining Muslim unity and effective leadership.[15] This was partly because the appointment of Imams as Muslim leaders was done solely by chiefs along tribal lines. For instance, with the establishment of zongos[16] and the influx of various ethnic groups in the zongos, each ethnic chief appointed an Imam to officiate religious ceremonies within the ethnic group, although there was a community Imam appointed by the sarkin zongo.[17]

Furthermore, the advent of Ahmadiyya, Ahlus-Sunna, Shi'ah and Istiqama which contributed to the construction of Islamic schools and mosques created platforms for the emergence of different Imams and Muslim leaders in the country. Thus, over the years, there have been variations in the process of appointing Imams, and the roles played by the Imams also differ from one community to another. For example, a tribal Imam may not have a mosque in which he can lead prayers, especially if the chief or the ethnic group that appointed him does not have a mosque in their community. And, since the chief is the sole appointing authority of the Imam, sometimes his death may bring the tenure of the Imam to an end. For instance, during my fieldwork, I came across an ethnic Imam whose imamship came to an end after the death of the chief who appointed him, as the next chief decided to appoint a new Imam. This highlights the power of the chief to appoint or depose the Imam. However, the tribal chiefs do not have the power to appoint the Imams of doctrinal groups. For instance, the Ahlus-Sunna, Shi'ah, Ahmadiyya and Istiqama have their leadership structures which define the process of appointing the Imams of such groups without the involvement of the chiefs. Thus, the somewhat clumsy manner in which Imams emerge in some communities occasionally creates tensions among Muslims.

Thus, as the doctrinal groups contest one another and negotiate religious space, non-doctrinal organizations such as the Ghana Muslim Community, Ghana Muslim Mission, Ghana Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, Ghana Muslim Representative Council, Federation of Muslim Councils, Din al-Islam Ghana and the Collation of Muslim Organisations, Ghana (COMOG) were formed with 'ecumeni-

15 Bari 2009, 565.

16 Zongo/Zango, is a Hausa word, which literally means 'strangers' quarters.

17 Head, chief of the Zongo.

cal' objectives towards advancing the cause of Muslims, albeit with some challenges.[18] As Bari observes, these groups also suffered internal leadership disputes which defeated their efforts towards harmonizing the ranks of Muslims. However, the establishment of the Office of the National Chief Imam (ONCI) in 1993 has promoted intra-faith collaboration through the National Hilal Committee, whose effort has secured two public holidays for Muslims to celebrate *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*.[19] Though each Muslim group remains a force to reckon with, the ONCI has constructed a collective Islamic identity by serving as the most instrumental mouthpiece of Muslims in the country. Therefore, in order to make sense of how Ghanaian Muslims institutionalize Islamic leadership as a lived tradition, this chapter seeks to analyze the role of the ONCI in reshaping the dynamics of Muslim intra-faith relations.

State-Muslim Interface

Since the colonial era, Muslim communities in Ghana have been referred to as zongos because the people living there are 'almost always Muslims' and "Islam has been [its] identifier and unifying force". The zongo has existed since 1810 with a composition of different ethnic groups such as Hausa, Fulani, Wangara, Zabarma, Dagomba, Moshie, Busanga, Gurma and Kotokole. Each of these ethnic groups had a tribal head (chief), yet the colonial government appointed the chief of the Hausa as the leader of all groups (sarkin zongo) and granted him a tribunal with jurisdiction over Muslims.[20] Though this arrangement created internal wrangling among the tribes in the zongo, it regulated Muslims' interactions with the colonial government and the traditional rulers during Indirect Rule. Aside from that, Muslims' interaction with the state has also been characterized by contestation based on the prevailing circumstances. For instance, in the aftermath of the 1939 earthquake in Accra, Muslims accused the state of being biased against the zongos in the distribution of relief items to the affected areas. As a result, the Gold Coast Muslim Association, which was formed in 1932 to promote the welfare of Muslims, metamorphosed into the Muslim Association Party (MAP). This was to empower Muslims to go into active partisan politics so that they could fight for their fair share of the 'national cake'. However, the leaders of MAP were

18 Bari 2009, 565.
19 Kobo 2012, 284.
20 Schildkrout 1978, 199; Schildkrout 2006.

accused of promoting a religious politics aimed at creating an Islamic republic in the country.[21] It has been argued that Kwame Nkrumah perceived the MAP as a threat to his Convention People's Party (CPP) and therefore played a cunning game to silence active members of MAP by orchestrating the passage of the 'Avoidance of Discrimination Bill' banning regional, tribal and religious parties. Yet, Nkrumah formed the Muslim Youth Congress as the branch of the CPP responsible for promoting the interest of Muslims; a shrewd move that paved the way for Nkrumah to pursue his political agenda without being perceived as anti-Muslim.[22] For instance, Imam Abbas was deposed as the Imam of Accra because of his involvement in the activities of MAP, and Mallam Amadu Futa, a CPP loyalist, was appointed the new Imam. Nkrumah went ahead to implore the spiritual service of Sheikh Ibrahim Niasse of Senegal, and this won him the love of many disciples of Niasse in the Tijaniyya fraternity.[23]

Since independence, successive governments have consciously supported Muslims and Christians (in particular) in manifesting their religious practices. For example, the Supreme Court in its ruling in the case of *James Kwabena Bomfeh Jnr vs the AG* described the role of government in the performance of hajj and the construction of a National Cathedral as a move to "satisfy the particular needs of these religious groups which ultimately are for the public good and interest".[24] State interest in the affairs of Muslims and other religious groups necessitated the creation of the erstwhile Ministry of Inner-City and Zongo Development in 2017, by the government of day, to promote "inclusion and integration of minorities and marginalized groups by improving the social and infrastructural development of zongos".[25] Thus, the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs as well as the erstwhile Ministry of Inner-City and Zongo Development played significant roles in promoting the interests of religious groups, which demonstrates that religion is indeed pervasive in state bureaucracy.[26] Thus, the dynamics of Ghanaian Muslims' interactions with successive governments reveal that the state has been active in reshaping Islam in the public sphere by exercising its powers to regulate Muslims' public life. This concurs with Casanova's thesis that secular modernization "has been accompanied by different forms of religious revival and by religious pluralism rather than by religious decline".[27] This means that the secular-

21 Pobee 1991, 114.
22 Allman 1991.
23 Dumbe 2013, 46.
24 Tweneboah 2020, 9.
25 Abdul-Hamid and Fawzi 2018, 131.
26 Brady and Hooper 2019, 10; Baumann 1999, 18.
27 Casanova 2019.

religious binary is a discursive tradition with "a shifting historical identity".[28] For instance, the secular nation-state is depicted as a religiously neutral player providing equal opportunities to all, yet the state "through its legal institutions and media representatives" gets entangled in religious affairs by determining who does what.[29] The attitude of the state therefore presents "secularism as a statist project [that] aims to make religious difference inconsequential to politics while at the same time embedding majoritarian religious norms in state institutions, laws, and practices".[30] Thus, although Muslims have occasionally cried foul of being marginalized by the state due to their minority status,[31] the state, under successive governments, has played a 'smart' role in maintaining constant interaction with Muslim leadership and this gave rise to the establishment of the ONCI as a response to state attempts to regulate Muslims' public life.

Office of the National Chief Imam (ONCI)

The Qur'an 2:124 uses the term Imam in relation to the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) as a leader after he fulfilled certain commands of Allah. Commenting on this verse, Muhammad Ali intimates that "Abraham was made a spiritual leader of men because he was found perfect in fulfilling the Divine commandments".[32] According to Lari, an Imam is a spiritual and political "leader and exemplar from whose intellectual power and insight those travelling toward God benefit, whose conduct and mode of life they imitate, and to whose commands they submit".[33] This implies that the Imam is a leader who is vested with the power, authority and responsibility to guide Muslims in their religious and social affairs.

In Ghana, the Imam is a Muslim leader whose basic duties include leading prayers, officiating religious ceremonies – such as naming, wedding and funeral ceremonies – and performing other functions in furtherance of the aspirations of members of the community. The Imam is also expected to work with Muslim chiefs and other opinion leaders to unite the ummah and bring development to the community. As indicated earlier, there is no uniformity in the process of appointing Imams in Ghana. Historically, the appointment of an Imam was the

28 Asad 2018, 20.
29 Seidel 2005.
30 Mahmood 2016, 206.
31 Ameen 2010.
32 Ali 2002, 56.
33 Lari 2006, 11.

prerogative of the Muslim chiefs because they have been entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring the development of the ethnic groups that they head in the zongos.[34] Therefore, each chief appoints an Imam to officiate religious ceremonies within the ethnic group. 'Senior' to the ethnic chiefs is the sarkin zongo (zongo chief) who appoints the community Imam in consultation with the subchiefs. The process of choosing ethnic and community Imams was therefore extended by the chiefs to the appointment of district and regional Imams, and finally to the National Chief Imam (NCI), respectively.[35]

Sulemana and Osman Bari chronicled that from 1850 to 1993, there have been 14 successive Imams of Accra,[36] though it was the 14th Imam, Sheikh Osman Nuhu Sharubutu, who earned the title NCI of Ghana. Sulemana recounts that the idea of appointing the NCI was conceived by some of the chiefs in 1982. Imam Mukhtar Abbas, who was the Imam of Accra at the time, became incapacitated and some of the chiefs decided to appoint Sheikh Osman Nuhu Sharubutu as the acting Imam.[37] However, the promulgation of the Religious Bodies Registration Law in 1989 (PNDCL 221) strongly affected the operations of the Office of the Accra Imam in assuming a national character. This law required that all religious bodies should register with the National Commission for Culture. "The law was announced on June 14, 1989, and all religious bodies, regardless of the length of their existence, were expected to register by November 14, 1989". Elom Dovlo contends that the Christian community described the PNDCL 221 as an attempt to control the proliferation of religious movements in Ghana. The Christian Council of Ghana and the Ghana Catholic Bishop's Conference protested against its implementation on the basis that the "government was attempting to muzzle the big churches and that the Head of the National Commission for Culture, a Muslim, wanted to prevent the growth of the Christian Church".[38] Muslims, on the other hand, saw the law as an opportunity to reorganize the Muslim community for public participation. However, the "PNDC Law 221 posed a problem in the Muslim community due to the constant conflicts and disunity in its leadership".[39]

In response to the call of the government, the Muslim community, under the leadership of Sheikh Sharubu, held a conference to discuss the registration

34 Ameen 2014, 89.

35 Sulemana 1994, 180.

36 Originally, these Imams were Imams of the Hausa community in Accra who led prayers in the Accra Central Mosque, though the Baribari, Fulani and Wangara also occupied the position on a few occasions. There were also community Imams across the zongos of Accra.

37 Sulemana 1994, 180.

38 Dovlo 2005.

39 Sulemana 1994, 130.

process. During the conference, some Muslims rejected the Law, while others thought that it was proper to comply with it so as to be able to interact with the state and make their voices heard. However, even those who agreed to comply with the Law raised concerns about the appropriate front that would represent all Muslims for the registration. It was in course of this entangled situation that Mr. Braimah, a lecturer at the Department for the Study of Religions of the University of Ghana proposed the name "Din al-Islam, Ghana" (DIG), which was accepted. The conference established a committee to draft a constitution for the registration, after which the Registrar of religious bodies, on May 25, 1990, issued a certificate to the DIG. Sheikh Yahya al-Amin was a member of the constitution committee and intimated that the constitution opened membership of the organization (DIG) to all Muslims in the country, irrespective of their doctrinal affiliation. The constitution also created the position of district and regional Imams as well as the NCI. An Imam of the central mosque in a district or regional capital would constitutionally be deemed the district or regional Imam. Similarly, an Imam of the central mosque in the national capital would be the NCI and head of the DIG. Thus, Sheikh Yahya al-Amin opined that the declaration of Sheikh Sharubutu in 1993 as the NCI was done in consonance with this constitutional provision. There was also a deliberate effort by some Muslim politicians to give visibility to the Muslim leadership by pushing the agenda for the creation of the ONCI. For instance, according to Issah, Dr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas[40] revealed that:

> Some of us, because of his great knowledge, believed that he needed to gain the recognition not only as Imam of Accra, but indeed as the National Chief Imam of Ghana. I am particularly very proud that some of my colleagues who were in government then; persons such as Alhaji Iddrisu Mahama who was a senior member in government, Alhaji Hudu Yahaya, the late Dr. Farouk Braimah, late Yahaya Seidu, and so many others, indeed the late Nii Niimah and the late Alhaji Bashiru Futah and of course others, who are still alive now such as former Deputy Governor of the Central Bank Dr. Ahmed, the Council of Muslim Chiefs were very much supportive. They all contributed to the creation of this position of National Chief Imam.[41]

It is clear from the foregoing account that it was in response to the PNDC Law 221 that Muslims deemed it prudent to formalize their national leadership structure. This is because, prior to the passage of the Law, Sheikh Sharubutu was only acting as the Imam of Accra. However, this does not mean that the government of the day

40 Dr Mohammed Ibn Chambas is a Ghanaian diplomat, and currently the United Nations General Secretary's special representative for West Africa and the Sahel.
41 Issah 2019, 62.

appointed him as the NCI, rather, he was appointed by the Muslim community, though the appointment process was not consultative enough in the sense that some prominent Muslim scholars who lived outside the national capital, Accra, felt disenfranchised as they were not actively involved in the process.

It is important to point out that since the emergence of Sheikh Sharubutu as the NCI, there has not been any well-structured administrative body called the Office of the National Chief Imam. For example, Sheikh Armiyao Shuaib, Spokesperson for the NCI argues:

> The ONCI is not a well-crafted system, but what has made it prominent is the person of the Chief Imam himself, and it has to do with his personal way of doing things, and in doing so he has succeeded in endearing himself to the majority of people across the religious divide. This acceptability has given him prominence and influence, and thus, he has become a rallying point as everybody runs to him. Because of this, if you associate the Chief Imam with his office, then the office also gets prominence, that is the truth. Currently what we have is that there is ONCI at the Abbosey Okai Central Mosque with Mallam Musah as the Administrator, and there is also the Advisory Board of the Chief Imam. There is no link between the office and the advisory board such that the board can be mandated to play a supervisory role. Our unity hinges so much on the personality of the Chief Imam because his spirit is repugnant to division, hatred, and violence, and that is why he has been able to bridge the gap between the sects, particularly the Tijaniyya and Ahlus Sunna.[42]

The above statement exposes a major weakness in the leadership of the NCI in the sense that he appeared to have focused more on performing his religious duties without creating the required administrative structures necessary for running such an important institution. As a result, the NCI himself has to rely on his advisory board in order to take some decisions for and on behalf of the Muslim community. At the time of this fieldwork, the Advisory Board of the Chief Imam was made up of about 20 people from different professional backgrounds, including Muslim clerics, chiefs, security officers and lawyers. The primary role of the Board has been to provide advisory services to the Chief Imam on emerging issues that affect Muslims and the nation as a whole. It is, however, worth noting that there has not been any clear policy regarding the qualification, mandate, size and tenure of members of the Advisory Board. For instance, the Chief Imam's Spokesperson confessed that:

> Things are done largely in the traditional way, it is just a matter of identifying someone that can offer something to the Chief Imam, or sometimes when a member dies a new person is brought as replacement. Sometimes we have a challenge about the expertise of the new

42 Armiyao, personal communication, 2020.

> person, whether he has something new to add to the board or he is just coming to add up to the number. The person may not bring anything new to the board but because things are done traditionally, we accept the person once his recommendation has been approved by the Chief Imam. So, whoever is recommended to him, and he finds the person useful, the person becomes part of the board. As I speak to you, I cannot tell what the upper sealing of the board is, we keep on adding and it does not look like we have reached the maximum.[43]

This quotation reveals that the Chief Imam is not directly in charge of appointing the board members, and that it is some individuals closer to him who identify and recommend persons that are supposed to join the board after which the NCI endorses the membership of such persons. This mode of appointment has been criticized for not ensuring efficiency and accountability. For instance, the Spokesperson and other personal aides to the NCI are also members of the advisory board and this has resulted in the diffusion of responsibility. My interlocutor also revealed that membership of the Board is male-centred as there has not been a female member. He lamented that "members of the board have not grown to accept women to sit on the same table with men", and that he once made a proposal for the inclusion of women, but it was rejected. According to him, in some cases the Board operated like a judicial council, discussing issues about marriage, divorce and inheritance, albeit from men's perspective. It was on this basis that he proposed the inclusion of women so that they could help the men to understand things from the perspective of women. However, this proposal sounded absurd and anathema, as a member curiously exclaimed: "so you mean a woman should come here!" Apart from the gender imbalance, the Board is hardly representative of the doctrinal diversity of the Muslim community since apart from one representative of the Ahlus-Sunna, most of the members belong to the Tijaniyya fraternity or Sufi sympathizers; the Shi'ah, Ahmadiyya and Istiqama did not have representation on the Board. However, the Board has established a sub-structure called Stakeholders Forum, and when a matter arises that requires consensus building among the various doctrinal groups, this becomes the converging point of the groups. For instance, when the government established a COVID-19 National Trust Fund to solicit support from non-governmental organizations, the Board, through the Stakeholders Forum, formed a committee with members from the Ahlus-Sunna, Tijaniyya, Ahmadiyya, Shi'ah, COMOG, Ghana Muslim Mission, FOMWAG (Federation of Muslim Women's Association in Ghana) and Federation of Muslim Council. The committee was able to raise 130,000 Cedis (15,000 Euros), which was donated to the government on behalf of all Muslims in the country.

43 Armiyao, personal communication, 2020.

The National Hilal Committee

Ghanaian Muslims have long been agitating and lobbying for holidays to celebrate *Eid al-Fitr*, but their efforts have proved futile because they disagreed with one another about the dates to commence and end the Ramadan fast. The Tijaniyya, Ahmadiyya and Ahlus-Sunna were the main groups at the beginning of the campaign for Muslim holidays, yet each group used to observe the Eid on separate days based on how they sighted the moon.[44] Meanwhile, despite their differences, they all needed the holidays. It was therefore this quest for the holidays that compelled Muslims to come together to work for their common interest. Consequently, the first Ramadan conference was organized in 1994 to build consensus on the sighting of the moon. According to Mallam Musa, the Administrator of the ONCI, the conference was held at the Abossey Okai Central Mosque and chaired by the late Sheikh Shuaib Abubakar of the Ahlus-Sunna, with the late Maulvi Wahab Adam of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission as the keynote speaker. Maulvi Wahab spoke on how to sight the moon domestically here in Ghana, and it was resolved that Ghanaian Muslims should not rely on the sighting of other countries to commence or end the Ramadan fast. This agreement led to the establishment of the Hilal Committee. In 1995 the committee met again in Accra to deliberate on the sighting of the moon, and in 1996 the meeting took place at Tamale, after which it was made rotational across the regions. And since 1994, the committee has been meeting every year until 2020 when the COVID-19 restrictions halted the meeting. However, after the first meeting in 1994, the Ahlus-Sunna withdrew from participating in the activities of the committee. According to my interlocutor, the Ahlus-Sunna complained that they did not recognize the Ahmadis as Muslims and since the Chief Imam had allowed the latter to be part of the Hilal Committee, the former would not participate in it. The Shi'ah did not have an organized leadership at that time, so they were not included. Thus, the Hilal Committee became a joint committee under the NCI and the Ameer of the Ahmadiyya Mission. Accordingly, communiqués for the announcement of the sighting of the moon used to start with the phrase, "on the authority of the National Chief Imam and the Ameer and Missionary-In-Charge of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission". According to Sheikh Armiyao "this mode of announcement automatically gave recognition to the Ahmadiyya and ignored the Ahlus Sunna who were completely against anything around the Chief Imam". Ustaz Ahmed, Executive Secretary of the Council of Ulama', on his part, revealed that the Tijaniyya told the Ahlus-Sunna to re-join the committee and "feel free to criticize its activities or suggest

44 Ibrahim 2011, 5–25.

alternative ways of doing things rather than to withdraw from it". Thereafter, the Ahlus-Sunna agreed to come back to the committee and, since 2010, all the Muslim groups have been participating in the activities of the Hilal Committee, though the Ahlus-Sunna occasionally disagreed with the committee's decisions if they did not coincide with the decisions of Saudi Arabia. Thus, according to Sheikh Armiyao, the attitude of the Ahlus-Sunna means that "the kind of unity that we are looking for is still hanging, but at least we have gone far, since we have agreed to sit together to disagree".

Over the years, regional branches of the Hilal Committee were established across the country to strengthen consensus building and ensure uniformity in the commencement and breaking of the Ramadan Fast. The regional branches report the sighting of the moon to the NCI through the National Chairman of the committee. During the National Ramadan Conference, the committee would normally agree on the first and second days of sighting the moon, and the regional branches would be given up to 10pm to inform the NCI of the sighting of the moon for him to announce it to the whole nation. Muslims' ability to build consensus on the sighting of the moon yielded their desired goal of securing an Eid holiday. For instance, in 1996, Muslims held a conference in Kumasi to deliberate on how to speak in unison for the holidays by compromising to treat all Muslim groups (especially the Ahmadis) as belonging to the same family of Islam. According to Mallam Musa of the ONCI, this compromised position strengthened the lobbying skills of Muslims, which accelerated the processes leading to the securing of the holidays. Thus, in the estimation of my interlocutor, "about 95 per cent of Muslims respect the decision of the Hilal Committee, and even the few Muslims who disagree with the committee still enjoy the holidays that were secured through the activities of the committee". Furthermore, the Hilal Committee serves as a platform for networking among the regional Imams and zongo chiefs. For instance, the Imam of the Eastern Region told me that prior to the formation of the Hilal committee, he did not know his colleague regional Imams, as the regional Imams did not have anything to do with each other. However, through the committee, the regional Imams have come to know one another and even formed the Conference of Regional Chief Imams to facilitate easy and regular communication among themselves and to improve upon the quality of leadership that they have been providing to the ummah.

Sheikh Sharubutu and the ONCI: Contestation and Discontent

Sheikh Osuman Nuhu Sharubutu, the first NCI of Ghana, was born on April 23, 1919, in Accra. He was born into a family of scholars and spent his life in pursuit of Islamic knowledge and teaching until his appointment as the deputy Imam of Accra in 1973, acting Imam of Accra in 1986, and finally NCI of Ghana in 1993. As the NCI, Sharubutu's functions include leading Friday and Eid prayers, officiating marriages, and naming ceremonies as well as funeral rites, running Quranic commentary (Tafsir) in Ramadan and collaborating with other Muslims to improve Muslims' relationships with the public. Sheikh Sharubutu has been celebrated by Ghanaians and the international community for his dedicated service to Muslim unity and national peace. For instance, in 2006 the University of Ghana awarded him an Honorary Doctorate in recognition of his role in teaching and peace building. Furthermore, the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre has identified him as one of the 500 most influential Muslim personalities across the globe, especially because of his role in "helping to promote disadvantaged and vulnerable communities in Ghana".[45] The NCI has intervened in Muslim intra-faith disputes across the country. For instance, there have been instances of disputes leading to court litigations or violent clashes among Muslims in Old Tafo, Koforidua, Hohoe and Ho, and so on, and his interventions have restored calm and togetherness in these communities. Though a Maliki-Sufi scholar, he has honoured invitations from 'other' Muslims and participated in their religious events to solidarize with them as well as consolidate unity among Muslims. For example, in 2016, the NCI participated in the annual Jalsa of the Global Ahmadiyya Jamat in London. The Imam has also worked towards harmonizing the ranks of Muslims and non-Muslims in the country. For example, the celebration of Sheikh Sharubutu's centenary birthday in April 2019, was held in a grand manner to reflect his national and international standing as a unifier. The President of the Republic, the Vice President, Ministers of State, Members of Parliament and the general public participated in the event.

What is more interesting about the centenary birthday was the Chief Imam's historic courtesy call on Christ the King Parish Church in Accra on April 21, 2019, in solidarity with the Church on its Easter Sunday service. According to Alhaji Khuzaima (former PA to the NCI), the visit was part of the activities outlined for the celebration as a symbol of gratitude to Allah for the blessings of peaceful

45 Schleifer and El-Sharif 2018, 173.

coexistence, unity and tolerance between Muslims and Christians in Ghana. Many Muslims and Christians praised the Chief Imam for making such 'ecumenical effort' towards interfaith harmony and national peace. However, some Muslims expressed disappointment in the Chief Imam's visit to the Church and even described it as 'shameful' and 'hypocritical' because his presence in the Church, especially during Easter, implied that "he had endorsed the Christian doctrine of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ". The expectation of other Muslims was that the NCI should have used the occasion to strengthen the relative unity among Muslims and to reconcile with his "perceived antagonistic Muslim group such as the Jallo fraternity before going out to fraternize with the Christian community". For instance, one of my interlocutors from the Jallo group remarked that "charity begins at home; therefore, if the Chief Imam had interacted with his perceived critics before opening up to the Christian community, it would have gone a long way to cement the brotherhood among Muslims".[46] My interlocutor recounted that prior to this historic visit, some loyalists of the Chief Imam were reported to have assaulted loyalists of the late Sheikh Abdulai Maikano Jallo, the son and Khalifa of Maikano who reportedly questioned the authority of the Chief Imam. According to my interlocutor, "the Chief Imam did not come out to publicly condemn the violent behaviour of his loyalists, but when the same loyalists attacked the Church of Rev. Owusu Bempah for prophesying the death of the Chief Imam, he came out publicly to condemn their actions, after which the leader of such loyalists was invited by the Police for investigation". It was against this background that the Jallo Tijaniyya group expressed disappointment in the Chief Imam's visit to the Church.

It is difficult to discuss Sheikh Sharubutu in isolation from the ONCI, especially because he is the first to occupy the position without any policy document to define the boundaries of the office. Therefore, his personal initiatives and gains may be deemed public or private depending on one's perspective. For instance, there are some establishments which were created to facilitate the NCI's personal humanitarian services. Some of them are the Sheikh Osmanu Nuhu Sharubutu Education Trust Fund (SONSETFUND), the Islamic Peace and Security Council of Ghana (IPASEC) and the Nurul Usmaniya Foundation for Humanitarian Services and Development. These organizations are run by the personal aides of the Chief Imam, though they do not form part of the National Office. Yet, in some cases, the activities of these organizations are more visible than that of the national structure. For instance, the SONSETFUND and IPASEC have been instrumental in championing education and peace building among Muslims in the country.

46 Name withheld, personal communication, 2019.

Similarly, the administrators of these NGOs have gained more popularity and influence within and beyond the shores of Ghana.[47]

Consequently, some of my interlocutors expressed concern that the ONCI lacks clarity in its operations. One of them remarked that there is "lack of transparency and cohesion in the operation of the office because it is not clear what belongs to the Imam as an individual and what belongs to the office for the benefit of the Muslim community". According to him, some individuals use the office for personal gains. As a result, "people respect the Chief Imam as a leader, but do not respect the office; the office has become money making venture rather than service-oriented body". My interlocutor alleged that some "aides of the Chief Imam are not honest and prevent honest people from getting closer to him". Additionally, a member of the Advisory Board of the Chief Imam revealed that he had received complaints that the Chief Imam is surrounded by some 'self-centred people' whose aim is to "exploit him to their advantage". My interlocutor confessed that:

> There is diffusion of responsibilities and conflict of interest between members of the Advisory Board, officers, and acquaintances of the Chief Imam. There is an intrusion of the office by non-appointees or self-imposed appointees who pursue their personal agenda against the collective interest of the community. As a result, there is friction between the Board members and some appointees. This is because some of the appointees act in a manner that the Board members are compelled to come out and do damage control in order to protect the image of the Chief Imam.[48]

However, a former personal assistant to the NCI argued that Muslims do not contribute "financially towards the running of the office, yet they demand accountability from those who sacrifice their time to serve the Imam without salary". The aide revealed that "the Chief Imam and his appointees are not on salary, and this is not of concern to Muslims, but when the Imam receives a gift from benevolent individuals, everybody wants to get their fair share, and once they do not get it, they begin to accuse the office of lack of transparency".

Some of the allegations have been confirmed by the Chief Imam himself. For instance, on September 7, 2020, the *Ghanaian Times* newspaper published a story captioned "Man destroys Chief Imam's school foundation". According to the story, the Personal Assistant (PA) to the NCI, Alhaji Khuzaima Osman told the *Ghanaian Times* that, in 2016, a traditional chief donated a four-acre parcel of land at Ablekuma Paradise (a suburb of Accra) to the ONCI to construct an English and Arabic

47 Abubakar 2019, 42.

48 Name withheld, personal communication, 2020.

school complex and a mosque for the community. The PA claimed that the ONCI has since spent about 20,000 pounds sterling on the project. However, bulldozers were sent to the site to destroy the ongoing project on the instruction of somebody claiming to be the owner of the land. Following this report, the Chief Imam on September 10, 2020, held a press conference at his residence denying he owns the purported piece of land. He lamented that a lot of things were being done in his name but without his knowledge, and that some individuals have exploited the office to their advantage. He therefore appealed to the media to check any information about him or his office before they spread it.

On September 17, 2020, the Secretary of the Chief Imam's Advisory Board issued a press statement that Khuzaima was relieved of his post as the PA to the Chief Imam. The press release advised the public to desist from dealing with Khuzaima on any matter concerning the ONCI. Alhaji Mohammed Marzuk was announced as the new PA to the Chief Imam and Executive Director of the SONSETFUND.

It is worth noting that the Advisory Board did not appoint Alhaji Khuzaima as the PA, yet they had the power to relieve him of his post. And according to Khuzaima, the Board forcefully removed him from office out of malice and personal vendetta. He told me that some members of the Board did not want him to outshine them because they saw him as a "threat to their interest in the ONCI and therefore plotted" to get him out so that they could pursue their interests. According to him:

> Some of the Advisory Board members openly told me that they would punish me to see how I would survive and take care of my family. These were the enlightened people responsible for advising the Chief Imam, in fact some of them were old enough to be my grandfather, as old as 85 years old, the younger among them was 55; but they did not think about the impact that their action would have on the larger community. Today, I am not in the office and things have come to a standstill because they cannot do the work. Now who is losing? We are all human beings, and we have our flaws, so when a problem comes, find a way of solving it so that things would move on.

This criticism points to the weaknesses and limitations in the operations of the ONCI. For instance, the Chief Imam's response to the *Ghanaian Times* reportage on the alleged land litigation and the action taken by the advisory board against the PA to the NCI indicates that he is not in full control of the people around him, did not open up enough to the Muslim community and lacked the human and material resources needed to manage the Office. As a result, the Chief Imam had to look for people around him to help run the affairs of the community. One can also argue that, because the appointees of the Chief Imam were providing voluntary services to the community, the Imam may have trusted them without

being critical of their motives. Thus, some of the appointees might have taken advantage of the laxity in the system to exploit the Imam and the community at large. This implies that, until the Muslim community takes on the responsibility of resourcing the ONCI, some individuals may get closer to the Chief Imam in the name of rendering free service, but with a hidden agenda to exploit the community.

Prior to the creation of the position of the NCI, the leadership of the Ghanaian Muslim community has been in the hands of the Maliki-Tijaniyyah group.[49] However, over the years, the Ahmadiyya, Ahlus-Sunna, Shi'ah and Istiqamah have established internal leadership structures parallel to the ONCI. Even though the ONCI has made efforts to bring these groups together under one umbrella, they continue to operate independently and constitute strong voices in the Muslim community. For instance, some of the groups occasionally act contrary to the decision of the National Hilal Committee on the commencement and breaking of the Ramadan Fast. In spite of this contestation, the Chief Imam's leadership has gained more prominence as the de facto official mouthpiece of the Muslim community. For instance, it is the ONCI that can officially write to the government to declare a public holiday for the two Eids. This has made the Chief Imam an indispensable figure through whom the state interacts with the Muslim community. In fact, all five presidents in the Fourth Republic have established strong connections with him and accorded him respect.[50]

Notwithstanding the popularity of the NCI, Muslim individuals and groups have often expressed discontent with his leadership and the operations of the ONCI. One interesting dimension of the discontent is the vehement opposition to the Chief Imam's leadership by his fellow Maliki-Tijaniyyah, loyalists of the late Sheikh Abdullah Ahmed Maikano Jallo. The Chief Imam and the late Sheikh Maikano were good friends until their relationship sour before the demise of Maikano in 2005. The Chief Imam did not attend the *Janazah* (funeral) of Sheikh Maikano, and this further worsened the relationship between the two camps. At Maulid ground in Accra on January 4, 2020, the Chief Imam recounted his good relationship with the late Sheikh Maikano and accused the scholars and zongo chiefs of failing to reconcile them. Chief Imam lamented that the son of Maikano had been insulting him publicly, but the chiefs and scholars failed to bring him to order.

The son of Maikano, Sheikh Abul Faid, on his part, expressed concern that Muslims have allowed politicians to manipulate them, and that the tension

49 Ameen 2011, 36.
50 Issah 2019, 175.

between the late Sheikh Maikano and the Chief Imam was created by some Muslims to please politicians. In his opinion, apart from the Chief Imam, the politicians do not want any scholar to be heard so that they could divide Muslims and manipulate them. He argues:

> I am a Muslim and I heard that there is a National Chief Imam who is my representative at the national level, and I wanted to know who appointed him, who is his deputy, and who created the Office of National Chief Imam. I did not get answers to these questions, so I concluded that there is no National Chief Imam (. . .) We shall see, indeed if Sheikh Maikano really suffered to spread the Tijaniyyah Order in Ghana, the truth shall prevail.[51]

From the perspective of Sheikh Abul Faid, it appears that some 'injustice' took place in the appointment of the Chief Imam, and this has the potential to mute other scholars and project the superiority of the Chief Imam. It appears from the conversation with Sheikh Abul Faid that he perceived the position of the NCI as an exclusive position for the Tijaniyyah, in which case Sheikh Maikano should be more deserving of it because he suffered to spread the Order in the country. It is based on this perception that he alleged that the creation of the position of NCI was politically motivated, and therefore accused the politicians of dividing Muslims in order to weaken them for their political gains. It is important to recall that some Muslim politicians contributed towards the creation of the position, and in the opinion of Sheikh Abul Faid, this is tantamount to government interference in the affairs of Muslims. However, it is clear from the narrative that those Muslim politicians did not champion the agenda of creating the position on behalf of the state, even if the government of the day took advantage of the situation to advance the interests of the state in managing the affairs of Muslims as citizens. On the contrary, the Muslim politicians used their political power to influence the creation of the position of NCI to promote the interest of Muslims by giving them more visibility. This is evident in the submission of Dr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas that "some of us, because of his great knowledge, believed that he needed to gain the recognition not only as Imam of Accra, but indeed as the National Chief Imam of Ghana".[52]

51 Abul Faid, personal communication, 2019.
52 Issah 2019, 62.

The Future of ONCI

At the time of this fieldwork, Sheikh Sharubutu was over 100 years old, and was still leading prayers at the Central Mosque and officiating religious activities on a daily basis without a deputy.[53] He still travelled abroad to participate in international events on behalf of the Muslim community. Some of my interlocutors therefore expressed fears that the Muslim community may fall apart upon his death. In this regard, COMOG has initiated a project to draft a constitution that brings all stakeholders together to determine who becomes the next Chief Imam and how the ONCI should operate after Sharubutu. As of February 2020, COMOG came out with the 'Ummah Constitution', which seeks to 'democratize' the ONCI and make it more effective and efficient. Consultations have since been going on to seek inputs from all the Muslim groups before its ratification. Article 29, clause two of the constitution states that "the positions of the National Chief Imam, the First Deputy National Chief Imam and the Second Deputy National Chief Imam shall altogether at all times be filled by nominees of not less than two different Islamic sects".[54] In all earnest, one cannot guarantee how the Muslim community would eventually receive this constitution because some Muslims have already questioned the legal mandate and moral authority of the drafters. However, if the constitution gets ratified, this provision will ensure that the position of the Chief Imam does not become the prerogative of a particular clan or doctrinal group. This shows that the Ghanaian Muslim community is changing, and therefore the state of the ONCI may also change in due course. This change could lead to an open competition for the position of NCI where the various doctrinal groups may want to present their candidates for the post, which may further intensify doctrinal rivalry. The unpredictable implication is that it could create a situation where there might be no NCI after Sheikh Sharubutu because of intense disagreement among the doctrinal groups. This may please some doctrinal groups (especially the minority groups) as they would feel independent to operate and interact directly with the state. However, if Muslims are unable to harmonize their ranks for effective leadership, the state may have to intervene to ensure peace in the Muslim community. Whoever becomes the NCI under this circumstance will not

53 On September 28, 2019, the Deputy Chief Imam, Sheikh Kamaluddeen Abubakar passed on, and his younger brother, Sheikh Ishaq Abubakar who was appointed as Acting Deputy Chief Imam also passed away on November 2, 2019. This study is not privy to any arrangement for the appointment of the next Deputy Chief Imam.

54 National Conference of Muslim Representatives 2020, 20.

only receive support from the state, but also the state will get more involved in regulating the affairs of Muslims through the ONCI.

It is worth reiterating from the foregoing narrative that the struggle to fill the age-old leadership vacuum that the demise of the Prophet created within the ummah remains an interesting challenge to contemporary Muslim societies, especially Muslims who live in so-called secular settings. Thus, in this chapter, I have attempted to draw scholarly attention to how Ghanaian Muslims have tried to establish an Islamic political authority in a secular state. Spotlighting an important aspect of Muslims' lived experience that has not received much academic analysis in the accounts of Islam in contemporary Ghana: the establishment and operations of the Office of the National Chief Imam, I have argued that although the NCI has made some ecumenical efforts to construct a collective Islamic identity, he struggled to establish the appropriate administrative structures to guarantee the future of his ecumenical initiatives. This entangled position of the Muslim community led by the NCI therefore draws our attention to the experience of Muslims in Ghana as a source of empirical scholarship that analyzes theoretical Islam in connection with its practical manifestation. However, paying attention to this nexus invites us to further reflect on how we should make sense of the power dynamics of the ONCI through the constant doctrinal contestation among Muslims on one hand and the secular project of the Republic which renders religious authority inconsequential to the powers of the nation-state on the other. This nexus also draws attention to the implications of these dynamics for the future of the ONCI and Islam in Ghana.

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Koudbi Kaboré

The Modernity of Islam in Burkina Faso

Contrasting Strategies in Two Emergent Movements

Since 2016, Burkina Faso has been caught up in the conflict zone of Islamist terrorism, propelling Islam to the forefront of public debates.[1] Until recently, however, Burkinabe Islam appeared to be quiet and apolitical, in contrast to the political influence of Catholic Christianity and traditional chieftaincy in the country as well as the movements for re-Islamization affecting the neighbouring countries of Niger and Mali.[2] In political struggles as in national crises, Muslims in Burkina Faso had been unable to rally as an allied or opposition force to those in power. The revolutionary potential expressed nowadays in Burkinabe Islam is as puzzling to specialists and politicians as it is to ordinary citizens. As recently as 2014, the Muslim faithful described their umbrella structure, the Fédération des associations islamiques du Burkina (FAIB, Federation of Islamic Associations of Burkina), as a mere "moon commission" (doing nothing but observe the moon to announce Islamic holidays), expressing their indignation at its inaction in the sociopolitical domain, where Muslims expected it to be involved.[3]

As Islamist terrorism expands its territorial and ideological foothold in various regions of Burkina Faso, adding to Muslims' critical attitude toward FAIB, it is revealing a new trend underway in Islam since at least the early 1990s. Indeed, when considering the history of Islam in Burkina Faso, formerly Upper Volta, it is crucial to acknowledge the development of a form of political Islam that led up to this pivotal period. What is at issue are new visions of collective

1 Idrissa 2019. The first signs were the Ouagadougou attack on January 15, 2016, followed by the attack on the Nassoumbo military outpost on December 16, 2016, with Al-Qaïda au Maghreb islamique (AQMI, Al Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb) claiming responsibility for the former and Ansarul Islam, the first Burkinabe terrorist group with Islamist allegiance, claiming the latter.
2 On Catholicism, see Otayek 1997; Somé 2006a; Somé 2006b; on traditional chieftaincy, see Somé 2003; on re-Islamization in Nigeria and Mali, see Soares 2009; Villalón 1996; Villalón 2015; Sounaye 2016; Idrissa 2017.
3 Madore 2020, 639.

Translation: by Catherine V. Howard

Koudbi Kaboré: Joseph Ki-Zerbo University, 03 BP 7021 Ouagadougou 03/Burkina Faso, e-mail: koudbikabore@yahoo.fr

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identity and society being propagated by emergent groups, in this case FAIB and Ansarul Islam, in different contexts and following radically opposed methods and logics.

FAIB was created in 2005 with the aims of building Muslim unity and influencing state policies that affect Muslim national interests. Since then, it has pursued religious and sociopolitical objectives that have gradually contributed to the development of a new political culture of Islam. Compared to the vision that Muslim associations had of their role and the relations they should maintain with the state, FAIB's approach represented a rupture. As for Ansarul Islam, which arose in 2016, the express purpose of its founder Ibrahim Malam Dicko was to employ preaching and jihad to radically reform Islamic Fulani society in the Soum, the western province of the Sahel region. Compared to FAIB, the model type of Muslim civil society organization operating within the framework of state institutions, Ansarul Islam presents itself instead as an identity-based movement, especially of the Fulani, involving an appropriation of Islam, the hegemonic norm of Fulani society in the Soum since at least the early 19th century.

In historical terms, it is more accurate to say these changes constitute a form of modernity. Here, I adopt an understanding of modernity from Shmuel-Noah Eisenstadt as a critical relationship to the state and traditional authorities, that is, as a process of reform and individualization.[4] Eisenstadt recognizes that modernity takes multiple forms, theorizing it as various types of "cultural programmes" adopted by societies, ones that are not necessarily inspired by the model of modernity embodied in the West. The idea that modernity is multiple indicates that other modernities are constructed through different modes, often in confrontation with the dominant forms of legitimizing power within communities and at the state level.[5] This suggests that modernities would be in conflict. However, without being wrong, this idea is insufficient. It does not explain the tendency of some movements to be a conduit of modernities they disapprove of. Why, for example, do the Izala, who promote an Islamic modernity in Niger and northern Nigeria, resort to the technological and linguistic tools and the knowledge used by the West? According to Ousmane Kane and Abdoulaye Sounaye, it is because the Izala want to Islamicize Western modernity, to domesticate and appropriate it according to Islam's own norms and values.[6]

It is thus tempting to say that what makes modernity is its contradictions, which reveal a great deal about the history of societies as well as the forms that

4 Eisenstadt 1973; Eisenstadt 1999.
5 Feenberg 1995; Amin 2005.
6 Kane 2003, 244–45; Sounaye 2016, 52.

modernity takes. Based on the cases of FAIB and Ansarul Islam, I propose an interpretation of the modernity of Islam in Burkina Faso through its two facets of persuasion and violence.[7] The key issues to elucidate are the contexts within which these movements have taken place, the regimes of historicity in which they are inscribed, and the aspirations they embody.

This study is based on fieldwork conducted in Djibo in the Sahel region and in Ouagadougou in 2018, 2019, and 2021. The statements about Ibrahim Malam Dicko and the Ansarul Islam movement he founded come from four people, three of whom had organizational, family, or religious ties to the preacher. I paid special attention to what was said by the religious guide who was part of Malam Dicko's inner circle, so his account is cited more often than the other three. The interviews took place in Ougadougou because, since 2016, it has been virtually impossible to visit a family in Djibo, let alone conduct interviews on a subject that has suddenly become taboo there. My fieldwork was also enriched by participating in a project of regional consultations on terrorism and violent extremism as well as by consulting numerous press sources.[8] This article has two main sections in which I analyse the historical trajectory, characteristics, discourse, and modes of action of FAIB and Ansarul Islam, respectively.[9]

FAIB and Burkinabe Islam: Between the Search for Unity and a New Political Culture

Muslim Unity in the Face of Conflict, 1962–1988

The emergence of FAIB involved a long process dating back to 1962. That year, the Muslims of Upper Volta overcame their divisions and established the Communauté musulmane de Haute-Volta (CMHV, Muslim Community of Upper Volta). The

7 Idrissa 2017.

8 Having been tasked with developing the national counterterrorism strategy in Burkina Faso, a group of experts, of which I was a member, travelled from May to June 2021 through the thirteen regions of Burkina Faso to conduct a diagnostic analysis and assessment of the terrorist threat and violent extremism.

9 This text was discussed at the colloquium "Du Sénégal au Nigéria : La Modernité de l'islam en Afrique de l'Ouest Pratiques, influences, et trajectoires", held in Lasdel, Niamey, Niger, on November 18–25, 2019. I thank Abdoulaye Sounaye for his attentive reading and comments throughout my writing of this article.

creation of a single organization representative of Muslims as a whole arose from their awareness of their weak political influence at that time. Paradoxically, the founders of the organization stated in their charter texts:

> The Muslim community is apolitical. Its activities are mainly religious, educational, and cultural. It models its religious conduct on the moderate opinion of the first companions of the Prophet and abstains from any excess in matters of religion.[10]

According to official documents of the Islamic associations, this orientation has not changed: their purpose is to organize Muslims in order to better promote Islam. They have a mentoring and training role, and the activities they conduct are aimed at helping Muslims better understand and practice their religion. This is not the way some FAIB grassroots activists, such as Salam Ouédraogo and Inoussa Bamogo, see things. The former, an octogenarian from Dori, stated:

> I had a mosque built that has become a Friday mosque. One of my sons leads prayers there. I am a Qur'anic teacher; I have a centre here where I continue to teach, and I opened another centre in the village of Djemsodji. I plan to transform this centre into a madrassa. Many imams and sheikhs came out of these two centres and, in turn, established Qur'anic learning centres and mosques in various locations in Burkina Faso. What I have done is promote Islam, which is what is expected of every disciple. We don't expect them to create associations or wait until they have the means before promoting Islam. The associations have objectives other than promoting religion.[11]

Inoussa Bamogo shared this view, arguing that:

> To promote Islam, we don't need to be united. However, to defend the interests of Muslims, unity is a necessity. Catholics are influential not because they are numerous but because the Catholic Church has achieved unity and speaks with one voice. That's why people listen to it more than to other faith-based groups.[12]

Although they speak as grassroots activists, Ouédraogo and Bamogo represent critical voices among Francophone elites and Muslim figures in the provinces who assign a more social and political purpose to Islamic associations to assist and defend the interests of Muslims. By assigning this role to such groups, they do not intend to suggest that the Islamic associations are not engaged in promoting Islam. To the contrary, they mean that, in addition to spiritual activities, Muslims

10 CMHV By laws, Article 3, 1962.

11 Interview on March 14, 2014, Dori.

12 Interview with a student, a member of the Association des élèves et étudiants musulmans du Burkina (AEEMB, Association of Muslim Students of Burkina), June 20, 2019, Ouagadougou.

have social, economic, and political interests that require protection best ensured through political means. Even the promotion of Islam through leadership and training becomes a special political matter in some situations.

This was the spirit that motivated the CMHV pioneers. They wanted a response to "the influence of Christian elites and the Catholic Church", which meant that CMHV had to have a political agenda, as Ouédraogo and Bamogo believed.[13] The fact that this agenda was not spelled out in the charter texts is a reflection of the secular stance of the state, which prohibits the intervention of religious organizations in the political sphere. However, this did not prevent CMHV leaders, like the Catholic clergy, from translating this agenda into action. If it existed, the implementation of this agenda was hampered by two realities within Voltaic/Burkinabe Islam.

The first seems to have been the absence of a clear policy among Muslims toward the state until the late 1990s. In contrast to Christian organizations, notably the Catholic ones, Muslim organizations did not give priority to training leaders to participate in the work of the state. Thus, among the Muslim elites appointed to the upper echelons of government, there was no one trained to develop an Islamic project at the state level.

The second reality concerns conflicts within the Muslim community. In fact, the unity of CMHV did not survive these internal conflicts.[14] As René Otayek has shown, doctrinal divergencies, such as those pitting traditionalists against Wahhabi reformists and conflicts over the control of large sums of Arab aid, caused CMHV to lose its legitimacy and cohesion.[15] In the late 1970s, three national associations that had emerged from the breakup of CMHV competed for the legitimacy of the *Ummah* (Muslim community). An initial schism at the beginning the decade led to the creation of the Mouvement sunnite de Haute-Volta (MSHV, Sunni Movement of the Upper Volta) in December 1973. In the same circumstances, the Association islamique de la Tidjaniyya (AIT, Tidjaniyya Islamic Association) was created in 1979.[16] With this fragmentation, CMHV was no more than a simple grouping of Islamic associations in the same way as MSHV and AIT. Although it is possible to link each of these three groups of associations to a particular current, the schisms were more the result of the logic of the camps than of the denominations. When categorizing them by denomination, CMHV includes the

13 Otayek 1984, 301.

14 After the country changed its name in 1984, the association became the Communauté musulmane du Burkina Faso (CMBR, Muslim Community of Burkina Faso).

15 Otayek 1984, 302–03.

16 Otayek 1984, 309–11.

Qadiriya and the Twelve-Bead Tidjaniyya brotherhoods; within MSHV are those commonly called Wahhabis; and AIT brings together associations opposed to the Eleven-Bead Tidjaniyya, also known as the Hamalists.

In addition to conflicts among Islamic trends, there were intradenominational conflicts, such as those that sporadically shook the Sunni Movement between 1988 and 1996.[17] From the mid-80s onwards, the conflicts escalated, and Muslims found themselves unable to speak with one voice.[18] To put an end to the crisis and enable the government to work with a single spokesperson for Muslims, the head of state, Thomas Sankara, urged the main leaders to restore their entente. This was achieved on June 13, 1986, through his personal mediation. At the end of the meeting, one of the leaders involved in the crisis, El Hadj Abdoul Salam Tiemtoré, president of the Communauté musulmane du Burkina (CMBF, Muslim Community of Burkina), expressed his satisfaction in these terms:

> The community was very ill and found a skilled doctor in the person of the President of Burkina Faso to extract the gangrene that was beginning to spread to all its limbs.[19]

However, the reconciliation achieved through pressure from or, to be more precise, imposed by the leader of the Conseil national de la révolution (CNR, National Council of the Revolution) was short-lived. Dissension soon resurfaced and shattered the unity of convenience in September 1986. Two meetings were held during this period, one taking place in Koudougou for the traditionalists, the other convened in Bobo-Dioulasso for the reformist intellectuals.[20] From these meetings emerged two camps with diametrically opposed perceptions of Islam and the administration of the *Ummah*.

During this same period, each of the three groups of associations – CMBF and AIT (mentioned above) as well as the Mouvement sunnite du Burkina Faso (MSBF, Sunni Movement of Burkina Faso) – sought to represent Burkinabe Muslims vis-à-vis the state. As none of them was authorized to represent the entire community of Muslims, they were all deprived of the favours they had enjoyed for financial support and access to the media. The impact on media usage was where ordinary Muslims most directly felt the consequences of the crisis in their community

17 Cissé 2009, 15–25.

18 This comes from an interview with Assimi Kouanda, quoted in Sanon K. Rigobert, "L'Islam chez nous d'hier à aujourd'hui. Un spécialiste en parle." *L'Observateur Paalga*, March 23, 1993.

19 Zoungrana Ben Idriss, "Crise de la communauté musulmane. Le président du Faso fait enterrer la hache de guerre." *Sidwaya*, June 16, 1986.

20 Tome Adama, "La communauté musulmane du Burkina Faso : Une évolution conflictuelle." *Le Pays*, May 27, 1993.

when, in 1988, the government suspended the broadcasting of the programme "La voix de l'islam" (Voice of Islam) on national radio and television stations.

The Public Media Crisis and the Advent of FAIB, 1988–2005

The decision to suspend the programme "La voix de l'islam" raised sharp criticism against the state. From 1988 to 1991, Muslim leaders incessantly denounced it while they pleaded with authorities to reinstate the programme, which constituted an essential link in the *Ummah*. Faced with the many requests, the government conditioned the reinstatement of the programme on reconciliation among the association leaders and the establishment of a national Islamic organization that would be more representative and consensual.[21] Correspondence among Muslims at the time show that all the Islamic leaders and associations were harbouring grievances against the state and, in their disagreements, were constantly exhorting Muslims to unite. They undertook negotiations with the authorities but failed to get the suspension lifted from the programme. On April 16, 1991, a Muslim holiday, young Muslims broke their silence and vehemently denounced three years of suspension and their leaders' inaction. In a letter that read like a lawsuit, an anonymous group accused the state of being biased in its treatment of religious groups regarding access to public media:

> We come before you, through this notice, to speak about a subject that has been troubling us for years. (…) Tuesday, December 25, 1990. A day of the week falling on a Christian holiday. The minister decides: the mass media, the heritage of all Burkinabe, are at the disposal of the Christians. (…) Tuesday, April 16, 1991. Also a day of the week falling on a holiday. This holiday is Muslim. The minister is secretive: the information department does whatever it wants. The television remains silent, more silent than a carp in the daytime (…) the holiday is Muslim, but Muslims will not get their message through (…) for us it is a question of knowing: are the Muslims of Burkina Faso citizens of the country or are only Christians considered citizens of the country who may enjoy the benefits of the state?[22]

Based on this challenge, a group within the Francophone elite held a meeting of the Association des élèves et étudiants musulmans du Burkina (AEEMB, Association of Muslim Pupils and Students of Burkina), and the Cercle d'études, de recherches et de formation islamique (CERFI, Circle of Islamic Studies, Research,

21 Letter from Abdoul Salam Tiemtoré to the Minister of Information and Culture, Ouagadougou, May 27, 1988, Archives nationales du Burkina, 7V 485.

22 Letter from the Muslims of Burkina Faso to the Minister of Information and Culture, ANB, 3H1a, 1991, 7V485.

and Training) and focused its discourse on the need to restore Muslim unity rather than on the condemnations and accusations against the government, much less on the reciprocal accusations levelled by the Islamic associations against each other. In their statements, the group suggested that these divisions and the tendency to be "apolitical" were the reasons for the state's disrespectful treatment of Muslims. Inoussa Bamogo's assertion that "Catholics are not influential because they are numerous; they are influential because the Catholic Church has achieved unity and speaks with one voice" accurately reflected the views of Francophone elites in AEEMB and CERFI at the time.

In the wake of persistent conflicts within Burkinabe Islam, AEEMB and CERFI had been created in 1985 and 1989, respectively, to bring together mainly Muslim pupils, students, and employees of secular Burkinabe schools.[23] When they were founded, these sister associations declared that one of their aims was to promote Islam in school and university settings and to pursue dialogue with other Islamic associations as a means of fostering unity among Muslims.[24] Compared to the multitude of Islamic groups with an acute interest in Arabic as their common denominator, AEEMB and CERFI claimed to represent "intellectual Islam".[25] As such, they defended their legitimacy for intervening in public space in the name of particular forms of symbolic capital: French as the language of the elites and of religiosity,[26] diplomas from traditional schools and universities, and posts held in public administration and government agencies. These conferred on them the power to formulate intellectual and political issues and to weigh in on debates independently. Because these specific forms of capital made these two French-speaking associations serious contenders in the competition over Islam, the traditionalists and the Arabisants (scholars trained in Arabic and mostly in Middle Eastern institutions) denied them legitimacy to represent Muslims and speak on their behalf, under the pretext that they were ignorant of the proper practice of their religion.[27] At the time, as Frédérick Madore notes, it was thought, rightly or wrongly, that secular public schools could only produce individuals who were barely religious, if not antireligious.[28] Thus, it would not do to let such Muslims

23 Madore 2016a, 91–92.

24 Bamba Bogna Yaya, "Premier congrès ordinaire de l'Association des élèves et étudiants musulmans du Burkina. Redynamiser l'Islam." *Sidwaya*, July 20, 1988; Ouédraogo D. Evariste, "CERFI. La foi et le reste." *L'Observateur Paalga*, February 5, 1997.

25 Cissé 2009, 17; Traoré 2010, 30–34.

26 Sounaye 2015, 119–40.

27 Zabsonré Issouf, "Rôle de l'élite musulmane dans la communauté islamique." *Sidwaya*, January 14, 1997.

28 Madore 2016a, 91–92.

occupy the Islamic terrain. This withholding of recognition came to galvanize the members of AEEMB and CERFI.

They saw the crisis in the media and the Muslim community as an opportune moment for realizing their common ambition to become a voice within the *Ummah* and to be the key actors in bringing about its organizational unity. To this end, their immediate objective was to bring the association leaders together to work out a compromise that would allow the media space to be reopened to Muslims. But they also realized how their initiatives could provoke resistance by the Arabisant elites, who turned their backs on them, and by wealthy businessmen, who considered them to be beggars.[29] They were well aware of the weakness of their status as French-speaking intellectuals: the special skills and power they claimed to have did not give them the aura or legitimacy they needed to play a role as conciliator among the Islamic associations. At the time, to be heeded within the Islamic community (and beyond), it was necessary to have three prerequisites: intellectual, economic, and relational forms of capital, the source of influence in political networks. The latter two prerequisites seem to have constituted the major handicap of the two associations of Francophone Muslim elites. Nevertheless, this handicap was not insurmountable. Their distance from the parties in conflict and the proximity of some of their leaders to Arabisant elites and Muslim businessmen were additional assets that tipped the balance in favour of their becoming mediators.

But they also knew that Muslim unity would not be achieved in one fell swoop at a meeting of association leaders; it would and should be achieved through a gradual embrace of the ideal of unity by them and their constituencies. Hence the two associations initiated public activities (exchange days, conferences, forums, panels) in the late 1990s around the theme of Muslim unity. On May 16, 1999, AEEMB was the co-organizer, along with the l'Association mondiale de l'appel à l'islam (AMAI, World Association of the Call to Islam), of the "Day of Islamic Unity", intended, they said, "to reflect on the unity and solidarity of Muslims". At the end of the meeting, the participants adopted a resolution recommending that the leaders of all the organizations work towards establishing a national coordinating council.[30] Following this AEEMB meeting, CERFI organized a debate forum in Ouagadougou on June 15–17, 2001, to "lay the groundwork for an orga-

29 Zabsonré Issouf, "Rôle de l'élite musulmane dans la communauté islamique." *Sidwaya*, January 14, 1997.

30 Boni Cheik Oumar, "Journée de l'unité islamique. Résolution pour une coordination nationale islamique au Burkina." *Sidwaya*, May 18, 1999.

nizational unity of the Muslims of Burkina Faso on a consensual basis".[31] After having unanimously recognized that "to be strong, we must unite", prominent Muslim figures and association leaders held a broad discussion exploring what model of union to achieve. Learning from the past, they called for an inclusive and nonpartisan structure to be put in place:

> The union of Muslims we are advocating will not be created to the detriment of anyone or any group nor will it centralise power in the hands of one man or a few groups of men; rather, it will be a union in the service of the Ummah and in the service of the one God, the Almighty, in the hands of men capable of rising above themselves, of sacrificing themselves for the community.[32]

Clearly, the discussion in this forum materialized the dream of the Francophone Muslim elites. The rest of the process, which no longer lay within their purview alone, was entrusted to ad hoc commissions that, after more than three years of reflection and work, proposed the creation of a federation. On December 16–18, 2005, four denomination groups – CMBF, MSBF, AIT, and Ittihad Islami – along with AEEMB and CERFI, adopted the charter texts of the Federation of Islamic Associations of Burkina (FAIB).[33]

Since then, this unified Islamic organization has pursued goals that are modest but probably more difficult to achieve. On the one hand, it calls for a single spokesperson for the associations, which have multiple and sometimes contradictory interests and motivations. On the other, it must assist associations and groups of associations and position them in relation to an ever-changing course of action. The organization must therefore reassure its members and public authorities, but it must also often issue warnings to associations developing outside its hegemonic corporatist structure.

31 Kaboré Madi, "Forum-débat sur l'unité des musulmans: Un pas historique dans la vie de l'islam au Burkina." *L'Observateur Paalga*, June 19, 2001.

32 Ibid.

33 Ouédraogo Hamidou, "Associations islamiques du Burkina: Une seule voix, un seul 'muezzin'." *LeFaso.net*, December 15, 2005, https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article11489, accessed September 12, 2022.

FAIB in Action. Functioning and the New Political Culture of Islam

The Federation of Islamic Associations of Burkina was created to meet two needs: to reconstitute an Islamic unity shattered by internal conflicts and to give Muslims a political weight comparable to their demographic weight in Burkina Faso at the beginning of the 21st century.[34] As for the first issue, the opinion of the Director of Customary Affairs and Worship is that FAIB, which has more than 240 member associations, is not the large united family that many Muslims had hoped for.[35] On the one hand, the established operating framework and structure, with their fixed norms and rules, relegate the intellectuals of AEEMB and CERFI to secondary roles. Even though they were the active players in the creation of FAIB, these two associations are excluded from its board, which is shared by the four denominational groups.[36] The distribution of functions and roles appears to perpetuate the domination of traditionalists and Arabisants over Francophone elites. On the other hand, the links between FAIB and its members are more relational than organic, since FAIB only plays an institutional supervisory role in relation to its members. In concrete terms, it is responsible for formulating directives and guidelines for member associations, which take them into account to varying degrees.[37] Apart from AEEMB and CERFI, the associations are caught between two poles: on one end, FAIB, to which they feel indirectly linked, and on the other, the denominational groups to which they belong. However, they retain autonomy in pursuing their own activities. Neither FAIB nor the denominational groups require prior approval from an association when they choose activities.

FAIB operates on the principle of a presidency rotating among the denominational groups. It has a national executive office, a general secretariat, a council of ulema (Islamic scholars) acting as a panel of judges, a disciplinary council, and numerous specialized commissions. Regional councils and a presidium make up the rest of its institutional architecture.

The appointment of members to the governing bodies preferably rests on consensus, in the absence of which an electoral college or the ulema council

34 Although Muslims represented only 20 per cent of the Burkinabe population in 1965, by the mid-2000s more than 60 per cent of Burkinabe identified themselves as Muslims, according to the Recensement général de la population et de l'habitat (RGPH, General Population and Housing Census) conducted in 2006.

35 Interview with Ouédraogo B. Abass, June 20, 2019, Ouagadougou.

36 Madore 2020, 630.

37 Interview with Ouédraogo B. Abass, June 20, 2019, Ouagadougou.

may intervene to arbitrate before any voting is held. Consensus is considered the most effective means of decision-making and preventing one association or denominational group from gaining hegemony over others within FAIB. Through consensus, the members seek to promote dialogue and avoid voting, which is a source of discord. As in other religious organizations, the quality of representatives is gauged not on their position but on their social capital and dedication to the cause of Islam and Muslims. But consensus, which often leads to a process of co-optation, is far from ensuring cohesion within FAIB. Indeed, during its first ten years, leadership conflicts impeded its functioning and presence in public debates, so it was unable to defend the interests of Burkinabe Muslims. Nevertheless, this was what they most expected the association to do. Because of disagreements, FAIB's first congress was not held until 2015 after receiving collective and individual pressure from Muslims to do so.

The majority of Muslims were looking to FAIB to make a break from previous political practices. They wanted to hear it speak on issues at the national level, where its voice would influence citizens' thinking and would be heeded as much as that of the Catholic clergy. They did not want FAIB leaders to continue being a pawn of the government. In a word, Muslims expected the association to provide the impetus for a new political culture of Islam that would grant this religion and its followers a power they had never had before. But FAIB floundered about as it wavered between the status quo and the imperative to take up a new dynamic. Paradoxically, as with the process that led to its creation, it was from the margins that AEEMB and CERFI and some independent Islamic figures would show the way for FAIB to follow.

During this period, AEEMB and CERFI dealt mainly with societal issues, such as secularism, the establishment of the senate, or the revision of Article 37 that would enable Muslims to be involved in the political process.[38] At the same time, other Muslim figures denounced the conflicts among FAIB leaders, their silence, or their inaction.[39] In 2014, for example, Aboubacar Sana, the Grand Imam of Ouagadougou, depicted the situation in these terms:

38 In 2000, a constitutional amendment limited the presidential term to five years, renewable once. According to this provision (Article 37), the president at the time, Blaise Compaoré, who had been in power since 1987, could not run again in the presidential elections scheduled for 2015. But starting in 2013, calls to amend this article to allow him to stand for re-election deeply divided Burkinabè citizens. When the Compaoré regime tried to force the amendment through, it was swept away by a popular uprising in October 2014.

39 Madore 2016b.

> The organisation of Muslims is not yet perfect. We do not have a prevailing voice. Faced with any situation, it flounders about.[40]

Like the Grand Imam, other Muslim leaders and worshippers flooded the press with their complaints and calls to revamp FAIB policy.[41] To avoid incurring the disapproval of its own people, FAIB was often pressured to take Muslim political concerns into account. This was the case, for example, with the debate on secularism, initially conducted by the member associations, in particular AEEMB and CERFI, and then taken up by FAIB during the Conseil consultatif sur les réformes politiques (CCRP, Advisory Council on Policy Reforms) held in Ouagadougou from June 23 to July 14, 2011. CCRP was a government initiative to defuse the recurrent crises that shook Burkina Faso after the murder of the journalist Norbert Zongo in 1998. During this major policy dialogue, religious groups, notably the Conference épiscopale (CE, Bishops' Conference), the Fédération des églises et missions évangéliques (FEME, Federation of Evangelical Churches and Missions), and FAIB successfully petitioned the government to consider their respective concerns.[42] FAIB took this opportunity to highlight what it called attacks on secularism and then called for a national debate to be held on this issue, which was of the greatest concern to Muslims.[43]

On September 27–29, 2012, the Forum national sur la laïcité (FNL, National Forum on Secularism) was held in Ouagadougou, attended by the delegates of the state administration, traditional and customary chiefs, representatives of trade unions and professional associations, members of political parties, and faith-based actors, including delegates from FAIB, EC, and FEME, representing the Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant communities, respectively. While the FNL was a public space of confrontation and controversies, where the various actors

40 "Imam Aboubacar Sana sur l'unité islamique: 'Chez nous, ça patauge dans tous les sens'." *L'Observateur Paalga*, July 17, 2014.

41 See Sidgomdé-Yusu Ouédraogo, "Lettre ouverte au Présidium de la Fédération des associations islamiques du Burkina." *LeFaso.net*, November 30, 2014, https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article62053, accessed September 12, 2022; Derra Ismaël, "Beaucoup de responsables musulmans ne méritent pas leur place." *L'Autre Regard* 22, January 5–February 5, 2015; Ilboudo Khalidou, "Nous devons refonder notre politique de la FAIB." *L'Autre Regard* 28, July 5–August 5, 2015.

42 Interview with Linkoné Boukaré, former Director of Customary Affairs and Worship, July 8, 2020, Ouagadougou.

43 Its list of grievances included the under-representation of Muslims in state offices and structures; the lack of recognition of Arabic in public education, the absence of Arabic-speaking graduates in the professions; the unfair treatment of religious groups in the media and in state funding, and so on. See Ouédraogo 2018.

(re)affirmed principles and defended and asserted their positions and interests, it was also a moment of (re)negotiation and compromise on certain issues that seemed to involve logical incompatibilities during the debates. For example, the Muslim participants insisted that references to secularism be stricken from the country's constitution and that Christmas trees and nativity scenes be banned from public places. The Christians, considering this demand to be a provocation, retorted that the building of mosques and the demarcation of areas for Muslim prayers should also be banned from the public spaces.[44]

Although this controversy was supposed to lead to the emergence of an "endogenous secularism", according to the forum's terminology, the debates instead gave rise to an ambiguous secularism. The state, in addition to deciding to treat all the religious denominations as equals and to subsidize their educational institutions, agreed to involve them in its mission of social regulation through various forms of partnership and funding. The passage of these resolutions offered a range of opportunities for religious groups to invert the relations between political and religious authority, as demonstrated when FAIB opposed the Religious Liberties Bill in 2017.[45] In December 2016, the Burkinabe administration had submitted a bill to Parliament that aimed "to provide a framework for the exercise of religious freedoms in order to protect society against any form of abuse".[46] The Ulema Council of FAIB held an executive meeting on January 7, 2017, while the legislators were in session discussing the bill. The ulema decided that the text infringed on religious freedoms and requested that it be withdrawn in order to allow broad talks to be held that would lead to consensual proposals.[47] Under great pressure, the legislators agreed to this.[48] Other voices were raised against withdrawing the bill. Some people thought it could still be discussed with FAIB, while others saw a threat to democracy if the passage of laws were to

44 Kaboré 2019.

45 Madore 2020, 639–40.

46 Conseil des ministres, "Pour un encadrement de l'exercice des libertés de religion." *Le Pays*, December 1, 2016.

47 Sawadogo Désiré, "Religion: la FAIB demande le retrait du projet de loi sur les libertés religieuses." *Fasozine.com*, January 7, 2017, http://www.fasozine.com/actualite/societe/549-religion-la-faib-demande-le-retrait-projet-de-loi-sur-les-libertes-religieuses.html, accessed September 12, 2022.

48 Although FAIB had criticized him for misconduct while he was head of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Security, Simon Compaoré considered the rejection of this bill as one challenge too many that tainted his honour and his actions. To save his image and position, he therefore ordered, without prior consultation with the Parliament, the withdrawal of the text under discussion in the chamber.

require the approval of religious authorities. Although Parliament's retreat in the face of FAIB's opposition may deserve criticism, it demonstrates the central issue of my argument that its opposition exemplifies FAIB's modernity.

As Sounaye emphasizes, when democracy enables freedom of speech and opens the way for the broad participation of citizens in civic life, they are no longer forced to choose between uncritical acceptance or systematic rejection of the rules of the democratic game. They make strategic choices about whether to adhere to them, to become key actors capable of influencing the course of events, and especially to determine the legitimacy of power.[49] This is evident in FAIB's case. The political action of this organization does not challenge the explicit rules of the Burkinabe state. On the contrary, through FAIB, Muslims intend to participate in the elaboration and control of these rules, which, for the organization's leaders, ensures them positioning and influence in the central institutional programmes of the state, such as education, electoral processes, legislative bodies, and the like. In contrast to FAIB's previous apolitical stance, Muslims now believe that through the organization, their position and role in the state should involve the construction of public spaces, civil society, and modes of political participation – in a word, the appropriation of the tools of modernity.[50] Another manifestation of modernity, as I show next, is the use of violence to reject traditional forms of legitimizing power.

From Preaching to Jihad in Ansarul Islam

When Ibrahim Malam Dicko moved to Djibo in 2009 to teach the Qur'an and preach, he had no plans in mind for an Islamist jihad. The trigger probably came from his contact with Amadou Koufa, leader of the Katiba Macina (Macina Liberation Front) in Mali. Following this, the residents of Djibo saw the person known as "the generous scholar" gradually become radicalized, to the point of calling for a jihad against local elites and the state. He thus became the local agent of a transnational form of Islamic modernity.

49 Sounaye 2016, 60–61.

50 Madore 2016a; Madore 2016b; Sounaye 2016, 65.

Malam Dicko, a Man of His Time

Ibrahim Dicko, the founder of Ansarul Islam, was born and raised in an Islamic Fulani community in Jelgodji (now the administrative province of Soum), where considerations of social class inherited from the era of slavery (from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries) still keep tributary groups in a state of political and religious subordination. These groups include the Rimaïbe and Bella (descendants of ancient slaves among the Fulani and Tuareg, respectively) and other castes. In fact, slavery lies at the heart of Fulani and Tuareg history, being a major factor in the foundation of their states in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso. The historically dominant groups continue to use a social construction of slavery that perpetuates discrimination against the descendants of enslaved people. Although by now, most of these descendants have reached a level of wealth and knowledge (both Islamic and secular) that puts them on an equal or superior footing in relation to their former masters, they are not always well integrated into their society.[51] The reason is that, in these societies, neither wealth nor knowledge can make up for status, which always determines social relations. Noble or slave, it is the status of individuals that dictates whether they will be listened to, whether they may lead prayers, whether they can marry outside their social groups, and so on.

To achieve integration, which the tributary lineages have always dreamed of, democracy has represented a new historical moment. Among the Fulani and Tuareg, members of the economic and professional elite who belong to these lineages recently began to believe that a "servile" vote would make it possible to win over local business owners, positioning the subordinate groups to unleash a dynamic that would reverse historical roles and give them access to "true freedom". Since 2002, the servile vote has fostered the emergence of a Rimaïbe and Bella political elite at the township level, but this has not yet enabled them to reverse the historical roles.[52]

As a *malam*[53] (Qur'anic scholar), Ibrahim Dicko wanted to make a place for himself in an Islamic sphere of Djibo controlled by influential marabout families

51 Kaboré 2016, 76–78.

52 Ibid., 81.

53 This term means "master/teacher" in Hausa, a title he would have acquired in Niger while exercising the role of a Qur'anic teacher.

and Wahhabis.[54] According to a religious guide who was part of the preacher's first circle of collaborators:

> Malam wanted to steer a path among three Islamic currents in Djibo. On the one hand is the emirate authorities' mosque, belonging to the dominant Qadiriya denomination, where the Grand Imam of Djibo officiates; on the other are the Hamalist mosque of the Doukouré and the Sunni mosque of the so-called Wahhabis. Anyone familiar with the problems of Islam in Djibo since the colonial era knows it was difficult for Ibrahim Dicko to make a place for himself in this Islamic landscape without becoming attached to one or another of the three rival currents.[55]

It was precisely the intra-Islamic rivalries and the frustrations of social categories that do not participate in the production of power that Ibrahim Malam Dicko would exploit to assert himself in the city. This involved making himself popular based on a form of good will that combined preaching and humanitarianism among the dominated social strata and the poor.

Security sources indicate that Ibrahim Dicko was born around 1970 in Soboulé in the rural township of Nassoumbou. Since a dual education had become the rule for many Muslim families, he first attended the traditional public school before pursuing an Islamic education in Burkina Faso and Mali. He then pursued a career as a Qur'anic teacher and preacher, teaching for several years in Niger before returning to Djibo, probably in 2008. The following year, Ibrahim Malam Dicko began preaching in Djibo and surrounding areas. He created the Islamic association Al-Irchad (meaning council, guide) and gradually became a religious humanitarian. As noted by a former municipal councillor who found refuge in Ouagadougou, Ibrahim Malam Dicko raised money to provide free assistance to the poor and interest-free loans to certain categories of people, especially low-income earners.[56] In 2012, he opened his own Qur'anic centre and combined the roles of preacher, humanitarian, and Qur'anic teacher.

From 2009 to 2013, his sermons in the Djibo region were essentially moral in nature and focused on the transformation of social relations, people's daily lives, and Islamic practices. His former collaborator (quoted earlier) summarized his message in two central points. In the first place, Ibrahim Malam Dicko insisted on denouncing social inequalities, which he saw as maintained by historically

54 Among these are the two rival families, that of Wuro-Saba (named after the Qur'anic home founded at the end of the 18th century by Gaoobe Fulani from Massina and which was the main focus of the Islamization of Jelgodji) and the Hamaliste family of Doucouré. See Diallo 2005.

55 Interview on January 22, 2021, Ouagadougou.

56 Interview on March 30, 2019, Ouagadougou.

dominant groups, mainly by nobles and then by Qur'anic teachers who continue to live off the backs of the *talibé* (Qur'anic students). Second, he disapproved of the management of religious affairs that was monopolized by a few families whose legitimacy was based not on knowledge but on ancestry and social status.[57] People say he was skilled at combining humour with painful truths in his sermons to accommodate members of the emirate and imamate, whom he knew were displeased with his criticism of inequalities and religious governance. Some verbal lapses often led to his being publicly admonished without, however, tainting the reputation he had acquired as a just and generous scholar. His humanitarianism conferred prestige on him and earned him the esteem or at least the loyalty of all those – the unemployed, poor, and subaltern categories – who could not do without his generosity.

The figure of Ibrahim Malam Dicko as a radical and extremist emerged in 2015 after he returned from a trip to Mali. He had gone there in 2013 and probably met the preacher Amadou Koufa, who radicalized him. The sermons he began giving in Djibo mosques and radio programmes were clearly exhortations to war. In essence, he insisted that it was necessary to "repair Islam". In the language of the region, *fulfulde*, "to repair Islam", (*Môndjine-dhè Dina-Alsilamaku*) can mean two nonexclusive things. One is "to rid Islam of inappropriate or blameworthy practices" (innovations, deviations, injustices, etc.), which involves an (individual) effort of conversion reminiscent of a major jihad. "To repair Islam" can also mean ousting illegitimate leaders. Ibrahim Malam Dicko's discourse in his radicalized phase has taken on this second meaning. In the opinion of another leader in Djibo, the preacher incited the *talibé* to free themselves from bad Qur'anic teachers and urged dependent groups to overthrow the political and religious order, which he saw as no longer legitimate and gradually becoming sclerotic.[58] His "disciples" summed up his message in an explicit, provocative slogan: "true" Islam must triumph and the abuses of traditional chiefs and marabouts must cease. At this stage, it was obvious that Ibrahim Malam Dicko's ideas had become radically opposed to the dominant thinking that is based on the principle that rules and positions in society are immutable. But the discourse he uses nowadays in the region has a precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial genealogy.

Fulani powers in the Sahel were built within the framework of the jihadist movements of Ousman dan Fodio and Cheikhou Ahmadou at the beginning of the 19th century. Fulani leaders who launched the jihad justified it as warranted against the tyranny of "pagan" powers, especially the Gourmantché, who domi-

57 Interview on January 22, 2021, Ouagadougou.
58 Interview on March 25, 2019, Ouagadougou.

nated the region. But the new religion inspired powers that emerged in place of these powers were strengthened by slavery, thus perpetuating tyranny over vast numbers of people captured during slave raids and wars. In the second half of the 19th century, with the emergence of the Tidjaniyya as the first Islamic group to compete with the Qadiriya, the liberation of servile categories was central to the discourse of Islamic figures and trends. The discourse on social issues and slavery still marks the political and social imaginary of the region and lies at the heart of the revival of jihad.

Ibrahim Malam Dicko preached in a society having a fragile balance. Numerous people saw in him a new reformer who, through jihad, would establish an egalitarian society, which they never stopped dreaming of. The words of his sermons fell on fertile soil. To launch his jihad, however, his discourse had to become weightier, to be inscribed in an historical continuity that would legitimize his action. He turned to Cheikhou Ahmadou, one of the historical figures of the Fulani jihad in the early 19th century, to acquire the symbolic capital he needed. In his calls for disobedience, he insistently invoked the jihad led by Cheikhou Ahmadou, a controversial figure in the Jelgodji, as a means of legitimation in the eyes of the population and himself.[59]

Ibrahim Malam Dicko's radical message encountered fierce opposition from conservative elites in Djibo, furious at his challenge to traditional and religious institutions and their established rules. Having decided that the preacher had crossed the line, the Council of the Emir summoned him to explain, after which they ordered him to stop his attacks against the established order, or be denied the right to speech. In another era and in similar circumstances, the disobedient preacher could have made amends and stayed in the city, as Mamadou Lamine did in 1958 when he was forced to collaborate with the religious dignitaries of Djibo.[60] Another option would have been to go into exile in the bush where, without constraint, he could lay the foundations of an alternative society, in the manner of Amadou Abdoulaye, who abandoned Dori to establish the Hamalist

59 As Hamidou Diallo (2003) has shown, the Jelgodji's assertion of political power at the beginning of the 19th century clashed with the hegemonic claims of the "pagan" kingdom of Yatenga and the Diina of Massina. Although the Jelgobe powers in Djibo and Barabulle recognized the spiritual authority of the Hamdullahi imamate at the time, they never accepted the sovereignty of Cheikhou Ahmadou over the Jelgodji. However, by requesting Ahmadou's intervention in their internal conflicts during the 1830s, the Jelgodji princes risked coming under the political guardianship of the Massina had it not been for the intervention of the Yatenga to drive the Massina troops out of Jelgodji. The figure of Ahmadou is controversial, but his jihad and image as a just ruler still contribute to the Jelgobe imaginary.

60 Son of Abdoulaye Doukouré, the famous Hamalist leader of the colonial Jelgodji.

city of Mansila in 1962 in the Yagha.[61] But Malam Dicko was a man of his time, that is, the time of global Islamism, an era for elaborating utopias and exultant imaginaries. He opted for armed confrontation instead of collaboration or shameful exile, to use the words of a local notable. To show his disapproval of the verdict of the council, he took a dissident stance: he first repudiated his wife, daughter of the Grand Imam, and then went into hiding.

Ansarul Islam and Jihad

As soon as he openly chose jihad, Ibrahim Malam Dicko declared the emirate and its components to be enemies of Islam and thus entities that must be fought. This decision to go to war against the established authority deprived him of many of his followers and sympathisers, but the preacher-turned-warlord was able to count on the loyalty of a few of them to launch the movement, created with the greatest discretion. Here is what someone close to Malam Dicko had to say about the origins of Ansarul Islam:

> Ansarul Islam was created in 2015, probably after his break with the Grand Imam. We know that when he left the city, he met regularly with the members of his association. During one of these meetings, held in the outskirts of Djibo, he unveiled his intentions to create a movement to defend the Fulani, who are persecuted by the military forces. At the time, there was in fact a military presence in the region because the country had already experienced its first terrorist attacks, putting the military forces on alert. In this context, the idea of a "Fulani movement" was not unlike the Kogolweogo self-defence groups present in the Mossi and Gourmantché regions at the time.[62] The first combatants were chosen that same day. It was only later that most of those who attended the meeting realised they had participated in the creation of a movement of Islamist allegiance to which they, as combatants, were called to join under penalty of reprisal, like all members of the association.[63]

Ansarul Islam first revealed itself on December 16, 2016, when it claimed responsibility for an attack on the Burkinabe army in Nassoumbou. People from all over Jelgodji joined the movement, which at first targeted mainly military forces

61 Kaboré 2016, 108, 308.

62 Sociologically and culturally, the Mossi and Gourmantché are agricultural societies in contact with the Fulani in the Sahel. The inability of the defence and security forces to curb crime has led to the proliferation of Kogolweogo self-defence groups in these communities since 2015. According to one account, Ansarul Islam is to the Fulani what the Kogolweogo are to the Mossi and Gourmantché.

63 Interview on January 22, 2021, Ouagadougou.

and government workers. Its combatants vigorously attacked educational institutions, kidnapping and killing teachers and imposing Arabic as the language of instruction in the areas they dominated. They took up the slogan "The white man's school where you take your children is the same school that will destroy you and lead you to hell", popularized by anticolonial reformers to express their hostility toward modern schools.[64]

Until 2018, Ansarul Islam refrained from attacking the emirate authorities and their supporters. It decided to spare any Fulani individuals because of *Pulaaku*[65] or "Fulani-ness", which forbids war within the "house" *(suudu baba*).[66] However, the reason for this decision lay elsewhere: Malam Dicko knew that any precipitous action against the ruling class and his ethnic group would lead to disaffection and would weaken the movement as it sought to broaden its base. The idea in the beginning was for Ansarul Islam to pose as a Fulani movement to gain support and sympathy from the Fulani population. Later, it could extend its attacks to all its enemies without distinction, including relatives. This strategy seems to have worked well, since as recently as April 2018, some Sahelian elites gave speeches that referred to it as the voice of the north, of those forgotten by progress.[67] Speeches of this kind, even if intended simply to explain the reasons for the appearance and development of the movement, helped reinforce it. Subsequently, Ansarul Islam changed its modus operandi and discourse; Ibrahim Malam Dicko pledged allegiance to Amadou Koufa and aligned his actions with the Macina Liberation Front and Al-Qaïda au Maghreb islamique (AQMI, Al Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb).

This development changed the movement's relations with the surrounding population, whose aspirations and interests the movement claimed to serve. Ansarul Islam combatants began kidnapping and killing local elites who disap-

64 Morgane Le Cam, "'Les djihadistes aux enseignants du nord du Burkina: 'Tu fais l'école du Blanc, tu iras en enfer!'." *Le Monde Afrique*, April 2017.

65 This concept can be defined as a code of honour containing a set of principles that include discretion, intelligence, and brotherhood embodied in the lineage (*suudu baba*).

66 Koudbi Kaboré, "Islam, foulanité et terrorisme au Burkina Faso. Les identités piégées." *Sidwaya*, July 13, 2020, https://www.sidwaya.info/blog/2020/07/13/islam-foulanite-et-terrorisme-au-burkina-faso-les-identites-piegees/, accessed September 12, 2022.

67 See Aziz Diallo, "Quand des jeunes se sentent délaissés, c'est la porte ouverte à tout !" *Mutations*, no. 122, April 1, 2017; Françoise Dembele, "Ousmane Amirou Dicko, Emir du Liptako à propos du programme d'urgence pour le Sahel: 'L'époque des vaines promesses pour plaire est révolue'." *Le Pays,* April 18, 2018, https://lepays.bf/ousmane-amirou-dicko-emir-liptako-a-propos-programme-durgence-sahel-lepoque-vaines-promesses-plaire-revolue/, accessed September 12, 2022.

proved of the organization's actions. In Djibo, many people realized that Ansarul Islam jihadists expected them to eventually join the movement, so they issued a call to fight the movement. But, according to a student in the city, their calls did not resonate with the population, since the movement had had time to permeate the society and open deep divisions.[68] Suspicion and fear had set in and silenced all dissenting voices. The only prospects left for people, especially youths in the villages, were to get involved in the movement or to flee the region.[69]

Disagreements arose after the death of Ibrahim Malam Dicko in 2017 and led the movement to disintegrate. Although a core group remains, most of the combatants have joined the Groupe de soutien à l'islam et aux musulmans (GSIM, Support Group for Islam and Muslims) and the État islamique au grand Sahara (EIGS, Islamic State of the Greater Sahara), through which they take part in strengthening the international jihadist structure and promoting social change in their society. Their discourse is addressed primarily to the Fulani of the Soum, the people who saw them emerge and grow and whose society they intend to reform through jihad.

Conclusion

I have explored two movements that present two different facets of the modernity of Islam in Burkina Faso: FAIB, with its political accommodation, and Ansarul Islam, with its violent jihad. Each of these movements can be understood in relation to its particular trajectory and its social and political context.

Consisting of associations and groups of associations, FAIB and its components operate through a clear division of missions and roles: FAIB is charged with the defence of Muslims' special interests vis-à-vis public authorities, while its member associations are tasked with the conduct of religious and social activities to promote Islam. FAIB is the only Muslim civil society organization with a mandate to explore legal and institutional ways to bring Burkinabe Islam out of its position of political subordination. Thus, it appropriates topics such as secularism and legislation on religious freedoms, school, and democracy in an attempt to promote new visions of the state and governance that give Islam and Muslims a significant place in public and institutional spaces in Burkina Faso.

68 Interview on August 17, 2020, Ouagadougou.
69 Kaboré 2020.

Unlike FAIB, Ansarul Islam is a local jihad that arose from the contradictions of Islamic Fulani society. Like the reform movements that preceded it in the region, it takes part in the antagonisms and hopes of the surrounding society. In the diffuse strands of its violence are revealed the tragic alternative of dominated social categories that have not found channels of mediation in the traditional and religious institutions of Islamic Fulani society. Ansarul Islam entered categories of subjugated identities that challenge social relations of domination and servitude. When its supporters attack local elites and the state or advocate a return to the era of Diina and Islamic instruction, their main goal is not actually to provoke the disintegration of the state or Islamic Fulani society in the Burkinabe Sahel. On the contrary, they fight for the state and society but in ways that redefine social relations in the former Jelgodji and the relationship of Sahelians to the Burkinabe state. But behind its advocacy of certain groups, Ansarul Islam reflects above all the will of a charismatic leader, Ibrahim Malam Dicko, whose intention was to lead the local *Ummah* of Djibo.

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Medinat Malefakis

The #ArewaMeToo Movement in Northern Nigeria

A Collusion of Islam, Culture and Modernity

The Birth of the #MeToo Movement

The World Health Organization (WHO) stated that 35 per cent of women, globally, experience physical or sexual violence at the hands of their intimate partner or someone else.[1] In Nigeria, one in four girls experience sexual violence before the age of 18, and, of those, only 38 per cent tell someone about it, and as few as 5 per cent seek help.[2] The reasons for the low number of women who speak up about, and seek help for, sexual violence are varied and are not restricted to Nigeria alone. Women around the world face shaming, victimization, a lack of justice and in certain cases persecution when they report their sexual abuses. This has crystallized into what Somini Sengupta describes as an "invisible non-disclosure agreement at birth" where women only tell their sexual violence stories to each other, and nothing happens after.[3]

Tarana Burke sought to break this culture of silence in the United States when she began what would later emerge as the #MeToo movement. Designed to encourage women to talk about their sexual abuses and seek help, the #MeToo movement has achieved global spread, from liberal societies like France, to culturally and religiously conservative societies like India and Pakistan – and then, to northern Nigeria where religion, culture, society and illiteracy all combine to make it an unlikely habitat for a movement about women's rights, championed by women! Decades-old values around chastity, virtue and dignity have meant that Nigerian women are held to higher moral codes than Nigerian men, and religion has cemented patriarchal norms to entrench these codes. Compared with the more educated, highly cosmopolitan south and east, the north of Nigeria was

1 World Health Organization 2017.
2 Busari and Idowu 2018, accessed February 24, 2022.
3 Sengupta 2017, accessed February 24, 2022.

Medinat Malefakis: NADEL, ETH Zurich, Clausiusstrasse 37. Building CLD, 8092 Zürich, Switzerland, e-mail: mmalefakis@ethz.ch

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not expected to be the stronghold of the #MeToo movement. This chapter explores the emergence of the movement in northern Nigeria through the underlying factors that simultaneously led to its evolution and attempts by societal gerontocracy (deference to elders), disguised under religion, to decimate the movement.

The chapter begins with the background of the #MeToo movement, detailing its evolution and impacts on varied interactions across the globe. Factors that make northern Nigeria an unlikely location for the movement are examined in the second section. These include a high rate of illiteracy, low levels of internet use, religious conservatism and societal beliefs. The blurred line between the social dimensions of religion and cultural/societal norms is evident in northern Nigeria and is one of the major preoccupations of this chapter. The blurring of these lines has led to the emergence of 'religiously-inspired', cultural norms which now appear to regulate societal interactions. Such norms are analyzed as consolidating the traditional and hegemonic culture of the north, especially with regards to dominant notions of gender and sexuality. Such blurred lines are, however, more prominent in rural areas of northern Nigeria, where formal education is not entrenched enough to provide an alternative understanding of societal values. They are also found in non-cosmopolitan parts of northern Nigeria, where Islamic culture and ways of life have not been challenged by urbanization, secularity or even another 'Islamic lifestyle' alien to such areas. Arguments about the political and patriarchal motives of blurring these lines will also be examined in this part of the chapter. Section three explores the place of social media in this discourse and the pivotal role played by 'hashtag activism' as an enabler of the #MeToo movement. More poignantly, this section answers the question: how did #MeToo become #ArewaMeToo? The fourth section of this chapter centres on reactions to #ArewaMeToo. It chronicles the processes by which victims and activists of the movement challenged gerontocratic, Islamic and patriarchal norms. The section further demonstrates the ways in which individual advocates for these norms fought back in a bid to stifle the movement. Their attempts at cloaking the loss of control experienced by men, elders and unyielding Islamic adherents with victim-shaming and discussions about 'public/private' discourse trespass is further explained. This chapter argues that attempts at stifling the #ArewaMeToo movement were a demonstration of deep-rooted fear in northern Nigeria: fear of the voice and enduring capabilities of women; fear of gerontocracy and religion losing their age-old control of societal fabric; and fear of unknown change in a society that basks in its conservatism.

Silenced No More: The Evolution of the #MeToo Movement

> I watched her walk away from me as she tried to recapture her secrets and tuck them back into their hiding place. I watched her put her mask back on and go back into the world like she was all alone, and I couldn't even bring myself to whisper (. . .) me too.[4]

Tarana Burke's use of the phrase "me too" was in relation to her regret for her inability to offer adequate help to a teenager who had just relayed to her the horrible account of her sexual abuse by her mother's boyfriend. Burke founded an organization in 2006 to help survivors of sexual violence, particularly black women and girls in the United States. The aim of the organization was also to find pathways to healing for these women by building a community of advocates driven by survivors.[5] However, the term 'me too' only became popular when it was adopted as a social media hashtag on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. American actress Alyssa Milano tweeted using the hashtag #MeToo when she tried to persuade victims of Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein to speak out about his sexual assaults. By October 16, 2017, 24 hours after Milano first tweeted, the hashtag had been used by more than 4.7 million people in 12 million posts on Facebook. By October 2018, it had been used 19 million times on Twitter, with tweets emanating from more than 85 countries.[6]

The #MeToo movement has been described as the "most high-profile movement against sexual assault and harassment in recent times".[7] Apart from bringing into the limelight discussions about sexual abuse, it has also highlighted the problems of shaming victims into silence by ensuring that high-profile perpetrators of sexual violence, who seemed hitherto 'untouchable', were brought to justice. Harvey Weinstein was forced to resign from his own company and stripped of honours from major film and television guilds when about 80 women in and outside of Hollywood accused him of sexual assaults.[8] He was sentenced to 23 years in prison after he was found guilty of some of the charges. Lawrence Nassar, the former American athletics team doctor has been sentenced to life in prison for sexually abusing athletes under the guise of medical treatment, by "penet-

4 Burke n.d., accessed February 24, 2022.
5 Ibid.
6 Britzky 2018, accessed February 24, 2022.
7 Igodo 2019, accessed February 24, 2022.
8 Harvey Weinstein was an American film producer.

rating his young patients vaginally or rectally with his fingers, without gloves, without consent, or, in many cases, with other parties present".[9] All in all, the *New York Times* reports that the #MeToo movement has 'brought down' about 201 powerful men including Roy Price (Head of Amazon Studios), Cliff Hite (former Ohio State Governor), Mark Halperin (political journalist) and Kevin Spacey (Hollywood actor).[10] At the end of 2017, TIME magazine named Burke, Milano, Juana Melara (housekeeper), Taylor Swift (American popstar), Megyn Kelly (news anchor), Terry Crews (actor), Adama Iwu (lobbyist), Selma Blair (actress), Wendy Walsh (psychologist), Ashley Judd (actress), Rose McGowan (actress) and other anonymous survivors who had shared their stories of sexual abuse as its 'Person of the Year'. The efforts of the 'Silence Breakers', as they were referred to, were lauded as informing changes in policies regarding gender diversity, employment and workplace relations across the world.

In other countries and sectors, varied hashtags sprung up in reference and reverence to #MeToo. Spain had #YoTambien; in France it was #BalanceTonPorc – roughly translatable as "snitch on your pig"; Italy had #QuellaVoltaChe, or "that time when".[11] #ChurchToo trended to draw attention to the sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests around the world while #HowIWillChange was used as a rallying point for men to modify their behaviour against women to prevent future sexual abuse. #MeTooStem was the defining hashtag for sexual assaults and workplace imbalances against women in the field of science and technology. When the movement spread to other countries, it took on geographically descriptive hashtags like #IndiaMeToo and #MeTooSA in South Africa. In the north of Nigeria, a similar geographical hashtag was coined.

Northern Nigeria

Home to 19 out of 36 states in the Nigerian Federation, northern Nigeria is the most homogenous part of the country. Geopolitically, the area is divided into four zones: Middle Belt (Benue, Nassarawa, Plateau and Taraba); North Central (Niger, Kaduna, Kogi, Kwara,); Northeast (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe and Yobe); and Northwest (Jigawa, Kano, Kastina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara). The core north accounted for 41 per cent (79m) of Nigeria's population (196.4m)

9 Meyers 2017, accessed February 24, 2022.
10 Carlsen, Salam, Cain Miller et al. 2018, accessed October 8, 2021.
11 Powell 2017.

in 2016.[12] The most widely spoken languages in the north are Hausa, Fulfude, Kanuri, Gbagyi, Idoma, Angas and Murmuye. The Hausa language is however the single, most spoken language in the whole of the north, spreading as far as the neighbouring countries of Niger, Cameroon and Chad.

Since the 11th century, Islam has inflected the history, culture, economy and political life in the north. Northern Nigeria's contact with traders from Agadez, Fezzan, Mali, Tripoli and the Tukolor of Senegal enabled the introduction of Islam to the Kanem Borno Empire. Islam would spread from Kanem to the rest of the Hausa states by the 15th century.[13] The spread and practice of Islam continues to influence the contemporary societal dynamics of northern Nigeria. Today, Islam dictates legal edicts in states like Kano and Zamfara, who have both adopted Sharia as an alternative basis of governance. Islam is used as a justification to develop mechanisms for policing society, as Kano state has with the 'Hisbah' security brigade.[14] The fear of 'contravening' Islamic ideals is used as justification for the rejection of 'civilizing agents' like the film village planned in Kano. The perceived preservation of Islam is at the basis of contemporary upheavals in the north, including the Maitastine revolts around Bauchi and Kano in the 1980s, the Miss World crisis in Kaduna in 2002, and the ongoing terrorist insurgence of Boko Haram in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. This need to keep away innovations from the practice of Islam affects only the outlook of adherents to novel, foreign influences, including attempts at re-establishing the traditional hegemonic and patriarchal order of society. Thus, when women began to publicly address issues relating to sexual violence, some reactions were premised on this preservation of Islam, accusing the women who spoke up of attempting to corrupt Islam with feminist ideas learned from the civilizing foreign powers of the West.

Northern Nigeria: Ready or Not

As the #MeToo movement transcended geographic borders and struck at the heart of societies with a rigid ethos on sex and sexuality, like Pakistan, the consequent adoption of the hashtag in Nigeria in February 2019, two years after Alyssa Milano used it, was an expected trajectory. However, the north was not the part of Nigeria expected take up the hashtag, because of certain factors. One of these reasons was the region's literacy level. Because Christian missionaries were the

12 Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics 2018, accessed February 24, 2022.
13 Aremu 2011, 3.
14 Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme 2016, accessed January 17, 2022.

simultaneous heralds of Western education in Nigeria, there was an opposition to Western education in the north based on fears that it would disrupt the Islamic way of life and the preference for the Hausa language. Southern Nigeria had the first and most extensive contact with Western education due to its coastal location and openness to Christianity. This early and intensive permeation of education meant that southern Nigeria from then, and to this day, has higher literacy levels than the north. According to the literacy data index published by Nigeria's Bureau of Statistics in 2017, the northern state of Yobe had a literacy rate of 7.23 per cent, Zamfara had 19.16 per cent, Katsina 10.36 per cent and Sokoto 15.01 per cent.[15] States in the south such as Imo had a literacy rate of 96.4 per cent, while Lagos had 96.3 per cent.[16] While there are no proven correlations between literacy levels and the social media revolution, the use of mobile technology (and inadvertently social media) is linked with a basic level of literate capacity.

More so, Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) in Nigeria, specifically Airtel and MTN, record higher revenues in sales of internet data (required for social media use) from states with higher literacy rates in the south and east.[17] This, amongst others, was the reason why Nigeria's social media scene from its inception was dominated by educated, young personalities of Yoruba and Igbo origins (major languages from the south, west and east) and the north had to play catch-up. Literacy here, however, is related to formal education in the English language. Arabic literacy, including literacy in the Hausa Ajami script for which the north is known, is not considered. Consequently, as the #MeToo movement was a social media campaign that started online, Nigeria's more educated south, west and east with its highly engaged Twitter, Instagram and Facebook communities was the sphere expected to have caught up with the buzz of the campaign.

The female-centricity of the #MeToo movement was another reason why it was not expected to take roots in northern Nigeria. The role played by the Islamic religion as a societal paradigm reflected more poignantly on the women in the area. From the introduction of Islam into Nigeria's north, many Muslims are believed to have adopted the ethic that views "women as the source of human tragedy because of her (Eve) alleged role as the temptress who seduced Adam into disobeying God".[18] By tempting her husband to eat the forbidden fruit, she is presumed to not only have "defied Allah, but caused humankind's expulsion

15 Amzat 2017, accessed February 24, 2022.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibrahim Muhammad Bashir, personal Interview, Abuja, Nigeria, June 22, 2019.
18 al-Qaradawi n.d., accessed February 24, 2022.

from paradise, thus instigating all temporal human suffering".[19] In light of this, certain controversial yet generally accepted Islamic doctrines often view and present "the woman as the hunter, the anti-divine force of nature and disciple of the devil, while the man is the passive victim of her ardor; female sexuality is thought of as being a powerful and dangerous force, a predatory threat to male spirituality and family honor that constitutes a real danger to society; a perilous element that demands stringent (male) supervision".[20] It is supposed that these are the reasons why child marriages and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) are adherently practiced in societies like northern Nigeria. Many parents marry off their children at tender ages because they believe that this is better than having the child become older and susceptible to fornication. FGM is practiced because some parents assume that cutting off the female genitalia (in parts or whole) decreases the female appetite for sexual enjoyment, and thus makes her less promiscuous. Child marriage and FGM are consequently attempts at reining in female sexual pleasures to regulate the whims of what is assumed to be the female's 'predatory and perilous' sexuality, all in a bid to use female chastity to safeguard the honour of family and society. Not all women perceive themselves as sexual predators, but many lack the will and outspokenness to dispel such notions. Some others believe their sexuality is a tool to '*malaki*' or exert eternal control over their husbands, hence the popularity of aphrodisiacs to boost such sexualities.

The translation and interpretation of the Quran and Islamic laws (Shari'ah), mostly by men, have helped to further views like the above. The acceptance of jurisprudential translations of the Quran and some Islamic tenets is explained by Kamari Clarke:

> In most Islamic interpretations, like many religious traditions, religious texts are living documents through which people have the power to apply core principles to changing social contexts. In addition to Qur'an and Sunna, Islam recognizes two other authoritative sources when answers are not explicitly given in holy texts: consensus (ijma`) and analogical reasoning (qiyas). Qur'anic commentaries constitute traditions of reading, reasoning, justification, and negotiation, thereby rendering religious readers active agents in the production of interpretative meaning.[21]

19 al-Qaradawi n.d., accessed February 24, 2022.
20 Barkindo, Gudaku and Wesley 2013, 17.
21 Clarke 2006, 7.

Most members of Ijma's who give consensus rulings are male sheikhs and ulamas, and while it may be difficult to gauge how much gender beliefs colour Ijmas, it is impossible to deny that they do.

In the north of Nigeria for example, certain Quranic injunctions have been jurisprudentially translated to regulate not just female sexuality but overall societal existence. The '*awrah*' (which linguistically means hidden or secret place) for instance proscribes the parts of the male and female body that must be covered. The Quran addresses women on their *awrah*:

> And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; and that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what must ordinarily appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty save to their mahram (husbands, or their fathers and their husbands' father, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons), or their women, or their slaves whom their right hand possess, or male servants free of physical desire, or small children who have no sense of sex; and that they should not stamp their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. Surah An-Nur Quran 24:31

Dressing while covering the '*awrah*' is interpreted as the wearing of the *hijab*, a loose, non-transparent, robe-like, head-to-bosom cover. Most women stepping out of their homes on the streets of Kano, Kastina, Sokoto and other northern cities do not go anywhere without a *hijab*. The act of covering is so entrenched that even non-Muslim women living in these areas have grown accustomed to wearing a head cover and a veil drawn around their bosoms. In Kano, the *hisbah* taskforce was commissioned by the state government to enforce, amongst other things, dress codes for women. A lady 'scantily' dressed and without a covering could be subject to jeers, catcalls, lewd remarks and in extreme cases, stoning, by both the *hisbah* (made up of mostly men), and members of the public who have abrogated to themselves the role of 'enforcers' of such Islamic injunctions: acting as judge, jury and executor.[22]

The female voice is also partly considered part of her *awrah*. The Quran admonishes that:

> O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any other women. If you keep your duty (to Allah), then be not soft in speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease (of hypocrisy, or evil desire for adultery) should be moved with desire but speak in an honorable manner. Surah Al-Ahzab Quran 33:32

22 Pittin 2002, 102.

The translated verse enjoins Muslim women to be weary of speaking flirtatiously to avoid commanding the attention of men who may have ill or sexual thoughts towards them because of their voices and speech. This verse has, however, been adopted culturally in the north as the impermissibility of women raising their voices in the presence of non-*mahram* men. Certain parts of the north have translated this as meaning that women are not allowed to broadcast the news on radio and on television as the viewers or listeners consist of non-*mahram* men. The regulations on the *awrah* of the voice have also been extended to criticism of actresses in northern Nigeria's Kannywood film industry. Islamic clerics have admonished the actions of female actresses, claiming that, in not guarding their *awrah*, they were 'spreading immorality' in northern homes.[23] The female act of communication has in this way become "a source of temptation and allurement to the male even though the only prohibition in the Quran is the female talking softly and flirting in a manner meant to excite and tempt".[24]

Above and beyond these interpretations, it appears that the fears and insecurities of men at the possibility of being tempted by women exposing their *awrah* have been aggregated in order to condition the ways in which a woman is expected to behave privately and publicly, resulting in the fortification of patriarchal societal norms under the guise of religious injunctions. Discussions of sex and sexuality have dominantly revolved around men, so much that when women attempt to insert themselves into the discussion in any form, they are chastised as immoral. Describing the sex lives of northern Nigerians for instance, Sada Malumfashi writes:

> The effects of sex and pleasure revolve around pleasing the man at all costs, but ironically, the sexual escapades of the man do not concern the society. Rather, the eyes of the community are focused on the pleasures and sexual life of a woman. The female virginity, sexual drive, birth rate, and marriage are all of concern and most of the time drive the discussion around pleasure and sexuality in Northern Nigeria.[25]

Apart from this, discussions of sexual activities are never pursued in a straightforward manner but under the cloud of idiomatic expressions such as if a man 'touches' you as a lady, you can get pregnant.[26] Giving sex education to children is equated to teaching children 'how to have sex'; contraceptives (especially for

23 Sanusi 2019, accessed February 24, 2022.
24 Ibid.
25 Malumfashi 2018, accessed February 24, 2022.
26 Onohwosa and Agbo 2018, accessed February 24, 2022.

women) are looked down on as the 'propagators of sexual recklessness'.[27] A new bride is expected to come to her marriage with no prior knowledge of sexual relations, and as a virgin. Sex is to be done in the dark, with the woman shy and pliant as responsive participation in the act could be interpreted as prior knowledge, which could mean she had been engaging in sexual acts before marriage. This could brand her a *karuwa* (prostitute) or *yar iska* (philanderer), and she could become divorced (*bazawara*) with all the attendant stigma of failing to keep a marriage. The male is consequently expected to drive sexual action, as it concerns the sexuality of both genders, consolidating popular patriarchal stereotypes not just in northern Nigeria, but in other parts of the country.

Religious and Societal Misrepresentations of Femininity and Gender-Based Violence

If the 'legal' act of lovemaking is so sacredly guarded, secretive and gender-based, illegal sex such as rape is even more privatized. When a woman is raped for instance, a pervading 'blame the victim' culture assumes that she may have done something to provoke the sexual assault: for example, by exposing her *awrah* and so dressing indecently or behaving provocatively by being flirtatious. Marital rape is 'unheard' of as a husband is viewed as 'entitled' to sexual pleasure from his wife. Consequently, there are no criminal or legal regulations concerning marital rape in Nigeria, and by extension the north. When an unmarried woman is raped with the aforementioned circumstances surrounding her assault, she is labelled 'used'. Societal presuppositions of her having overtly or covertly 'invited and contributed to' the rape tarnishes whatever sympathies she would ordinarily receive. The facelessness of her rapist is also seen as a negative force because no 'good man' is supposed to rape so he may have been a thief, a drunk or a delinquent.

All of these reflect negatively on the rape victim, who is seen by society as 'stained' with all the negative vices surrounding the occurrence. Men avoid her, and she eventually becomes 'un-marriageable'. Her parents become 'ashamed' of her because she has proved them unworthy in child-raising and parenthood in the eyes of the 'morality police' that is the society. Most rape victims are sent away from the location where the assault occurs to live in far-away villages, out of sight from family and friends, and from immediate society. Victims are sometimes also

27 Onohwosa and Agbo 2018, accessed February 24, 2022.

advised or forced to marry their assailants.[28] Fears of these kinds of stigmatization are often cited as reasons why many survivors do not report sexual attacks. On these grounds, sexual abuse is surrounded by a culture of shame, secrecy and silence especially when the perpetrator is family, kin or a prominent member of the community.[29] Given these facts, the prominence which the #MeToo movement gained was unanticipated.

In addition, northern Nigeria is one of the few parts of the country where gender inequality is acknowledged by religious injunctions and appropriated by cultural practice as a societal norm. The Qur'an and Shari'ah (Islamic body of laws) define terms of difference between the behaviours and expectations of men and women and are "interpreted to give men power over and above women".[30] The Qur'an, for instance, states that:

> Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. Surah An-Nisa Quran 4:34

Positioned as the enforcer of Islamic injunctions, the man (husband or father), as a protector and provider of the woman is jurisprudentially interpreted as reserving the right under Islamic law to restrict the freedom of movement of his wife in determining what is necessary for her safety, security and protection. He can prevent her from leaving their home without his permission unless there is a necessary or legitimate reason for her to do so.[31]

This role of protector has been appropriated culturally into the practice of '*kulle*' (seclusion). Many urban and rural compounds have their entrances explicitly marked with *ba shiga* (no entry) or implicitly with curtains, walls and gates.[32] This posits that only the *mahram* of the women can enter unrestricted into these buildings and any other men have to announce their entrance and gain permission to enter, or be met outside, with any meeting under the gaze of the public or passers-by to discourage immoral behaviour or conversation. Under this 'act' of protection, the practice of *kulle* also stipulates that women cannot step out of their homes without the express permission of their fathers, husbands or guardians. *Kulle* has been expanded to limit inter-gender interactions, where,

28 Olukemi and Folakemi 2015, 34.
29 AFRUCA 2015, accessed February 24, 2022.
30 Barkindo, Gudaku and Wesley 2013, 10.
31 Ibid.
32 Kozieł 2014, 222.

for example, wedding ceremonies have female-only events such as *kamu* (catching the bride) and *yinin biki* (wedding sitting). *Kulle* guarantees a unique space where northern women have power over their bodies and do not have to wear the *hijab*.[33] They can use this unique space to organize meetings, social gatherings and engage in activities that non-*mahram* men are not expected to view, such as singing and dancing.[34]

However, *kulle* remains a restriction on women's mobility, preventing them from social and economic activities, and, in some cases, access to basic health care, as when women have to delay seeking hospital care because they had not sought the permission of their husbands.[35] High maternal mortality rates in northern Nigeria, for example, are seen as a consequence of *kulle* because many women in rural areas "would delay or not attend ante-natal clinic" without the permission of their husbands, preferring risky, unhygienic home births.[36] Renee Pittin explains that woman's lives as citizens have been profoundly influenced by the practice of *kulle*, as it ensures that women are not seen (and heard) in public.[37] Their public invisibility and the spatial control exerted upon them have placed them physically, socially, and politically in an object, rather than a subject position.[38] This is also the reason why rich and educated northern elites do not practice *kulle* anymore. Their actions have restricted the practice to the less educated in rural, non-urban parts of northern Nigeria. In a society with pervasive restrictions on visibility for a specific gender, it should be near impossible for the same category of people to lead a movement about issues that the society categorizes as 'out of public reach'. But this may also speak to the fact that the act of finally speaking out – of opening of a new channel of communication not under the control of men and otherwise dominant parts of society – was even more needed. This was what the #MeToo movement represented in northern Nigeria.

33 Kozieł 2014, 222.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., 221.
36 Ibid.
37 Pittin 2002, 102.
38 Ibid.

From #MeToo to #ArewaMeToo: Liberation through Hashtag Activism

In February 2019, 24-year-old Khadija Adamu from Kano tweeted that she had suffered domestic abuse from her now ex-boyfriend. Amongst the sea of commenters on her post was Fakhriyya Hashim who then, like Alyssa Milano, encouraged others to share their stories using the hashtag #ArewaMeToo. Arewa literally translates to the 'north' in Hausa language and is the generic name used to refer to northern Nigeria. Victims, survivors, and sympathizers alike from February 12, 2019, adopted the #ArewaMeToo hashtag to share their stories, starting on Twitter before spreading to Instagram and Facebook. Microblogging platforms also caught the buzz and shared, mostly, stories from Twitter also using the hashtag.

The context, setting and personalities accused by victims were varied. @_Goldblodded_ shared that her uncle abused her from the ages of five to 15. She wrote that he would ask her to "watch porn with him because it was what normal people did, give him a hand and a blowjob, and touch her everywhere, cloths on and off. I have spent 10 years of my life in pain, depression and disgust, and sadly in silence".[39] @_Goldblodded_ noted that she was not given any prior sex education by her parents and was manipulated into silence because her uncle was loved by everyone, and no one would have believed her.[40] @Za_Tenni recounted how her late husband and his friends had raped her and physically abused her. Hashim posted an account of a lady who wrote that her Arabic tutor (mallam) had abused her from the age of nine in her home when he came to tutor her and her brother. "Underneath the table every day, he would put his hand inside my hijab touching my bare chest, because I was just 9, I had no boobs. He would usually put his hands inside my womanhood and finger me. I told him to stop but he would not. When I was 10, I wanted to commit suicide. My own father never listened to my side of the story. He trusted a stranger over me because of this thought that African parents have, that elders are always right, and children are always wrong." Another anonymous post read: "I was 6 and my brother was 8 and we had this help (maid) who was 16/17. We shared the same room with her and every night after she takes her bath, she would wake us up and start asking us to touch her in places (including her asshole). At that time, we did not know if we were enjoying it or having a horrible time. We never had the courage to tell anyone."

39 Twitter. Twitter Handle: @_Goldblodded_, February 17, 2019.
40 Ibid.

Analysis from 1,218 posts on the Twitter feed of #ArewaMeToo showed that, of the accounts rendered under the hashtag and anonymous postings, 82 per cent of the victims were below 15 when they were abused, with ages from as young as three years old. 68 per cent of the assaults recounted were either committed by family members or in safe spaces such as private homes, and secular or religious institutions. This analysis substantiates Hardy's 2014 study that in many cases of sexual violence, the abusers are known to the people and are usually people in positions of trust.[41] Akinlusi reported that in 54.6 per cent of cases of rape examined in Nigeria, the assailants were neighbours with the act occurring in the neighbour's homes, while perpetrators of sexual violence in schools are teachers, peers and students in higher grades.[42]

The first few days saw over 100 survivors reaching out to either share their stories on their own social media platforms or sending them anonymously to Hashim and other social media users who had led the discourse on Twitter, such as women rights activist Maryam Awaisu. Relying on the premise that 'nothing unsettles a sex predator like an outspoken victim', Hashim, Awaisu and other leaders of #ArewaMeToo fuelled the discussion from Twitter to Facebook and Instagram, and all three social media platforms helped to keep the discussion alive and 'trending'. Certain survivors tagged the social media handles of the men who had abused them, showing a courage and fearlessness hitherto unimagined. One of such was the case of Abubakar Siddique Aruwa who was then the Special Adviser to the Nigerian Minister of Finance, Mrs Zainab Shamsuna Ahmed. Aruwa was called out on twitter by numerous women who described him as "a serial rapist and sexual predator who specializes in using veiled threats to keep his victims mum".[43] One of his accusers, Maryam Awaisu was arrested after Aruwa lodged a Cyber Bullying, Criminal Defamation of Character and Libel complaint to the police. She was later released. He reacted further by suing #ArewaMeToo activists for what he termed 'defamation of character' but they counter-sued with evidence of his abuse from victims. While this case remains in court, Khadija's abuser, Lawal Abubakar has publicly apologized to her, taking full responsibility for his actions and admitting his wrongdoings.

The democratizing potential and accessibility of social media, the distance it guarantees as a tool requiring only a mobile phone and a Twitter, Facebook or Instagram account all served to promote #ArewaMeToo. It guaranteed a physical anonymity to the victims sharing their story and an unreachability that instilled

41 Olukemi and Folakemi 2015, 33.
42 Ibid.
43 Twitter, Twitter Handle @RayNkah, June 7, 2019.

confidence in sharing details of assaults. As more accounts were shared, the power of numbers engineered a togetherness which most victims did not expect, forging what Lauren Berlent termed "a collective digital space" where a kind of kinship in shared experiences, meanings or beliefs was found.[44] This gave an impetus to naming abusers and assault perpetrators. By doing this, #ArewaMeToo victims spurned the victim-shaming they had endured during their abuse, confronting the culture of silence and giving voice to years of bottled-up emotions. With social media, #ArewaMeToo therefore joined the ranks of other movements around the world that had generated ground-breaking conversations about women, sex and gender including #YouOkSis, #RapeCultureIsWhen, #IStandWith, #SayHerName and many others. As the hashtag continued to trend on social media, court cases where activists helped victims confront their abusers were simultaneously being launched. In northern states such as Borno and Niger, volunteers went to secondary schools and set up workshops to educate young people about the means of reporting any form of abuse they may encounter. #ArewaMeToo ultimately joined the ranks of activism that began on social media but spread outside of it.

Fighting Back: Reactions to the #ArewaMeToo Movement

#ArewaMeToo's challenge to gerontocracy was the first visible impact of the movement, and this also influenced the reactions the movement garnered. According to George Sefa Dei, gerontocracy is the belief that old age comes with wisdom and an understanding of the world.[45] It is "the traditional African respect for the authority of elderly persons for their wisdom, knowledge of community affairs, and 'closeness' to the ancestors".[46] Amadi Ahimadu specifies that in many African traditions, gerontocracy is synonymous with patriarchy, and a gerontocratic culture is patriarchal in matters of government and lawmaking, as well as patrilocal in matters of marriage and domiciliation.[47] Abayam Noah explains that, specifically in Nigeria, elders usually had the final say over matters of importance to the family and community.[48] When survivors shared their story on

44 Igodo 2019, accessed February 24, 2022.
45 Adegindin 2011, 455.
46 Ibid.
47 Ahiamadu 2015, 363.
48 Noah 2013.

#ArewaMeToo, a resounding narrative was the inability to speak out because the perpetrators were 'elders' and older than the victims. Many victims also asserted that in instances when they disclosed their abuses, their parents, for fear of 'negative attention' and shame advised them to not disclose such matters to the public. Using social media through #ArewaMeToo, where one tweet went to as many people as possible, was thus a way of by-passing the gerontocratic filtering of Nigeria's culture. It took away the authority that elders had enjoyed for so long as 'information gatekeepers' and determinants of what becomes (or does not become) public discourse.

By using social media and bypassing information gatekeepers, the women driving the #ArewaMeToo conversation were able to name and shame perpetrators, viewing this as an alternative means of justice and relief, and a warning to abusers that covering up abuse would no longer be tolerated.[49] This move was however tantamount to revealing matters considered 'private'. Exposing occurrences deemed to have happened in 'private' was both *haram* (Islamically forbidden) and anti-social in northern Nigeria. The 'public/private' sidestep also influenced the reactions the movement received. It is found in Islamic rulings based on the existence of this prophetic hadith:

> It was narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Whoever removes a worldly hardship from a believer, Allah will remove one of the hardships of the Day of Resurrection from him. Whoever grants respite to (a debtor) who is in difficulty, Allah will grant him relief in this world and in the Hereafter. Whoever conceals (the fault of) a Muslim in this world, Allah will conceal him (his faults) in this world and in the Hereafter. Allah will help a person so long as he is helping his brother. Narrated by Muslim (2699).

Commenters who denounced the movement based on this hadith stated varied ways in which neglecting the teachings of this hadith negated the premises of #ArewaMeToo. Some of their comments are highlighted below:

> @Ishaqibraz1: the so called #ArewaMeToo is against our religion and culture. Something bad happened to you and you happen to be an innocent victim to it, and no one knows about it, it is between you and your creator. Instead of you to keep silent but you'll come on this platform and be exposing yourself.

> @alhussainalfa: The right place to seek justice is not with the mob. You take your case to a court of competent jurisdiction or leave it to the court of Allah. If a woman reveals that she has been raped, she leaves room for much to be imagined. It desecrated her honor.

49 Malumfashi 2018, accessed February 24, 2022.

> @mukhtar35610704: I am calling reasonable and responsible Arewa girls, ladies and women. Do not expose something which Allah SWT has concealed from your evils committed by your intentions or against your consent. #ArewaMeToo is simply a hidden agenda against your religion.

These three tweets do not deny that the sexual abuse that the victims reported had occurred. However, on the premise that they were exposing a 'private affair', the act of sexual violence is disregarded to uphold a seemingly more important religious injunction. All three examples also describe the negative impact of exposing this 'private affair' to the victim, using such nuanced ideas as 'exposing yourself', 'desecrates your honor' and 'what Allah has concealed of your evils'. The concept of the public/private sidestep is an attempt at victim shaming, especially when considered with other Islamic schools of thought which stipulate that any act of wrongdoing that violates the rights of a person can be made public by the one who has suffered wrongdoing.[50]

Besides voicing their abuse on social media, revealing the *awrah* was another form of 'public/private' sidestep that influenced reactions to #ArewaMeToo. Some victims were accused of encouraging their sexual assaults because they disobeyed Islamic injunctions by revealing their *awrah* to members of the opposite sex. Some of the accusations include:

> @_saz_k: When we say cover your body, cover your hair, stop posting bad pics, be reserved on social media platforms and real life, no, you won't hear. You are exposed, you want feminism. You disobey Allah, yet you are screaming for help? Obey the laws of Allah and Allah will protect you. You can't pay a deaf hear to the commandment of Allah and remain peaceful #ArewaMeToo

> @Ajamfalan: You can't wear transparent cloths, exposing your body, change how you walk (catwalk) to attract men's attention in an unsecured environment and then complain of being raped. Islam teaches us how to maintain our dignity. #ArewaMeToo

> @N_Oldskool: Going to your boyfriend's Apartment is Haram. Going to your boyfriend's Apartment is Haram. Going to your boyfriend's Apartment is Haram. Going to your boyfriend's Apartment is Haram.

> @Ms_Kurawa: Cover your bodies and dress with decency and modesty, nobody will harass you. The Quran teaches everything. #ArewaMeToo

50 Mohammed Mallam Musa, personal Interview, Kaduna, Nigeria, June 27, 2019.

The Complicity of Northern Nigeria's Patriarchal Spaces

#ArewaMeToo and the prominence it generated through hashtag activism further uncovered northern Nigeria's conservative cultural and patriarchal spaces as being complicit in the abuse of women in the region.[51] As Awosusi and Ogundana's study shows, intimate partner violence and the abuse of women in Northern Nigeria have long been under the radar, with men bragging about them and admitting to using them as a form of patriarchal domination.[52] Such domination is reinforced when victims of sexual violence are shamed for their assaults and perpetrators are excused or exonerated from wrongdoing, acts that are likely to increase sexual assaults and prevent victims from seeking help.[53] The fact that the majority of denouncing reactions to the movement on social media were championed by men further upholds this complicity. The reactions are another way in which attempts by women in northern Nigeria to actualize changes to traditional gender roles are directly and indirectly suppressed. Such complicity has been noticed in other spheres, as northern women seek better access to education, public and private employment, and political offices. It appears that northern women's pursuit of a voice and a seat at various decision-making tables is making it difficult for patriarchal norms to continue to hold sway. Positing that northern women's emancipation endeavours were antithetical to Islam and northern culture were attempts at holding on to these patriarchal sways.

Where Does #MeToo Go from Here?

If #MeToo was the most high-profile movement against sexual violence worldwide, #ArewaMeToo was that defining period for young women in northern Nigeria. It exposed how decades-long values around chastity, virtuousness and dignity have held northern women to different moral codes than men. It displayed the various ways in which religion is employed (overtly and covertly) in cementing patriarchal norms and safeguarding the place of men in northern society. The movement also affirmed the role of social media in providing a sanctuary where traditional information gatekeepers could be bypassed and dispensed with. Social media's crucial role in the realization of the movement has been described as indispen-

51 Salaudeen 2019, accessed February 24, 2022.
52 Olukemi and Folakemi 2015, 33.
53 Ibid.

sable. However, its restriction to social media also meant that only a certain category of affected people could participate. Social media reduced the percentage of women that the movement could have represented, and implicitly meant that a category of women who were not 'literate' and had no access to social media were left out. It remains to be seen how much of #ArewaMeToo's ideals will be sustained offline and how the movement will inspire changes to gender dynamics in other aspects of northern Nigeria's societal landscape.

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Francis Arsène Fogué Kuaté

Trajectoires radiophoniques de la modernité islamique au Nord-Cameroun (1958–2010)

En tant que média de l'oralité, la radio a été au cœur de l'évolution des sociétés africaines compte tenu de son rôle en matière d'information, d'éducation et de loisir dans des contextes où l'écriture n'était pas assez répandue.[1] Bénéficiant de la fonction communicative qui caractérise les médias, elle a été capable de créer du sens et de produire du savoir et des pratiques. Mettre cet outil en relation avec l'évolution de l'islam revient donc à s'intéresser à ce que David Douyère et Frédéric Antoine appellent « l'entrelacs des religions et des médias » et qui traduit un chiasme des deux qui évoluent de façon fusionnelle ; « chacun pouvant se passer de l'autre, mais ne le faisant pas ».[2] À travers cet entrelacs qui est intervenu en Afrique pendant la colonisation,[3] les médias sont devenus des acteurs essentiels du religieux dont ils intègrent le dispositif de production des pratiques.[4] Ce faisant, ils ont donné lieu à l'intervention accrue du religieux dans la sphère publique.[5] Pour ce qui est précisément de l'islam, ils ont contribué à la production de nouvelles religiosités, l'émergence de communautés religieuses ayant un fort ancrage dans la sphère publique, la radicalisation de certains musulmans et la dynamique des rapports entre les musulmans et d'autres composantes religieuses.[6] Dans ce contexte, il devient pertinent d'explorer la dynamique de l'islam sous le prisme de la radio, surtout que la littérature y afférente au Cameroun a jusqu'ici accordé une place congrue aux médias.

Ainsi, ce chapitre s'intéresse aux trajectoires radiophoniques de l'islam au Nord-Cameroun. Par trajectoires radiophoniques, il faut entendre les différents itinéraires de la représentation de l'islam à travers la radio. Ce concept fait référence aux temporalités spécifiques à travers lesquelles se sont opérés les réajustements induits par la radio dans le processus de réinvention de soi de la communauté

1 Tudesq 2002.

2 Douyère et Antoine 2018.

3 Lire Rambaud, Tudesq et Lenoble-Barth 2007.

4 Voir notamment Larkin 2009; Grätz 2014; Adama 2015; Faimau et Lesitaokana 2018.

5 Meyer et Moors 2006.

6 Pour chacun de ces aspects, voir Sounaye 2014; Schulz 1999; Madore 2016; Fogué Kuaté 2017; Taguem et Fogué Kuaté 2017.

Francis Arsène Fogué Kuaté: Department of History and African Civilizations, University of Buea, Bp. 63 Buéa-Cameroon, e-mail: fogue.kuate@ubuea.cm

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musulmane. Ces temporalités sont des marqueurs de la modernité islamique qui renvoie aux processus d'actualisation et de représentation qui ont façonné la dynamique interne de la communauté musulmane pendant des périodes précises.[7] Il est donc question d'analyser le rôle de la radio dans la réinvention continue de l'islam au Nord-Cameroun entre 1958 et 2010. La première trajectoire correspond à la création de Radio-Garoua, la toute première radio de la région. La seconde, quant à elle, a vu l'inauguration de la radiodiffusion islamique avec notamment l'ouverture de Radio Annour. Partant du principe que l'islam est un « référent collectif qui définit les rapports sociaux mais aussi l'identité nationale et politique »[8] l'étude dépasse le cadre normatif de la religiosité (rituels, actes de piété) et intègre des paramètres relatifs au politique et à la coexistence religieuse. Cela revient donc à analyser le diptyque radio et islam afin d'en dévoiler les trajectoires historiques et déceler les changements qui en ont résulté, non pas seulement du point de vue des pratiques religieuses, mais également de l'agencement des rapports de force entre l'islam, L'État et les autres religions.

En plus d'aller au-delà des considérations religieuses, l'analyse dépasse aussi le cadre géographique principiel de l'Afrique de l'Ouest en portant sur le Nord-Cameroun. L'incorporation du Cameroun, conventionnellement positionné en Afrique centrale, dans un dossier portant sur l'Afrique de l'Ouest traduit, d'une part, une distanciation épistémologique par rapport à un ordonnancement géographique d'origine coloniale et dont les fondements sont contestables au regard du « caractère artificiel et arbitraire »[9] des frontières héritées de la colonisation. D'autre part, elle s'inscrit dans la perspective d'une reconstitution opérationnelle de la territorialité historique qui fait du Cameroun septentrional le prolongement naturel de la terre de l'islam ouest africain. En fait, plus connu sous l'appellation « Adamaoua historique » en référence au Fombina, qui était l'extrémité sud-est de l'empire de Sokoto, l'émirat de l'Adamawa – du nom de son fondateur Modibo Adama, et qui avait pour capitale Yola – couvrait le Nord-Nigéria et le Nord-Cameroun. C'est dire, d'un point de vue historique, qu'il ne s'agissait que d'une seule et même entité géoculturelle. Du fait de la colonisation britannique et allemande, Nigéria et Nord-Cameroun se sont distingués. Cette séparation est restée théorique car les musulmans des deux entités ont maintenu des liens par une « remise en cause symbolique des frontières héritées de la colonisation ».[10] Aussi, Jean-

7 Ces réformes ont tantôt porté le label de « réislamisation » (Roy 1992), « réveil identitaire » (Triaud 2013) et de « renouveau islamique » (Taguem 2003; Larkin 2009).

8 Cesari 2001, 140.

9 Ahmad 2013, 15.

10 Taguem 2005, 567.

Paul Charnay intègre-t-il le nord du Cameroun dans l'analyse qu'il fait de l'expansion de l'islam en Afrique de l'Ouest.[11]

D'un point de vue méthodologique, l'analyse s'appuie à la fois sur l'exploitation de sources de seconde main et sur les résultats d'une enquête de terrain effectuée entre 2008 et 2011 dans les radios étatiques (Radio-Garoua, Radio-Maroua et Radio-Ngaoundéré) du Nord-Cameroun.[12] Ladite enquête, qui s'inscrivait dans le cadre d'une série de missions de recherche organisées par le Coredec,[13] a permis de collecter des données qualitatives, notamment des grilles de programmes de ces radios et des entretiens avec des animateurs de programmes religieux parmi lesquels certains leaders religieux. Sur la base des données obtenues, il est possible d'appréhender la modernité islamique par la radio à travers trois trajectoires: (1) le rôle pionnier de Radio-Garoua dans la médiatisation des éléments culturels islamiques en vue de l'implémentation de la politique musulmane de la France (1958–1964) ; (2) la modernisation de l'élite religieuse traditionnelle à travers la diffusion des programmes radiophoniques islamiques à des fins hégémoniques (1960–1984) ; et (3) l'instauration de la *da'awa* radiophonique dans un contexte de diversification du paysage médiatico-religieux (1984–2010). La présentation de ces trajectoires est suivie d'une analyse croisée qui démontre qu'elles ont en commun la réinvention de l'islam et la construction d'un imaginaire politico-culturel musulman.

11 Charnay 1974.

12 La priorité accordée aux radios étatiques se justifie par l'inexistence de médias audiovisuels de confession musulmane au Nord-Cameroun, et même au Cameroun en général, pendant la période étudiée (1958–2010). Les radios étatiques étaient donc les seuls médias qui offraient une tribune d'expression à l'islam.

13 Community Research and Development Center. Il s'agit d'un centre de recherche en sciences sociales qui entend lier recherche fondamentale et développement communautaire. Le centre organise régulièrement des missions de recherche en vue de collecter des données sur le Nord-Cameroun.

Première trajectoire : Radio-Garoua et la médiatisation d'éléments culturels islamiques à travers la politique musulmane de la France (1958–1964)

L'introduction de l'islam, au Nord-Cameroun, se situe entre les XVII[ème] et XVIII[ème] siècles, notamment à travers la présence de guerriers-commerçants bornouans dont l'activité, le long des pistes caravanières, les conduisit dans le royaume du Wandala ou Mandara.[14] Cette présence encouragea la dynastie régnante du Mandara à s'islamiser sous le règne du roi Bukar Aji.[15] Toutefois, c'est le Jihad du XIX[ème] siècle qui donna lieu à la véritable expansion de l'islam dans la région. Cette expansion fut réalisée par les Peul sous la conduite de Modibbo Adama.[16] En dépit de la résistance des groupes ethniques rencontrés sur place et plus tard regroupés sous l'appellation de Kirdi (terme utilisé pour désigner les populations non-musulmanes), ce Jihad a permis à l'islam d'asseoir sa domination. Cependant, cette domination ne s'est pas réellement exprimée sous l'angle religieux (nombre de croyants). Son impact fut plus culturel et politique. D'un point de vue culturel, le code vestimentaire peul et la langue fulfuldé ont été vulgarisés au sein des autres communautés. Cette vulgarisation a bénéficié de l'hégémonie politique des Peul sous-tendue par la création d'une trentaine d'entités politiques dénommées lamidats et dirigées chacune par un *lamido*, qui est un chef à la fois politique et religieux.[17] Cette influence politique acquise par les musulmans a amené l'administration coloniale française à se conjuguer avec l'islam en développant un mode d'administration spécifique lui permettant d'associer la communauté musulmane aux tâches administratives afin de mieux contrôler l'islam au Nord-Cameroun. Compte tenu de son hostilité envers tout processus visant à promouvoir la culture arabe au Nord-Cameroun, l'administration colo-

14 Le Royaume du Wandala ou Mandara était un territoire vassal du Bornou. Avant la conquête peule, il constituait l'entité politique la plus en vue dans l'espace géographique qui allait plus tard devenir le Nord-Cameroun à partir du protectorat allemand (1884–1916).

15 Lire Mohammadou 1975 ; Boutrais 1984, 236.

16 Njeuma 2012.

17 Il convient d'indiquer que, démographiquement, l'islam est minoritaire au Nord-Cameroun. Bien qu'il soit difficile de donner des chiffres exacts compte tenu de l'absence de statistiques officielles sur la question, l'essentiel des travaux portant sur cette région s'accordent sur l'effectif réduit de la population musulmane. Celle-ci est principalement constituée des Peul ou Foulbé dont l'arrivée dans la région, au XIX[ème] siècle, a été précédée plusieurs siècles auparavant par l'installation d'une multitude de groupes non-musulmans.

niale française adopta une politique d'administration particulière labellisée sous le nom de « politique musulmane ». Cette politique découlait de la perception que les Français avaient de l'islam qu'ils considéraient comme un facteur de résistance et une force d'opposition à l'entreprise coloniale.[18] Pour être plus précis, ils estimaient que la culture arabe en général, et l'enseignement coranique en particulier, étaient responsables de « l'imperméabilité musulmane à l'influence occidentale ».[19] Pour cela l'administration coloniale avait choisi d'encourager le développement de sectes locales à l'instar de la *tijaaniiya* dont elle contrôlait les sources et les leaders.[20] La politique musulmane de la France désigne donc la forme particulière d'administration appliquée par les colons Français en contexte musulman au Cameroun. Elle a connu une évolution en trois étapes: l'étape du tâtonnement et de la méfiance ; l'étape de l'offensive politique ou de répression et l'étape de la collaboration et de l'instrumentalisation.[21] Cette dernière étape a consisté à utiliser l'islam – à travers ses leaders et ses éléments culturels – pour mieux le contrôler et éviter l'influence arabe. C'est ainsi que, sur le plan politique, les *lamibé* (pluriel de *lamido*) ont été intégrés dans l'appareil administratif en devenant les intermédiaires entre l'administration coloniale et les populations. Ceci contribua à renforcer l'hégémonie musulmane sur les Kirdi (non-musulmans) pourtant numériquement majoritaires. Dans le domaine de l'éducation, les écoles franco-arabes furent créées en vue de concurrencer le dispositif éducationnel traditionnel appuyé sur les écoles coraniques et inciter les musulmans à envoyer leurs enfants à « l'école du blanc ».[22] Sur le plan religieux, un réseau de contrôle avait été mis sur pied dans l'optique d'encadrer et de contrôler les candidats au pèlerinage à La Mecque.[23]

C'est dans le but d'assurer ce contrôle que Radio-Garoua fut créée en février 1958 alors que le Cameroun français comptait déjà deux radios coloniales dans la partie sud du territoire. Il s'agit de Radio Douala, créée en 1941, et Radio Yaoundé, ouverte en 1954. Mais contrairement à ces deux radios, dont la gestion avait été confiée à des Camerounais au moment de l'indépendance en 1960, Radio-Garoua était dirigée par des Français jusqu'en 1964.

Cela dit, avant la création de Radio-Garoua, l'administration française n'avait aucun contrôle sur la diffusion et la circulation des informations au Nord-Came-

18 Taguem 1996, 14.
19 Genest et Santerre 1974, 592–93.
20 Voir notamment Seignobos et Nassourou 2005.
21 Lire Taguem 1996.
22 À ce sujet, lire Fotso 2009 et Taguem 1996.
23 Socpa 1999, 67–68.

roun qui était arrosé par les ondes des radios étrangères telles que Radio Kaduna (Nigéria) et la Voix des Arabes (Égypte) qui avaient respectivement une connotation anticolonialiste et panarabe. Cette situation découlait de la faiblesse des émetteurs de Radio Douala et Radio Yaoundé dont les ondes n'atteignaient pas le Nord-Cameroun.[24] Il était donc difficile pour les Français de contrecarrer les discours anticolonialistes et pro-islamiques diffusés depuis Kaduna et le Caire. Pour ainsi dire, le conditionnement idéologique et cognitif des populations nord-camerounaises échappait à l'administration. Cette dernière avait donc besoin d'un palliatif à l'influence des radios étrangères, d'autant plus qu'elle faisait face à la radicalisation des revendications nationalistes de l'Union des populations du Cameroun (UPC), le principal mouvement anticolonialiste, qui avait très tôt médiatisé son combat. La création de Radio-Garoua répondait ainsi aux besoins de contrôle de l'opinion publique. Cette nouvelle radio devait contribuer à endiguer la propagation du nationalisme upéciste au Nord-Cameroun, tout en préservant cette région de l'influence arabo-musulmane. S'agissant précisément de cette dernière préoccupation, sur le plan médiatique, qui est au centre de cette analyse, Radio-Garoua avait pour objectif de désintéresser les populations musulmanes des programmes des radios étrangères. C'est la raison pour laquelle, dès sa création, la part belle avait été accordée à la minorité musulmane en termes de langues vernaculaires utilisées et de personnel local.

En effet, compte tenu du faible niveau de scolarisation des musulmans, il a fallu recourir aux langues locales dans la production des programmes en langues vernaculaires. L'étude de Gaétan Tremblay[25] indique que ces langues représentaient 47 pourcent du temps de diffusion contre 53 pourcent pour le français. C'est ainsi que les langues des communautés musulmanes (le fulfuldé, le haoussa et l'arabe choa) furent prioritairement utilisées. Toutefois, leur utilisation ne fut pas harmonieuse. Une importance plus grande fut accordée au fulfuldé, la *lingua franca* au Nord-Cameroun, mais aussi la langue des Peuls qui incarnent l'hégémonie de l'islam dans cette région.

En effet, le fulfuldé est lié à l'évolution de la société musulmane ainsi qu'à son aspiration à la modernité au Nord-Cameroun. C'est un indicateur de la modernité islamique au regard de son rôle dans la promotion de la pensée islamique. En lui accordant la priorité, Radio-Garoua contribua à sa promotion comme élément de la culture islamique étant donné que le fulfuldé est symboliquement lié à l'islam local. Dans la même lancée, l'utilisation des langues des communautés musulmanes supposait le recrutement de locuteurs de ces langues. Le 30 janvier 1958,

24 Ahmadou Abdou, premier animateur en langue locale de Radio-Garoua, entretien, 2008.
25 Tremblay 1974.

Ahmadou Abdou Baba fut recruté comme le tout premier animateur en langues fulfuldé et haussa. Adjoumi Aissatou et Adamou Aladji, qui le rejoignirent après l'indépendance du Cameroun en 1960 et la cession de Radio-Garoua à l'État camerounais, étaient eux-aussi musulmans. Décrivant le personnel de Radio-Garoua à la suite d'une enquête menée au début des années 1970, Gaétan Tremblay révèle que les animateurs en langues vernaculaires étaient tous musulmans.[26] L'appartenance à l'islam semblait donc avoir été instaurée comme critère majeur dans le recrutement des premiers animateurs de Radio-Garoua, étant entendu que le fulfuldé est pratiqué par l'ensemble des communautés du Nord-Cameroun. En réalité, d'un point de vue sociolinguistique, le Nord-Cameroun constitue une communauté linguistique ayant en partage le fulfuldé comme langue de communication. Cela revient à dire que même des non-musulmans s'exprimant en fulfuldé auraient pu assurer l'animation radiophonique en langue vernaculaire, d'autant plus que le recrutement se faisait soit par cooptation (comme ce fut le cas d'Ahmadou Abdou et Haoua Sidiki) ou par sélection sur la base d'un test de traduction du français vers le fulfuldé.[27] On est donc en droit de penser que le facteur religieux a été plus déterminant que le facteur linguistique (appartenance à l'islam) dans le processus de sélection des premiers animateurs de Radio-Garoua par les Français. C'est cela qui justifie l'homogénéité religieuse qui a caractérisé ces animateurs et qui a contribué à faire des musulmans les seuls pionniers locaux des médias dans l'espace social nord-camerounais.

Étant donné que l'animation radiophonique constituait une activité nouvelle au Nord-Cameroun, son existence conféra un statut nouveau aux animateurs en langues vernaculaires et donc aux musulmans. Étant issus de la société traditionnelle qui a constitué le capital culturel de leur recrutement et de leur promotion/ascension sociale, ces animateurs musulmans accédaient ainsi à un statut « d'évolué » du fait de leur collaboration avec le « blanc ».[28] Ce nouveau positionnement social faisait d'eux des marqueurs d'une restructuration socioculturelle. Et l'islam, qui se trouvait au cœur de cette restructuration, ne pouvait que se situer dans la même logique transitoire. Ceci est d'autant plus vrai que Radio-Garoua a constitué l'un des tous premiers facteurs d'intervention de la femme musulmane sur la place publique. Le recrutement et l'implication des femmes à l'instar d'Adjoumi Aissatou et Haoua Sidiki dans le fonctionnement de la radio et l'animation des programmes radiophoniques constituaient une forme de révolution au regard de la place de la femme musulmane dans la société traditionnelle. Le champ de

26 Ibid., 582.
27 Adamou Alhadji, animateur en fulfuldé, entretien, 2008.
28 Voir Fogué Kuaté 2020.

compétence des femmes était très souvent restreint à la sphère privée et il était inhabituel pour elles de prendre la parole dans l'espace public. En permettant leur intervention dans la sphère publique à travers l'animation radiophonique, Radio-Garoua a donné lieu à une actualisation de l'image et de la place des femmes dans la société islamique du Nord-Cameroun. Ce processus d'actualisation bénéficia de la contribution de certains hommes qui, du fait de leur formation à l'école occidentale, avaient une perception différente du rôle et de la place de la femme dans la société.

Ainsi, au regard des mobiles ayant conduit à la création de Radio-Garoua, force est de constater que les stratégies mises en place par les colons français, pour lui permettre d'atteindre ses objectifs, ont ouvert une ère nouvelle dans l'évolution de l'islam et donc de la communauté musulmane au Nord-Cameroun. La médiatisation et la promotion d'éléments culturels caractéristiques de l'islam local constituaient des phénomènes nouveaux qui ont permis aux musulmans de se réinventer en s'initiant à la pratique de l'animation radiophonique. La priorité accordée aux langues des groupes ethniques musulmans dans l'animation des programmes a réactualisé l'hégémonie de l'islam sur les autres groupes socioreligieux. Ces derniers avaient tout simplement été exclus des activités de Radio-Garoua étant donné qu'ils ne représentaient aucun enjeu stratégique pour l'administration coloniale. En plus des domaines politique et culturel dans lesquelles elle s'illustrait déjà, l'hégémonie musulmane a eu une portée médiatique avec l'arrivée de Radio-Garoua. Cette hégémonie médiatique initiée par les Français dans le cadre de leur politique musulmane s'est pérennisée en s'accentuant après le départ du dernier directeur français de Radio-Garoua. Il s'agit de Georges Derrier qui fut remplacé en 1964 par un musulman en la personne de Bello Malgana. Ce remplacement marqua une étape nouvelle dans la structuration de l'islam nord-camerounais avec le début de la diffusion des programmes à caractère islamique et la médiatisation des leaders religieux traditionnels.

Deuxième trajectoire : diffusion des programmes islamiques et modernisation de l'élite religieuse traditionnelle (1960–1982)

Le lecteur va surement être intrigué par le caractère discontinu de la fourchette chronologique de cette deuxième trajectoire par rapport à la première. Loin de traduire un manque de logique, cette réalité chronologique découle de l'enchevêtrement de certains éléments de trajectoire tel que l'attitude de l'administration

coloniale et celle de l'élite postcoloniale à l'endroit de Radio-Garoua. En effet, les éléments caractéristiques d'une trajectoire peuvent se retrouver dans une autre et de ce fait justifier un va-et-vient entre les trajectoires, mais aussi les périodes. Il existe pour ainsi dire une relation entre les temporalités relatives aux trajectoires. Ces dernières peuvent donc avoir des lignes d'intersection chronologiques en s'inscrivant dans une logique de continuité et non de rupture. Aussi, existe-t-il une analogie de pratiques dans la gestion de Radio-Garoua avant et après l'indépendance du Cameroun. Cette analogie ne découle pas simplement du contrôle que la France a continué à exercer sur les médias camerounais après les indépendances.[29] Elle procède également d'un héritage du moment colonial et traduit le mimétisme qui a caractérisé les pratiques politiques postcoloniales. Après l'indépendance, les héritiers de l'État ont perpétué la logique coloniale consistant à utiliser Radio-Garoua pour la satisfaction d'intérêts politico-stratégiques.

L'islam se caractérise par une connexité du religieux et du politique qui justifie la participation de la religion dans la structuration du politique et la fabrique de l'État. Cette participation politique de l'islam intègre les schèmes de sa modernité en ce sens qu'elle est déterminée par des contingences propres à un contexte spécifique.[30] Au Nord-Cameroun, la modernité islamique relative à cette connexité s'est illustrée à partir des années 1960. Elle bénéficia de la désignation d'Ahmadou Ahidjo – un musulman originaire du Nord-Cameroun – comme premier Président du Cameroun indépendant. Avant cette désignation, Ahmadou Ahidjo était parlementaire puis Premier ministre et se présentait comme le leader de l'élite politique musulmane dont l'ambition était de préserver les intérêts de l'islam au Nord-Cameroun où les Kirdi étaient presque exclus de la scène politique.[31] Autrement dit, l'hégémonie musulmane au Nord-Cameroun fut renforcée sous son règne qui prit fin en 1982.

Localisée dans la ville de Garoua, d'où Ahmadou Ahidjo était natif, Radio-Garoua était au cœur des enjeux politiques et surtout religieux de ce nouvel épisode de l'hégémonie musulmane. Dans un contexte où les postes politiques et administratifs du Nord-Cameroun étaient occupés par des musulmans, c'est sans surprise que la direction de Radio-Garoua fût confiée à un musulman, Bello Malgana, qui présida aux destinées de la radio jusqu'en 1984.[32] Au-delà du renforcement de l'homogénéité religieuse du personnel de Radio-Garoua, l'arrivée d'Ahmadou Ahidjo a ouvert le chapitre de la diffusion des programmes isla-

29 Fogué Kuaté 2016.
30 Sounaye 2016.
31 Schilder 1991.
32 Archives non-classées de CRTV-NORD.

miques. Ahmadou Abdou Baba a confié que Radio-Garoua ne diffusait pas les programmes à caractère religieux avant 1960. Les « Blancs ne diffusaient pas les programmes religieux et notre rôle consistait plus à traduire les informations en langues locales et à animer des programmes de divertissement où on jouait la musique locale ».[33] Ce n'est qu'après l'arrivée d'Ahmadou Ahidjo au pouvoir que l'islam s'est manifesté d'un point de vue religieux au niveau de Radio-Garoua. L'islam était, pour la toute première fois, diffusé à travers les ondes radiophoniques au Nord-Cameroun. Les musulmans avaient ainsi la possibilité de pratiquer et de vivre leur foi à travers la radio. Les différents informateurs qui ont vécu pendant cette période ont indiqué que la plupart des concessions (appelées *sarhé* en fulfuldé) de Garoua disposaient d'une radio. Il s'agit généralement d'un transistor (petit poste récepteur à pile) qui était très souvent la propriété du *Babba* (le père ou chef de famille en fulfuldé). Celui-ci se déplaçait constamment avec son transistor et il n'était pas exclu d'observer des situations d'écoute communautaire : « parfois des amis ou des frères se regroupaient dans une cour ou sous un arbre pour écouter la radio ».[34] Même s'il est difficile aujourd'hui d'estimer le pourcentage d'auditeurs qui écoutaient Radio-Garoua du fait de l'inexistence d'études de sondage pendant la période étudiée, les témoignages des informateurs ainsi que les archives (courriers des auditeurs) permettent de constater que ses programmes bénéficiaient d'une écoute assez importante. Celle-ci ne se limitait pas d'ailleurs à la seule ville de Garoua.[35]

Les grilles des programmes de la radiodiffusion camerounaise au cours des années 1960 permettent notamment de constater qu'en plus de la prière retransmise tous les vendredis depuis la mosquée de Garoua, Radio-Garoua diffusait des programmes tels que : religion et morale islamiques (en haoussa) ; *Waazou* (programme d'éducation islamique en fulfuldé) ; biographie du prophète (en haoussa). Ces programmes islamiques animés par des marabouts couvraient 1 h 05 min du temps de diffusion hebdomadaire.[36] Ce quota horaire tripla dans les années 1970, passant de 1 h 05 min à 3 h 25 min, avec les récitations quotidiennes de versets coraniques et des prières à l'ouverture et à la fermeture d'antenne. En effet, dès les années 1970, les programmes débutaient et s'achevaient par la

33 Ahmadou Abdou, entretien, 2008.

34 Haoua Sidiki, animatrice en langue locale, entretien, 2010.

35 En 1963, le président Ahidjo avait doté Radio-Garoua d'un émetteur d'ondes courtes de 30kw qui donnait un caractère transnational à la radio dont les programmes étaient écoutés hors du Cameroun tel que cela transparaît des courriers provenant des pays étrangers au cours des années 1970.

36 Archives non classées de la radiodiffusion de la République fédérale du Cameroun : grille des programmes de Radio-Garoua en 1962.

récitation de versets coraniques ainsi que « des prières pour tout le monde ».[37] « Tout le monde » employé ici inclut les chrétiens.[38] Ces prières étaient dites par des marabouts et des imams qui représentaient l'élite religieuse traditionnelle mobilisée par l'ordre gouvernant. L'implication de cette élite religieuse traditionnelle dans l'animation radiophonique participait de sa modernité en ce sens qu'il s'agissait d'une pratique nouvelle lui permettant de s'affirmer d'un point de vue médiatique. Les marabouts et les imams qui jusque-là n'avaient que les mosquées comme cadre d'expression, pouvaient désormais prêcher à travers la radio. Malgré le fait que la mobilisation de cette élite traditionnelle répondait à des besoins hégémoniques visant à donner au Nord-Cameroun une homogénéité ethnico-religieuse basée sur l'islam, il n'en demeure pas moins qu'elle marqua une avancée significative dans l'évolution et la pratique de l'islam au Nord-Cameroun. Cela vient actualiser l'état des connaissances sur la dynamique de l'islam camerounais du point de vue des acteurs.

En effet, la littérature existante sur la question de la modernité islamique au Cameroun l'aborde sous le prisme de l'émergence de nouveaux acteurs (*Ulémas)*[39] apparus au cours des années 1990.[40] Ces derniers sont considérés comme une néo-élite musulmane opposée à l'élite traditionnelle et porteuse de « renouveau ». Cette lecture du renouveau islamique élude le processus de modernisation des marabouts – notamment à travers la radio – qui illustre pourtant mieux les transformations endogènes de l'islam camerounais tant il est vrai que les nouveaux *Ulémas* revenaient du monde arabe où ils étaient allés acquérir le « pouvoir du savoir ». Aussi, contrairement à ce qui avait été observé au Nigéria où des leaders religieux formés dans le monde arabe ont utilisé les médias pour créer des communautés religieuses – à l'instar du mouvement Izala de Sheikh Aboubakar Gumi, les nouveaux *Ulémas* du Cameroun n'eurent pas accès à la radiodiffusion qui était sous le contrôle exclusif de l'État. Cela limita leur influence médiatique. Ce n'est qu'au cours de la première décennie du XXI^{ème} siècle que cette catégorie d'acteurs a pu investir l'univers médiatique audiovisuel à travers la création d'une radio musulmane (Radio Annour).

37 Cheikh Oumarou Mala Djibring, guide religieux, animateur de programmes religieux à l'office national de radiodiffusion, entretien, 2010.

38 En précisant que ces prières musulmanes étaient destinées à « tout le monde », le cheikh Oumarou Mala Djibring entend nuancer et relativiser l'embargo qui pesait sur le christianisme. Celui-ci était totalement absent des programmes de Radio-Garoua sous le règne d'Ahmadou Ahidjo (1960–1982).

39 Un *Uléma* est un théologien, un savant dont les connaissances poussées de la loi coranique en font un garant du respect et de l'application des principes de l'islam.

40 Voir les travaux de Taguem 2003; Taguem 2005 ; Taguem et Takou 2013.

Autrement dit, du point de vue des acteurs, la nouvelle élite intellectuelle représentée par les nouveaux *Ulémas* ne constitue pas la seule incarnation de la modernité islamique au Cameroun. Avant elle, les marabouts ont connu un processus d'auto-actualisation en s'adaptant à l'outil médiatique qui a donné lieu à une reconfiguration des pratiques religieuses à travers la diffusion des prêches et des sermons. Après le régime Ahidjo et son remplacement par celui du président Paul Biya, ces pratiques se sont poursuivies, non plus dans une logique hégémonique, mais dans le sens d'assurer la survivance de l'islam dans un environnement de plus en plus marqué par la compétition religieuse.

Troisième trajectoire : instauration de la *da'awa* radiophonique et émergence d'un *leadership* féminin musulman dans un contexte de diversification du paysage médiatico-religieux (1984–2010)

Le Cameroun dispose d'un réseau de médias dont l'évolution a suivi une politique gouvernementale consistant à doter chacune des régions du pays d'une radio, en plus du Poste national (la radio mère) situé dans la capitale Yaoundé. Depuis 1983, le Cameroun compte dix unités administratives majeures (provinces devenues régions en 2008) consécutivement à l'éclatement, par le président Paul Biya, de la grande région du nord (« bâtie » par Ahmadou Ahidjo) en trois provinces : le Nord, l'Adamaoua et l'Extrême-Nord. Le Nord disposant déjà d'une radio (Radio-Garoua), il fallait aussi en doter les deux nouvelles régions. C'est ainsi qu'en 1984, ont été créées Radio-Ngaoundéré et Radio-Maroua. Toutefois, l'éclatement du Nord-Cameroun ainsi que la création de ces deux radios découlaient de la « querelle » de palais qui s'instaura après la démission d'Ahmadou Ahidjo en 1982 et dont le point d'orgue fut le coup d'État manqué de 1984 qui lui avait été attribué par le régime en place. En démissionnant de ses fonctions de chef d'État, Ahmadou Ahidjo décida de se maintenir à la tête du parti unique, l'Union nationale camerounaise (UNC), qui devait définir les politiques devant être mises en œuvre par l'État et donc par le nouveau président de la République.[41] Soucieux de s'affirmer politiquement, son successeur constitutionnel, Paul Biya, refusa de

41 Bayart 1986.

souscrire à cette forme de bicéphalisme. Cela ne fut pas du goût de son illustre prédécesseur. Il s'en suivit une crise politique qui a remis en question l'exclusivité accordée à l'islam par Radio-Garoua. Les stratégies d'émasculation des réseaux politiques restés fidèles à Ahmadou Ahidjo au Nord-Cameroun conduisirent au déclin de l'hégémonie médiatique de l'islam dans cette région. Le régime du président Biya amenuisa l'influence musulmane sur les médias. Radio-Garoua, qui constituait l'outil médiatique de la politique hégémonique des musulmans, perdit son monopole avec la création de Radio-Maroua et Radio-Ngaoundéré. Aussi, la direction des trois radios du Nord-Cameroun a-t-elle été confiée à des non-musulmans.[42] L'un des faits marquants de l'arrivée de ces deux radios a été l'introduction de programmes chrétiens qui venaient mettre un terme à l'exclusivité des programmes islamiques. Ce faisant, ces radios étatiques ouvrirent la voie à une compétition religieuse. Les églises chrétiennes développèrent une adversité médiatique soutenue par la maison de production Sawtu Linjiila[43] qui œuvrait pour l'évangélisation en milieu musulman en pourvoyant les radios en programmes. Dans ce contexte, l'islam qui avait jusque-là régné sans partage sur l'univers médiatique nord-camerounais devait désormais se réadapter. C'est ainsi que l'ère du prosélytisme médiatique de l'islam a été inaugurée au Nord-Cameroun à travers la *da'awa* radiophonique.

En réalité, sous le règne du président Ahidjo, l'intention de Radio-Garoua n'était pas de diffuser l'islam afin de convertir de nouveaux adeptes. Les programmes religieux de cette radio s'adressaient dès lors essentiellement aux musulmans. Elle était un moyen de communication au service de la communauté musulmane. Mais, avec la création des radios de Maroua et Ngaoundéré et l'introduction de programmes chrétiens, la médiatisation islamique[44] participait désormais de la *da'awa*. À travers ces différentes acceptions (religieuses, juridiques et politiques), ce mot d'origine arabe signifie littéralement « invitation » et renvoie prosaïquement à un appel. C'est un appel aux non-musulmans à adhérer au message de l'islam – qui se veut universel – en faisant recours au dialogue et à la persuasion.[45] En tant que facteur de prosélytisme religieux, la *da'awa* s'exerce à travers une action de propagande. Laquelle propagande fait usage des médias en général et de la radio en particulier. L'idée de *da'awa* radiophonique renvoie

42 Fogué Kuaté 2017, 262.

43 En fulfuldé, l'expression « *Sawtu Linjiila* » signifie la « Voix de l'évangile ».

44 Nous faisons une nuance entre la « médiatisation islamique » qui renvoie au prosélytisme et la « médiatisation de l'islam » qui renvoie au discours informationnel construit par les médias sur et autour de l'islam (Bensalah 2006) sans aucune visée prosélyte.

45 Janjar 2013.

donc à l'utilisation de la radio à des fin de diffusion de l'islam. Dans le contexte du Nord-Cameroun, elle fut menée d'abord par les marabouts qui ont par la suite été rejoints au cours des années 1990 par la nouvelle élite intellectuelle musulmane formée dans le monde arabe (Soudan, Égypte, Arabie Saoudite). Au début des années 2000, chacune des trois radios étatiques du Nord-Cameroun comptait quatre programmes islamiques avec une couverture hebdomadaire de 3 h soit 4 h de moins que les programmes chrétiens.[46] Ces programmes islamiques étaient constitués de séances de prédication et de lectures de sermons réalisées en fulfuldé et en français.[47] Absente sous le régime Ahidjo, l'utilisation du français dans ces programmes islamiques laisse transparaître un désir de promotion de l'islam auprès des populations non-musulmanes qui ne comprennent pas le fulfuldé.[48]

Ainsi, contrairement aux travaux[49] qui donnent l'impression que le regain islamique par les médias publics s'est opéré essentiellement à travers le programme « Connaissance de l'Islam » diffusé par le Poste national et la télévision nationale, force est de constater que les radios régionales (périphériques) du Nord-Cameroun ont également participé à ce regain. Celui-ci a aussi été provoqué par l'existence de radios chrétiennes non-étatiques créées à la faveur de la libéralisation du paysage médiatique intervenue en 1990 et la signature du décret 2000/158/PM du 3 avril 2000 fixant les conditions de création et d'exploitation des entreprises privées de communication audiovisuelle au Cameroun.

En effet, la production du savoir sur les transformations de l'islam au Cameroun passe sous silence l'influence des non-musulmans. Cette orientation analytique ne permet pas de restituer ces transformations dans leur totalité et leur complexité. Plusieurs aspects de la modernité islamique découlent du contact, par médias interposés, entre l'islam et le christianisme. Un contact qui a donné lieu à des processus d'emprunts. C'est ainsi que les chrétiens (surtout pentecôtistes) ont été les premiers à créer des radios afin de sous-tendre leur action évangélisatrice au Nord-Cameroun. C'est le cas des Radio Bonne nouvelle (2003), Radio Sallaman (2004) et Sawtu Linjiila (créée en 1964 comme maison de production de programmes radiophoniques et devenue radio en 2008).

46 Fogué Kuaté 2017, 286.

47 Grilles des programmes (Archives non classées de CRTV-ADAMAOUA à Ngaoundéré, CRTV-NORD à Garoua et CRTV-EXTREME NORD à Maroua).

48 Bien que le fulfuldé soit admis comme *lingua franca* au Nord-Cameroun, il faut reconnaître que certaines populations non-originaires de la région l'utilisent à peine ou pas du tout. Il s'agit notamment des fonctionnaires et des étudiants (des universités de Ngaoundéré et Maroua) provenant de la partie méridionale du Cameroun.

49 Voir notamment Adama 2015.

Dans l'optique de s'adapter à cet environnement médiatique désormais dominé par le christianisme, les musulmans ont à leur tour créé des radios destinées à promouvoir la culture musulmane. Il s'agit de FM Bénoué créée en 2001 à Garoua par le *lamido* Alim Garga Hayatou et Radio Annour ouverte en 2010 à Ngaoundéré par Nafissa Ali. Contrairement à la première qui a un caractère communautaire, la seconde se veut confessionnelle. Elles ont la mission commune de diffuser la culture et l'identité musulmanes à travers des programmes islamiques produits en fulfuldé, arabe et haoussa. Radio Annour a cependant la particularité de prôner un islam moderne du fait de sa collaboration avec *al Da'awa al-islamiia*, une organisation non-gouvernementale islamique ayant contribué à sa création. Aussi, l'enseignement de l'arabe constitue-t-il ici un enjeu majeur. Au regard de ce que cette langue symbolise pour l'islam orthodoxe, sa vulgarisation par Radio Annour participe d'une volonté de revenir à la lettre du Coran. En s'impliquant dans l'enseignement de l'arabe, Radio Annour amène à revisiter la typologie des structures éducatives de l'islam constituée : des écoles coraniques, des médersas et des universités. La radio est ainsi devenue un lieu de déploiement de l'enseignement arabo-islamique au Nord-Cameroun.

Bien plus, Radio Annour matérialise l'émergence d'un *leadership* féminin musulman au Nord-Cameroun. Sa promotrice, Nafissatou Ali, qui a poursuivi des études islamiques au Soudan et en Arabie Saoudite dans la deuxième moitié des années 1990, fait en effet figure de pionnière en ce qui concerne la participation féminine dans la dynamique de l'islam au Cameroun. Dès sa création, la Radio Annour a entamé un prosélytisme religieux visant à valoriser la femme musulmane. C'est ainsi qu'elle diffuse des programmes sur les droits de la femme selon le Coran. En plus des prédications et psalmodies du Coran, Nafissatou Ali anime personnellement des prêches portant sur l'intimité de la femme, un sujet pourtant tabou pour l'élite religieuse traditionnelle. D'après cette élite conservatrice, l'orientation féministe qui saupoudre le prosélytisme de Radio Annour est de nature à encourager l'émancipation des femmes en les éloignant des préceptes de l'islam traditionnel et surtout du *Pulaaku*.[50]

En devenant la première femme à porter le discours religieux dans l'espace public à travers la radio, Nafissatou Ali est venue bousculer les traditions dans un environnement où la femme peut difficilement prendre la parole dans une mosquée. Grâce à sa radio, elle a initié un mouvement visant à renégocier la

50 Le « *pulaaku* » désigne le code de conduite peul. Il a une portée morale et s'articule autour de trois éléments constitutifs : « *seemteende* » (la modestie et la réserve), « *munyal* » (la patience) et « *hakkiilo* » (la prévoyance). Ces trois éléments contribuent « au maintien de l'ordre familial et plus, généralement, à la stabilité et à la continuité de la communauté » (Boesen, 1999, 89).

place, le rôle et l'image de la femme musulmane au Nord-Cameroun. Ce faisant, Radio Annour participe de la réinvention de l'islam dans cette région.

La réinvention de l'islam et la construction d'un imaginaire politico-culturel à travers les trajectoires radiophoniques de la modernité islamique au Nord-Cameroun

L'entrelacs de l'islam et de la radio au Nord-Cameroun laisse entrevoir trois phases d'évolution entre 1958 et 2010. Chacune de ces phases – représentées par les trois trajectoires présentées plus haut – est un marqueur temporel de la modernité islamique par les médias dans cette région qui constitue le fief de l'islam au Cameroun. Pour emprunter la pensée de François Hartog,[51] ces trajectoires participent du régime d'historicité de la modernité islamique par la radio au Nord-Cameroun. Chacune d'elles constitue un présent pendant lequel l'islam s'est réinventé au gré des enjeux politiques et culturels en cours. D'où la portée politique et stratégique de la modernité.

À travers ces différentes trajectoires, les musulmans du Nord-Cameroun ont utilisé la radio pour revendiquer une modernité qu'ils ont d'abord déniée aux Kirdi (non-musulmans) de 1958 à 1984, période qui correspond aux deux premières trajectoires. Au cours de la dernière trajectoire, la radio leur a permis de renégocier leur existence dans un environnement marqué par une forte christianisation des univers politique et médiatique.

Autrement dit, sur la base de ces trajectoires radiophoniques de la modernité islamique, il est possible de constater que l'entrelacs de l'islam et de la radio a été déterminé par celui du politique et des médias. Comme dans la plupart des pays d'Afrique subsaharienne, l'univers médiatique camerounais a fortement été influencé et dominé par l'élite politique qui le contrôle et l'utilise pour atteindre ses objectifs de propagande et de mobilisation politique. Cette logique a été introduite par l'administration coloniale française. C'est ainsi qu'au cours de la première trajectoire, l'implémentation de la politique musulmane de la France a été le premier facteur de la modernité islamique par les médias au Nord-Cameroun. Créée à des fins politiques, Radio-Garoua a servi de tremplin à cette modernité en diffusant, pour la première fois, des éléments culturels musulmans. Après

51 Hartog 2005.

le départ des Français, les médias étatiques ont constitué le bras médiatique de l'appareil gouvernant. Ils ont été mis au service du pouvoir au prétexte de servir d'instruments de développement et d'unité nationale.[52] Les responsables de ces radios étaient désignés par le gouvernement et les programmes et informations qu'elles diffusaient devaient respecter l'idéologie et les desiderata de l'appareil gouvernant. C'est la raison pour laquelle, sous le règne du musulman Ahmadou Ahidjo, Radio-Garoua a été au centre de la politique hégémonique entreprise par les musulmans contre les Kirdi. La deuxième trajectoire démontre justement que la médiatisation de l'islam s'inscrivait en droite ligne de cette politique hégémonique. Le but de cette médiatisation était de créer un imaginaire politico-culturel qui donnerait l'illusion d'un Nord-Cameroun homogène et uni autour de l'islam. En d'autres termes, il fallait faire accroire aux Camerounais de la partie méridionale que le nord du pays était essentiellement musulman. Contrairement à ces deux premières trajectoires, la dernière trajectoire, qui est plus longue dans le temps, a été déterminée par l'arrivée au pouvoir d'un chrétien dont le régime a œuvré en vue de saper l'ordre établi par son prédécesseur musulman. Dans ce contexte qui a favorisé la compétition religieuse au Nord-Cameroun, les musulmans ont dû renégocier l'existence et la place de l'islam dans le champ social en développant une *da'awa* radiophonique destinée à assurer sa présence dans l'espace public médiatique progressivement envahi par les programmes et les médias chrétiens.

Ainsi, les trois trajectoires radiophoniques de la modernité de l'islam dévoilent trois moments historiques au cours desquels l'islam a connu une réinvention induite par des enjeux politiques et religieux. Ces différents processus de réinvention ont consisté respectivement en l'utilisation des langues musulmanes dans la production des programmes radios, l'intervention des femmes dans l'espace public médiatique, l'implication de l'élite religieuse traditionnelle dans la diffusion des programmes islamiques et la pratique d'un prosélytisme radiophonique face à la concurrence du christianisme en général et des églises pentecôtistes en particulier.

Par ailleurs, ces trois trajectoires révèlent que l'histoire de la radio au Nord-Cameroun est intimement liée à celle de l'islam. Le contrôle et la gestion de l'islam ont été les principales raisons de l'implantation de la radiodiffusion dans cette région, tel que cela transparaît de la première trajectoire. Par la suite, l'islam a déterminé l'évolution de la radio. Alors que le régime d'Ahmadou Ahidjo a prôné une centralisation médiatique autour de Radio-Garoua pour asseoir sa domination, celui du président Biya a déconstruit cette centralisation en diversifiant le

52 Tjadè Eonè 1986.

paysage radiophonique de la région à travers la création de deux nouvelles radios dont une à Ngaoundéré et l'autre à Maroua. Cette observation remet en question la pertinence du postulat de David Douyère et Frédéric Antoine lorsque, parlant de l'entrelacs des religions et des médias, ils indiquent que « chacun peut se passer de l'autre, mais ne le fait pas ».[53] Dans le cas spécifique du Nord-Cameroun, des éléments de contexte comme l'imbrication du politique et du religieux – qui caractérise l'islam – et l'assujettissement des médias à l'élite a fait en sorte que l'islam ne peut pas se passer de la radio. Dans cette région, l'entrelacs de l'islam et de la radio n'est pas seulement fusionnel. Il a une dimension essentielle. L'islam a constitué l'essence de l'existence de la radio qui, à son tour, lui a permis de se réinventer au fil des années.

Vers d'autres modernités religieuses par les médias

En conclusion, la réalité observée au Nord-Cameroun rend compte du rôle déterminant de la radio dans les processus de transformation du religieux. Ceux-ci s'élaborent en empruntant des trajectoires différentes en fonction des contextes géographiques et sociopolitiques dont la diversité amène à penser que ce rôle pourrait différemment s'exprimer et être expérimenté dans d'autres territoires africains. Les travaux de Dorothea Schulz[54] démontrent, par exemple, que ce rôle s'est fait ressentir dans le renouveau des femmes musulmanes (*Silame musow*) au Mali. Ce qui revient à dire que l'hétérogénéité des contextes politiques et culturels africains appelle à une diversité des réflexions sur la question de la modernité religieuse par la radio. Celles-ci devraient également tenir compte de deux variables : la conversation religieuse – c'est-à-dire des échanges et interactions entre les religions – et la révolution médiatique en cours sur le continent. La première variable est mise en exergue par Birgit Meyer et Marloes Janson[55] qui invitent à traverser les frontières religieuses en développant des analyses comparatives portant sur l'islam et le christianisme. Il ressort justement de l'analyse proposée ici que l'une des trajectoires de la modernité islamique au Nord-Cameroun a découlé des rapports de force entre ces deux religions. Cela traduit l'intérêt de la conversation religieuse dans la compréhension de la dynamique des

53 Douyère et Antoine 2018.
54 Schulz 2011.
55 Janson et Meyer 2016.

religions en contextes multi-religieux. Cette approche « œcuménique » pourrait permettre de saisir les similitudes, les différences et les enchevêtrements qui caractérisent la contribution de la radio à la modernité de l'Islam et du christianisme en Afrique. Quant à la seconde variable, elle procède de la place de plus en plus importante qu'occupent les réseaux sociaux en Afrique et invite une comparaison entre la radio et les nouveaux médias. Il n'est pas illusoire de penser que ces nouveaux outils technologiques aux propriétés particulières ont inauguré de nouvelles trajectoires dans le vécu religieux en général et la modernité islamique en particulier.

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Djiby Ndiaye

Flaming et pratiques d'irrévérence des « musulmans connectés » au Sénégal

Au lendemain du *Mágal* de Porokhane[1] de 2018, un extrait d'une causerie sur la *Mouridiyya* de Serigne Ganna Mésséré est devenu viral sur les réseaux sociaux. Ce conférencier, particulièrement apprécié par les disciples de Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba[2] pour la plasticité de son langage et sa capacité à capter son auditoire, y affirmait dans un monologue élogieux que : « *Cheikh Ahmed Tidiane Cherif, Sëriñ Tuuba du moromam* ».[3] Ce propos, banal pour l'internaute, a été jugé « irrévérencieux » par les *talibés* de la confrérie *Tidjaniyya*[4] qui trouvaient cette comparaison avilissante pour un guide de la stature du fondateur de leur ordre.[5] En effet, il existe une règle non écrite, mais connue de tous au Sénégal, sur la façon de parler des guides religieux. Il s'agit de l'observation d'une « certaine politesse »[6] lorsque l'on parle d'un marabout. Le manquement à ce dispositif de révérence est assimilé à du *sàllalu*, qui signifie tutoiement. Cette séquence de la conférence diffusée en direct sur plusieurs pages Facebook et chaînes YouTube a occasionné sur internet une vague d'indignations à travers des répliques, délibérément hos-

1 Grand évènement qui commémore la figure féminine de la *Mouridiyya*, Mame Diarra Bousso, ascendante du fondateur de la confrérie. Voir Rosander 2004, 72.

2 Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba est le fondateur de la *Mouridiyya* qui est l'une des plus importantes confréries musulmanes du Sénégal.

3 Ce qui signifie littéralement : « Serigne Touba n'est pas l'égal de Cheikh Ahmed Tidiane Cherif ».

4 El'Hadji Malick Mbaye, un proche de la famille Sy de Tivaoune, a jugé ce propos de Serigne Ganna Mésséré comme dévalorisant. Il a remis en cause la déclaration en faisant allusion au nombre de *talibés* de Cheikh Ahmed Tidjane à travers le monde. Collectif International des Talibés Cheikh, « La Réponse Sallée [*sic*] de Elhadji Malick Mbaye Bollé à Gana Méséré ». Vidéo, 8:22. https://youtu.be/gpNKxms5MoU, mise en ligne 23 mai 2020.

5 Une tendance consiste à réserver une dimension exclusive à chaque grand marabout. Il s'agit d'admettre l'unicité des fondateurs de confréries et de se garder de les comparer à un quelconque individu mort ou vivant. C'est une sorte de sacralisation extrême des saints observée dans presque toutes les confréries au Sénégal, particulièrement dans la *Mouridiyya*. Ceci est appelé « *kénal* » en wolof. L'inobservance de cette règle par certains personnages publics provoque souvent des indignations de la part des disciples du marabout visé.

6 Il s'agit de ne pas utiliser un propos contenant des invectives, insultes, comparatifs ou affects négatifs lorsqu'on prononce le nom d'un marabout.

Djiby Ndiaye: Laboratoire d'analyse des sociétés et pouvoirs/Afrique-Diasporas, Université Gaston Berger, Quai Henry Jay, Sud, Saint-Louis, Sénégal, e-mail: ndiaye.djiby5@ugb.edu.sn

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tiles, parfois insultantes, à l'égard de Serigne Ganna Mésséré et même de la *Mouridiyya*. Ainsi, l'outil internet apporterait quelque chose d'inédit dans la pratique du religieux avec la reproduction du *sàllalu* en ligne, déjà pratiqué hors ligne.

Les acteurs musulmans ont investi internet, ce qui leur permet de renforcer leur visibilité. Ils ont diversifié leurs stratégies de communication à travers le recours aux médias socio-numériques pour partager des *posts*, notamment des déclarations spectaculaires relatives aux doctrines, figures ou faits religieux généralement appelés *flames*. Les *flames* contournent, le plus souvent, les règles de révérence islamiques et occasionnent des gênes par l'outrance de leurs contenus. Ainsi, le *flaming* désigne une forme de communication hostile ou offensante dans laquelle des mots irrespectueux, grossiers ou critiques sont employés et qui provoquent des répliques de la part de la catégorie religieuse visée ou du chef confessionnel cité sur internet. Cette pratique passe par l'usage d'un large éventail de termes vulgaires ou de propos inflammatoires chez les « musulmans connectés ». Nous entendons par « musulmans connectés », les entrepreneurs religieux agissant comme porte-paroles auto-proclamés de leur obédience, en l'occurrence les figures s'identifiant de l'islam hors, intra- ou trans-confrériques, qu'il s'agisse de marabouts, d'imams, d'*oustaz*,[7] de prédicateurs ou de disciples, qui mettent en ligne des messages hostiles avec parfois l'intention de créer une confrontation à partir de Facebook ou YouTube.

Loin d'être un phénomène « stable » qui se prêterait à un usage facile, le *flaming* fut initialement pratiqué par des internautes d'origine sénégalaise établis à l'étranger autour de 2015.[8] Ils ont commencé par faire des commentaires sur divers faits et discours qui ont été largement diffusés sur les réseaux sociaux. Les expressions d'hostilité à l'égard de marabouts ou groupes musulmans ont émergé à partir du moment où les acteurs religieux ont investi les réseaux sociaux, particulièrement populaires auprès de la jeunesse, pour diffuser leurs enseignements, protester contre un état de fait, valider ou infléchir une position doctrinale, etc. La forte propension du *flaming* s'explique, entre autres, par le fait que l'irrévérence est un facteur d'audience et de référencement sur les moteurs de recherche et sur les réseaux sociaux. La pratique a exacerbé les divergences de points de vue à chaque fois qu'elle impliquait un acteur religieux connu du grand public.

Notre réflexion s'intéresse à la pratique du *flaming* sur internet qui n'est pas le simple emploi d'un outil technologique. Cette pratique revêt une portée plus large qui consiste en un comportement de transgression morale. En effet,

7 Professeur en français ; mais le nom *oustaz* est également employé pour désigner le prédicateur ou le maître coranique.

8 Les plus visibles étaient Assane Diouf ou encore Aby 666.

les potentialités offertes par internet ont permis aux « musulmans connectés » de développer une nouvelle forme de prise de parole qui constitue une forme de participation en rapport, et parfois en contradiction, avec des pratiques existantes dans le contexte socioculturel sénégalais. Cet aspect est relatif à la relation que le musulman entretient avec internet, notamment la potentialité technique et les motivations de l'usage qu'il en fait. Il s'agit d'une pratique inédite marquée par l'interaction des besoins des « musulmans connectés », notamment ceux de s'informer et de communiquer, et d'autres besoins[9] qu'internet permet de satisfaire. Le *flaming* donne la capacité aux religieux de créer, *remixer* et partager,[10] et la possibilité de prendre part à la formation de nouvelles formes de réflexivité non seulement individuelles, mais aussi collectives sur internet.[11] Ainsi, les pratiques de l'irrévérence constituent-elles un mode de communication se manifestant avec suffisamment de récurrence et sous la forme d'habitudes suffisamment intégrées dans la quotidienneté pour s'insérer dans l'éventail des pratiques du religieux sur internet. Par conséquent, le *flaming* est une sorte de consensus théorique, un cadre conceptuel commun associé aux intentions belligérantes destinées à un genre, une catégorie sociale ou un enseignement dans le but de stigmatiser des individus ou des groupes ciblés sur internet. L'observation des pratiques antérieures des musulmans est révélatrice de quelques continuités. Les discours contenant invectives, insultes ou affects négatifs ont pendant longtemps été utilisés hors ligne par des acteurs musulmans à l'égard des figures de l'islam au Sénégal.[12]

Cette étude du phénomène du *flaming* dans l'islam au Sénégal privilégie le repérage d'un certain nombre de profils et la mise en interaction d'informations et pratiques hétérogènes sur Facebook et YouTube. Vu les disparités de profils et la diversité des circonstances qui conduisent chaque acteur à opter pour cette pratique, nous estimons qu'une approche quantitative pourrait se heurter à des limites importantes liées à la capacité du chercheur à réunir un nombre assez représentatif de « *flamers* ». Ceci a motivé le choix des entretiens – directifs et non-directifs – effectués auprès de quelques figures musulmanes qui ont permis de comprendre la perception du phénomène du *flaming* dans la sphère islamique. Cette méthode est complétée par l'analyse d'un corpus de publications

9 Assouvir la foi, savoir, attirer l'attention, susciter le débat, etc.

10 Millerand, Proulx et Rueff 2010, 15.

11 Voir Beuscart, Dagiral et Parasie 2016.

12 Le discours des précurseurs du réformisme au Sénégal était hostile à l'égard des tenants de l'islam soufi. Il arrivait d'y noter des propos assez déplaisants au point de soulever des réactions de certaines grandes figures musulmanes. Sur ce sujet, voir l'article sur cheikh Touré dans Loimeier 1998.

disséminé dans des réseaux sociaux différents,[13] qui ne s'est pas restreinte aux contenus sémantiques des messages. Elle s'attache à comprendre la signification des *posts*[14] en lien avec l'islam notamment en prenant en compte les profils des auteurs.

Cependant, des difficultés de matériel empirique sont inhérentes à l'identification et l'entretien des « musulmans connectés ».[15] La question du positionnement du chercheur à l'égard de son objet d'étude[16] se pose souvent lorsqu'il s'agit d'étudier le religieux. Néanmoins, nous pensons, pour reprendre les mots d'Albert Piette, que « le travail en terrain religieux n'est pas plus facile, ni plus difficile que sur tout autre terrain, plus précisément il n'a pas à être considéré à part »[17] dans les sciences sociales. Des propositions sur l'attitude à suivre sont nombreuses : les uns parleront d' « athéisme méthodologique »,[18] de « neutralité métaphysique[19] » ou d'autres proposeront une « conversion méthodologique ».[20] Nous avons opté pour le maintien d'une stricte délimitation entre nos opinions et le travail de recherche, même s'il apparaît illusoire de prétendre à une totale neutralité.[21]

Dans le cadre de notre travail, nous essayerons de décrire la configuration d'internet qui est un nouvel espace d'expression du religieux au Sénégal. Il s'agira aussi de décrire le *flaming* comme une technique et objet de censure. L'analyse nous permettra de délimiter l'espace et d'identifier les acteurs de ce phénomène, leurs profils et leurs stratégies propres. Le repérage et la mise en

13 Les publications en ligne sont soumises à des problèmes de volatilité. Les suppressions et privatisations des commentaires ou des textes constituent des aléas récurrents qui nous ont imposé dès le départ le figement des corpus afin de disposer de leur état initial tout au long de la recherche.

14 Les *posts* ont été sélectionnés selon le critère principal de présence des termes offensants ou des mots dégradants en adoptant ce qui nous paraissait relever des solutions de bon sens au prix, parfois, d'incohérences que le puriste voudra bien nous pardonner.

15 Le phénomène étudié est sensible au point que personne ne veut admettre sa réalité.

16 Sur ce sujet, voir les contributions réunies dans Lambert, Michelat et Piette 1997.

17 Piette 1997, 40.

18 Berger 1971, 166.

19 Zahavi 2001.

20 Concernant le débat sur ces différentes attitudes, voir les articles réunis dans Platvoet, Cox et Olupona 1996.

21 Les propos scientifiques se mêlent aux arguments éthiques au point d'avoir raison de nos résistances et, plus encore, concernant la position de l'observateur influençant inévitablement son analyse de l'objet. Il était donc préférable pour nous de nous montrer « transparent ». Nous avons clairement expulsé nos biais de l'analyse pour éviter toute équivoque.

interaction d'une pluralité d'acteurs sur internet nous permettront de souligner les fonctions variables des pratiques de l'irrévérence dans l'islam au Sénégal.

Internet : un nouvel espace d'expression du religieux au Sénégal

Aujourd'hui, internet se situe au croisement des sphères sociétales (politique et économique) et à l'intersection des espaces privé et public. La communication numérique par le biais d'internet est un phénomène omniprésent ayant un impact majeur sur les interactions sociales et la vie quotidienne. Internet apparaît comme un espace virtuel d'exportation de la lutte de légitimation et de reconnaissance du religieux.[22] Au Sénégal, des musulmans qui souffraient de quasi-invisibilité dans les espaces conventionnels d'expression l'ont investi pour faire connaître leur doctrine, recruter et mobiliser leurs alliés ou gagner la faveur des publics. Internet a transformé les médias, formé un nouveau langage et fait développer de nouvelles relations entre les musulmans. Il concourt à la redéfinition des conceptions de l'espace et des rapports. Ainsi, internet influence fortement les dynamiques des pratiques religieuses,[23] et facilite la mise en scène de l'usager autonome au sens où il est libre d'utiliser la technologie et son contenu. Dans cette perspective, les initiatives des agents religieux, leurs stratégies intellectuelles de persuasion et leurs tactiques de prosélytisme peuvent se conformer ou se distancier des rites et des normes qui étaient connus jusque-là. Si certains acteurs religieux engagent une concurrence sur internet qui implique une prise en charge du contexte, d'autres y développent de nouvelles pratiques de communication inspirées parfois du webmarketing.

La démocratisation de l'accès à la technologie a fait d'internet une plateforme susceptible d'encourager ou même de permettre aux internautes d'agir de manière offensive.[24] Ceci a considérablement influencé la temporalité et les dimensions des échanges autour du religieux. À l'origine, les plateformes numériques permettaient non seulement de renforcer l'esprit de fraternité et de convi-

22 Madore 2016.

23 Hackett 2005.

24 Les internautes peuvent faire le choix d'être anonymes ou de créer de faux comptes de messagerie privée pour se prononcer sur toutes les questions à leur guise avec peu de raisons de s'inquiéter.

vialité des disciples d'une communauté,[25] mais également de s'émanciper d'un certain nombre de carcans religieux. La blogosphère représente un espace où il est possible de poster diverses opinions. Comme illustré dans les propos de Elhadji Djiby Seye du *Daara Maslakul Hudda*[26] ci-dessous :

> Étant donné que je m'y connais en informatique, je partage souvent les enseignements du mouridisme. Donc, dès que je trouve un passage intéressant d'un xassaide[27] ou d'un wolofal,[28] mon premier réflexe va être évidemment de le partager avec mes amis. Souvent les publications occasionnent des discussions avec des interlocuteurs. Ces discussions m'ont permis de convaincre certains à adhérer à notre Daara.[29] Internet est vraiment important quand on veut parler de spiritualité surtout avec la crise des valeurs dans notre société.[30]

Les forums numériques ont facilité l'implication de beaucoup d'internautes qui disposaient d'un faible niveau de connaissance en islam dans des débats religieux. Le recours aux forums en ligne représentant des plateformes web qui existent depuis longtemps démontre que les espaces de discussions jouent un rôle très important dans l'accès aux connaissances religieuses, même s'il occasionne souvent des pratiques d'irrévérence, parfois sous une forme inédite. En effet, les débats sur les forums ont été souvent l'occasion pour certains d'introduire des points de vue hostiles, des jugements ou des accusations à l'encontre des groupes religieux ou des marabouts. C'est sans doute parce que l'inscription dans un forum ne nécessitait par une identification en bonne et due forme. Ayant constaté l'intérêt des internautes pour les *flames*, certaines figures se sont appropriées la stratégie pour polariser l'attention.[31] Ainsi, des chaînes, des pages, des blogs ou des sites se sont mis à rediffuser et partager des propos inflammatoires tenus sur des personnalités de certaines communautés.[32] Ceci a d'ailleurs occasionné l'implication de nouveaux acteurs, tels que les blogueurs, les déten-

25 Bèye 2014, 230.

26 Ma traduction : Association engagement de la droiture.

27 Poème, chanson ou panégyrique dédié à Allah ou au Prophète Muhammad.

28 Un genre littéraire mis en place, selon Cheikhouna Bèye, par les premiers adeptes de Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba. C'est une littérature wolof d'expression arabe phonétisée popularisée par Serigne Moussa Kâ. Voir Bèye 2014, 122 et 124.

29 Ici, il désigne une association d'individus ayant en partage une allégeance commune à un *Sang*. Cela peut être également une institution pédagogique dans laquelle le musulman acquiert les rudiments ou la maîtrise du Coran.

30 Elhadji Djiby Séye, entretien, 12 août 2020.

31 Il était devenu fréquent de voir des marabouts et d'autres acteurs s'en prendre verbalement à une figure vénérée et de se justifier par le *Haal* qui désigne un état d'inconscience temporaire.

32 Voir les chaines YouTube de la mouvance réformiste *Alkhuran Ak Sunna rek 2* et *KEUROU SOUNNAH TV*.

teurs de comptes YouTube, les usagers de Facebook, etc. dans le débat autour de l'islam au Sénégal.[33] La diffusion de *flames* sous la couverture de prédications, de commentaires de la tradition ou des vidéos de manifestations religieuses a fait ressortir des divergences profondes dans la matrice islamique au Sénégal. Ceci est à l'origine de la prise de distance de certains individus avec les anciennes normes de politesse.

Plusieurs communautés religieuses présentes au Sénégal ont exploité l'opportunité offerte par internet, tantôt pour défendre leur croyance, tantôt à des fins de prosélytisme, mais surtout pour acquérir plus de visibilité. En effet, l'usage d'internet par les communautés religieuses est caractérisé le plus souvent par l'ambition de légitimer une doctrine et fabriquer ou diffuser des discours justificatifs.[34] Les « musulmans connectés » utilisent les réseaux sociaux en permanence pour construire des référentiels théologiques et symboliques par des exhortations et des prédications. Ils sont engagés dans des pratiques d'influence impliquant une modification des processus cognitifs, émotionnels et comportementaux d'individus ou de groupes. Qu'il soit le fait des communautés ou qu'il s'affiche au contraire à leur marge, qu'il soit collectif ou individuel, le discours religieux sur internet – adapté voire inventé – exprime souvent l'agrégation des appartenances à longueur de vidéos, *posts* ou autres brûlots numériques sur Facebook ou YouTube. Si certains *posts* sont considérés comme provocateurs par les acteurs religieux eux-mêmes, il n'y a pas une qualification unanime de l'irrévérence sur les réseaux sociaux, extension virtuelle de l'espace religieux au Sénégal.

Les pratiques du religieux sur internet sont variables, différenciées, et connaissent des évolutions qui sont à placer au cœur de celles que vivent les groupes confessionnels sous l'effet des potentialités induites par le développement des réseaux sociaux. Les publications relatives aux groupes et communautés religieux sur internet sont généralement jugées pacifiques. En revanche, la mise en ligne de propos inflammatoires est devenue récurrente et exprime, dans la plupart des cas, un scepticisme, une frustration et un cynisme vis-à-vis d'un groupe islamique, de l'élite maraboutique ou d'un chef religieux en particulier. Par conséquent, la pratique du *flaming* sur internet peut aboutir à une appropriation paradoxale d'une forme d'expression qui génère de la discrimination, de l'intolérance, de la haine, voire de la violence.

33 Plusieurs plateformes dédiées ont été créées parmi lesquelles on peut citer: les chaines YouTube *Yàlla Yàlla Tigi*, *alkhuran ak sunna rek*.

34 Ndiaye 2020, 6.

Quand le *flaming* censure et conduit à la censure

Depuis le début des années 1980, les chercheurs ont utilisé le terme *flaming* en corrélation avec un certain nombre d'agissements désinhibés qui s'expriment plus principalement sur internet que sur d'autres outils de communication.[35] Les réseaux sociaux numériques ont permis de prolonger, d'intensifier et de transformer cette pratique par la rhétorique orientée vers une cible précise (personne ou groupe). Cela a permis d'appréhender des controverses de différents ordres sur internet.[36] La multiplicité des formes et la diversité des circonstances sous lesquelles se manifestent les interactions hostiles entre les usagers de l'internet constituent de véritables obstacles pour obtenir un idéal-type de cible du phénomène de *flaming*.

Le *flaming* est réduit à des insultes ou des étiquettes polémiques servant de modes de délégitimation. Le groupe *La vérité sur Seydi Mouhamed El Cheikh*[37] illustre cette pratique d'internautes affinitaires qui mettent en circulation et discutent des publications, par ailleurs, considérées comme hostiles à un leader religieux ciblé. Les arguments textuels échangés et leurs interprétations renseignent sur les objectifs de ce groupe Facebook. Ses membres vont au-delà de fédérer le maximum de musulmans possible pour arrêter la diffusion d'informations pouvant modifier ou influencer l'image positive de la *Tidjaniyya* et de l'islam. Il s'oppose à la diffusion d'informations délibérément biaisées sur les fondements de la confrérie. Cette plateforme[38] s'ancrerait dans une logique de dénigrement de Seydi Mouhamed El Cheikh,[39] qui se fait appeler aussi Khoutboul Akhtaboul Kabir,[40] dont la particularité réside dans son âge mais également dans sa réaction face aux modes de vie actuels, sa tension particulière avec la pratique de la *Tidjaniyya* et ses conceptions spécifiques sur l'islam.[41] Il est porteur d'un enseignement

35 Kiesler, Siegel et McGuire 1984, 1130.

36 En raison de la multiplicité de ses formes, il a été étudié à travers plusieurs concepts différents comme « cyber-intimidation » (Moore et al. 2012, 861), « cyber-harcèlement » ou « cyber-violence », entre autres.

37 Il n'est plus possible à ce jour de voir les commentaires dans ce groupe. C'est sans doute lié aux modifications des paramètres du groupe par ses administrateurs.

38 Elle était fermée à sa création en 2017. Il fallait répondre à quelques questions pour devenir membre. Cette option a été enlevée quelques mois plus tard.

39 Mar Ba à l'état civil, ce marabout draine de grandes foules durant ses « offensives spirituelles » dans différents lieux du Sénégal.

40 Pole suprême de la Sainteté.

41 La pratique de la *Tidjaniyya* professée par *El Cheikh* représente un syncrétisme de méditation et de rituels orthodoxes.

jusque-là inconnu des différentes *zawiyas* sur la chaine de transmission du *wird tidjane*[42] qui est assimilé à une tentative de subversion de la doctrine de Cheikh Ahmed Tidjane pour y faire exister des pratiques, des manières de voir qui n'y sont pas reconnues.[43] Des disciples de la confrérie *Tidjaniyya*, constituée par plusieurs foyers au Sénégal, désapprouvent les prétentions messianiques d'*El Cheikh* par un travail de mise en accusation dans le groupe sur Facebook. Les propos injurieux contre le fondateur du quartier Medina Cheikh de Saint Louis y sont d'autant plus acceptés qu'ils s'adressent à une personne ayant eu « un comportement immoral » ou qui sort de la norme, et pour lequel elle doit être sanctionnée par la communauté musulmane.[44] C'est ce que semble indiquer l'unanimisme des réactions contre ce personnage dans ce groupe Facebook. On observe un usage prolifique de l'irrévérence, par exemple, fait qui s'est généralisé à plusieurs publications de ses détracteurs. Ceci a eu, sans doute, des conséquences sur la représentation de ce leader religieux. Plusieurs membres du groupe ont répondu à la question : « connaissez-vous *El Cheikh* ? » par des qualificatifs irrévérencieux comme : « le menteur », « l'envoyé de Satan », « l'imposteur », « *El Kazab* », entre autres termes. S'y ajoute l'utilisation répétée d'images montées, d'extraits de vidéos ou de gifs animés avec ces qualificatifs. Plusieurs personnes interviewées nous ont avoué qu'ils n'ont jamais pris le temps de l'écouter malgré leurs jugements. Cette forme spécifique de commentaire portant sur le jeune marabout[45] a influencé les représentations communes sur sa communauté. Cependant, la relative imprécision du statut d'El Cheikh qui apparaît tantôt comme le Mahdi Mountazar,[46] tantôt comme le *Khoutboul Akhtaboul Kabir* dans les publications textuelles ou visuelles, semble influencer cette posture hostile contre lui.

Au Sénégal, l'attitude de laisser-faire a longtemps dominé les politiques numériques. L'anonymat offert par internet renforce la conviction qu'il existe peu de risque de sanctions, de punitions ou de justifications. Mais les déclarations publiées dans la sphère virtuelle peuvent mettre en péril l'ordre public ou susciter des tensions à différentes échelles. Les effets pervers induits en partie par les réseaux sociaux, les pratiques de désinformation et de fausses nouvelles ont été soulevés comme l'argument principal des mesures politiques. Pour la paix

42 Il dit que c'est cheikh Ahmed Tidjane en personne qui lui a donné le *Wird* dans sa biographie publiée sur le site www.medinacheikh.com

43 C'est l'avis de plusieurs disciples de la *Tidjaniyya* interrogés.

44 Il est souvent accusé de diverses choses immorales dans les publications.

45 El Cheikh est né en 1983 à Saint-Louis-du-Sénégal.

46 L'Envoyé de Dieu attendu à la fin des temps a toujours fait l'objet d'une attention particulière en Islam. À travers les siècles, il a nourri la piété populaire autant que la réflexion des théologiens.

religieuse et sociale, la loi de 2008 sur la cybercriminalité stipule dans son article 431–40 que :

> l'insulte commise par le biais d'un système informatique envers une personne en raison de son appartenance à un groupe qui se caractérise par la race, la couleur, l'ascendance ou l'origine nationale ou ethnique, ou la religion dans la mesure où cette appartenance sert de prétexte à l'un ou l'autre de ces éléments, ou un groupe de personnes qui se distingue par une de ces caractéristiques sera puni d'un emprisonnement de six (6) mois à sept (7) ans et d'une amende de 1.000.000 à 10.000.000 francs.[47]

De plus, le gouvernement du Sénégal a mis à la disposition des forces de sécurité de nouveaux instruments et s'est assigné une « mission répressive » contre le *flaming*.[48] L'État s'est positionné face à ce nouveau phénomène en incitant les plateformes à s'investir davantage dans la régulation des contenus qu'ils hébergent, laissant paradoxalement courir le risque d'une privatisation des pouvoirs de censure du religieux sur internet. Ainsi, il s'accapare ou réduit au silence l'esprit de certaines catégories, dans un dialogue permanent entre les entrepreneurs administratifs, politiques et religieux d'une part, et les populations d'autre part,[49] au nom de la préservation de la coexistence pacifique et de la bonne entente entre les différentes communautés religieuses.

Il faut toutefois s'interroger sur l'expression de la relation clientélaire que l'État entretient avec les communautés religieuses à travers l'application d'une législation sur les libertés individuelles qui chercherait une adéquation avec la spécificité de la pratique de l'islam au Sénégal.[50] Nous rappelons qu'il existe un

47 Loi n° 2008–11 du 25 janvier 2008 portant sur la cybercriminalité.

48 Le président Macky Sall dit à Touba à propos des insulteurs du net : « Nous allons les traquer et les conduire vers les tribunaux. » Seulement le terme « insulteur du net » n'est pas précisément défini par le législateur dans les textes juridiques.

49 Le président de la République du Sénégal, Macky Sall, l'a indirectement affirmé lors de l'inauguration de la brigade de Gendarmerie de Touba, en compagnie de Serigne Bassirou Mbacké, actuel porte-parole du Khalif General des Mourides qui a été la cible de l'activiste Assane Diouf emprisonné pour des propos diffamatoires contre le marabout. Il apparaît qu'un tel événement a donné lieu à de multiples interprétations. Ankou Sodjago, « Macky Sall annonce la traque des insulteurs du net. » *Senego*, 27 octobre 2018. https://senego.com/macky-sall-annonce-la-traque-des-insulteurs-du-net_787418.html, mise en ligne 23 mai 2020.

50 Les ordres confériques musulmans tirent une partie importante de leur légitimité du rapport privilégié qu'ils entretiennent, depuis la période coloniale, avec les autorités politiques. Ils représentent toujours une force sociale dans la politique de l'État en raison de leurs capacités de mobilisation efficace.

contrat social sénégalais[51] qui régit les relations entre les marabouts et les élites politiques que les nouvelles dynamiques du religieux sur les réseaux sociaux sont en train de reconfigurer. Étant donné que le *flaming* n'a qu'une signification floue[52] à l'état actuel, la loi sur la cybercriminalité peut servir d'arme symbolique pour censurer l'opinion de certaines communautés religieuses ou porter préjudice à la lutte pour la reconnaissance sociale de la diversité de croyances au Sénégal.

« Musulmans connectés » : les acteurs du *flaming* sur Facebook et YouTube

Les débats en ligne sur l'islam impliquent plusieurs profils. Il s'agit généralement d'acteurs du religieux numérique : prêcheurs en ligne, sages, exégètes, ou référents doctrinaux, et gestionnaires de sites spirituels, fidèles, etc. Ils alimentent une sorte de concurrence religieuse sur les réseaux sociaux et se réclament, parfois, d'une communauté ou d'une entreprise religieuse. Agissant de manière le plus souvent autonome, ces « musulmans connectés » occupent une place prépondérante dans le débat sur l'islam au Sénégal, au regard de leur audience. En effet, il existe plusieurs personnages dont les avis comptent du fait de leur audience. Nous pouvons citer Oustaz Oumar Sall qui est suivi par 301 725 abonnés sur Facebook au 6 avril 2022. Il diffuse ses prédications en direct sur sa page Facebook, pratique la médecine traditionnelle et se prononce souvent sur les questions de l'islam en prenant une position réformiste. Il a fait ses études dans les écoles *Al Falah* créées par le Dr. Ahmad Lo, une des sommités de l'islam réformiste au Sénégal. Cheikh Oumar Diagne est également un des personnages influents sur les réseaux sociaux. Il est suivi par plus de 11 938 abonnés à ce jour sur Facebook. Expert financier et enseignant dans plusieurs instituts de commerce à Dakar, il est connu pour ses positions sur certaines questions musulmanes et son implication contre divers phénomènes religieux émergents à travers les réseaux sociaux. Ses avis sont souvent demandés par ses milliers de *followers* sur les différents réseaux. Il revendique une affiliation à la *Tidjaniyya Nassiriyya*. Par le biais de

51 L'autorité politique est réputée proche des ordres religieux avec la réactualisation récurrente du mécanisme communément appelé le « contrat social sénégalais ». Cette notion recouvre, dans l'explication de Donald Cruise O'Brien, un système de relations entre le régime politique, les chefs religieux et leurs disciples. Voir Cruise O'Brien 1992. Il est également possible de trouver de plus amples informations sur le fonctionnement de ce type de relation entre l'État et les ordres confessionnels au Sénégal en consultant Diouf 2013.

52 Il n'est abordé que de manière périphérique ou parcellaire.

séances en direct, il s'est imposé comme « un défenseur de l'islam ». L'internet a permis à ces acteurs, parfois dotés d'un savoir religieux, de s'affranchir de certaines normes de soumission par une participation sur les groupes de discussion et les sites de réseaux sociaux en ligne. Ainsi, les « musulmans connectés » peuvent intervenir en toute liberté là où ils sont moins attendus sous le sceau d'une identité islamique.

Nombreux sont les imams à s'être emparés des réseaux sociaux pour gagner en notoriété et voir leur influence augmenter. L'un des plus visibles d'entre eux, au Sénégal, est l'imam Ahmadou Makhtar Kanté. Cet ancien dirigeant de l'Association des étudiants musulmans de l'Université de Dakar (AEMUD) s'est positionné de manière plus ou moins populiste sur la scène publique avec un style de discours différent du genre conventionnel à orientation didactique de la plupart des imams sénégalais.[53] Il aborde une diversité de thèmes à travers ses interventions sur sa page Facebook : genre, décadence sociale, les minorités et actualités politiques, entre autres. À travers l'animation de sa page Facebook, il parvient à déconstruire ou à resignifier certains stigmates et sensibiliser sa communauté d'abonnés sur la religion musulmane. Sa conception du sens de l'engagement religieux le conduit à donner ses positions sur des questions généralement sensibles dans l'espace public. En effet, sa publication sur la doctrine de la réincarnation a provoqué la très longue controverse qui l'opposa à la communauté *Ahl Laahi*, fondée par Limamou Laye.[54] Il publie sur sa page que : « Les conditions et les critères donnés par les références scripturaires et les interprétations les plus satisfaisantes qui sont données par les oulémas établissent que nous sommes encore dans le temps de l'attente du *Mahdi* et du vrai Messie, Jésus, comme du faux Messie "almasihud-dajjal" ». Cette thèse défendue par imam Kanté à travers un *post* Facebook a été reprise par de multiples sites d'informations en ligne. Elle a occasionné plusieurs réactions des disciples layennes. Cette déclaration a poussé Baytir Ka, président de la commission scientifique de *Nurul Mahdi*, à apporter la réplique de la communauté layenne à travers une contribution intitulée *Imam Ahmad Kanté, d'une mauvaise foi chronique ou d'une ignorance notoire*. Cette controverse n'a pas connu son épilogue lors du débat télévisé qui l'opposait au professeur Mouhamadou Laye, au cours de l'émission hebdomadaire *Eutoub Islam*.[55] Imam Kanté s'est appuyé sur des critères, indices et dates des différents

53 Piga 2006, 291.

54 Il est le guide de la confrérie des layennes du Sénégal qui a proclamé la doctrine du mahdisme. Il est également appelé Baye Laye.

55 Il s'agit d'une émission consacrée à l'islam qui a lieu tous les vendredis sur la DTV, une chaine de télévision privée, animée par Cheikh Tidiane Biteye.

épisodes mahdistes, notamment la révolte d'Abu al-Abbas, contre la dynastie omeyyade et la proclamation du *Mahdi* du Soudan pour réitérer sa position. Le professeur Mouhamadou Laye de la communauté *Ahl Laahi*, qui était son co-débatteur, a réfuté cette thèse en invoquant les écritures de Baye Laye et des érudits de l'époque. Il a également évoqué les miracles produits par Baye Laye comme éléments en conformité avec la prophétie.[56] Quoique les disciples s'accordent sur l'identité du *Mahdi*, l'imam Kanté continue de remettre en cause la compatibilité de la doctrine mahdiste de Seydina Limamou Laye, professée par la communauté *Ahl Laahi*, établie à Yoff et Cambèrene, avec leurs enseignements fondamentaux de l'islam sur les personnes, statuts et fonctions du prophète Muhammad, de Jésus et du *Mahdi*.[57] La manière dont l'Imam Kanté entretient sa visibilité par le biais des réseaux sociaux fait de lui l'une des figures les plus connues de l'imamat « connecté » au Sénégal, même s'il ne représente aucune communauté particulière dans l'islam. C'est pour cette raison sans doute qu'il est qualifié d'« auto-entrepreneur d'influence ».[58]

Les préposés religieux prennent de plus en plus de distance par rapport aux normes en vigueur dans les foyers et les familles religieux. Il s'agit des détenteurs de « savoirs hagiographiques » qui n'exercent pas de fonctions officielles au sein des communautés religieuses mais qui disposent d'une audience assez importante et d'une influence sur les réseaux sociaux à l'instar de Thiédo Mouride Sadikh.[59] Les publications de ce *talibé* mouride consistent en des traitements spécifiquement confrériques de ses désaccords avec ce qui se dit sur la confrérie *Mouridiyya* et sur ses « figures emblématiques ». Ces interventions tentent de recueillir, dans leur fond doctrinal, les enseignements des grands noms de la confrérie à déployer pour capter ses cibles et engager des membres de la communauté dans une réflexion sur ce qui se fait au nom de la *Mouridiyya*. Il prône un retour à l'enseignement de Cheikhoul Khadim comme référent et à la clarté des *Xassaïdes* qui doit s'associer à la défense de l'intégrité de l'œuvre du Cheikh et à la revivification de son héritage. Ses commentaires sont sourcés ou argumentés. Il entreprend de dénigrer ses adversaires par l'identification des « absurdités » repérées dans leurs

56 L'intégralité de l'émission a été partagée par l'imam Kanté sur sa chaine YouTube Imam Ahmadou Makhtar Kanté. Suivie par plus de 4 000 abonnés. Cf. Imam Ahmadou Makhtar Kanté, « Grand débat sur le Mahdi de Yoff entre imam Kanté et Mouhammad Laye. » Vidéo, 17:38. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ElUByv89ITw&t=1058s, mise en ligne 21 mai 2019.

57 Voir le *post* sur ce lien : https://www.facebook.com/ahmadoumakhtar.kante.9/posts/157074231974543, mise en ligne 21 mai 2019.

58 Voir Havard, Wilhelm et Diouf 2020.

59 Diène Mack Faye à l'état civil.

propos à l'encontre de la *Mouridiyya* ou de ses figures emblématiques.[60] Ce disciple de la confrérie de Touba est engagé dans une pratique de défiance vis-à-vis des détracteurs de sa communauté dans le but de « protéger l'intégrité du Cheikh [Ahmadou Bamba] et de son œuvre ».[61] L'examen du contenu sémantique de ses *posts* révèle une forme de communication autour d'une « supériorité » de son guide sur les autres marabouts au Sénégal.

Il n'est pas possible de catégoriser objectivement les « musulmans connectés » en fonction de leur genre, de leur âge, ou de leur milieu plutôt urbain ou rural. Certaines croyances poussent les chercheurs à croire qu'ils sont tous jeunes. D'autant plus qu'on parle d'irrévérence dans un contexte de méfiance envers les modèles prédéfinis et les vérités définitives et d'une quête de la différence. En réalité, il existe une multitude de profils, protégés souvent derrière des pseudonymes qui trouveraient sur internet un exutoire idéal pour manifester leurs frustrations sans risque d'en payer les conséquences. Certains acteurs acquièrent une forme particulière d'autorité qui dérive d'une stratégie mise en œuvre pour corriger les incohérences. Mais, ils s'inscrivent aussi dans les dynamiques de recherche de la reconnaissance sociale et dans l'économie de l'attention sur les réseaux sociaux.

Flaming : une pratique de défiance aux fonctions variables au Sénégal

La dimension subjective de l'appropriation d'internet permet de positionner l'internaute non pas comme un observateur passif, mais plutôt comme un acteur qui contribue à la construction des pratiques religieuses selon son usage du dispositif technologique. De ce fait, le processus de construction de la fonction d'une technologie chez l'usager occupe un rôle important dans la détermination de l'usage, celui-ci étant bien plus important que les propriétés proposées par la technologie elle-même. Les révolutions technologiques ont influencé les pratiques des acteurs religieux avec des transformations dans leurs modes d'engagement qui

60 Dans plusieurs vidéos, Thiédo Mouride Sadikh qualifie d'absurdes les propos de certains guides religieux à l'endroit de la *Mouridiyya* ou des chefs religieux mourides.

61 Voir l'entretien en réponse aux propos qu'auraient tenus Serigne Moustapha Sy, guide du *Dahiratoul Moustarchidina Wal Moustarchidati*. Sunubuzz.com, « Vidéo : La cinglante réponse de Thiédo Mouride à Serigne Moustapha Sy. » https://sunubuzzsn.com/video-la-cinglante-reponse-de-thiedo-mouride-a-serigne-moustapha-sy/, mise en ligne 13 novembre 2019.

ont des conséquences sur la perception générale du croire. Les *flames* des chaînes YouTube et des pages Facebook sont diffusées pour justifier de la supériorité d'une doctrine, pour convaincre de l'inadéquation voire du danger des communautés et des enseignements de ses adversaires et, enfin, pour rendre familier son nom et celui de son groupe religieux auprès des internautes. L'individu qui s'approprie de nouveaux objets peut développer des usages qui « dévient » de la trajectoire initialement prescrite par les concepteurs. L'analyse des *flames* nous amène à faire deux hypothèses : (a) quand la publication mentionne le nom d'une figure ou le nom d'une communauté donnée, c'est généralement pour défendre une doctrine ou vanter les qualités d'une figure ; (b) lorsqu'elle mentionne le nom d'un chef spirituel concurrent ou de son groupe, c'est pour attaquer ses idées ou mettre en évidence ses défauts.

L'usage du *flaming* par certains leaders religieux s'accompagne d'une volonté de légitimer une doctrine, fabriquer et diffuser certains discours qui sont généralement liés à des situations volatiles. Dans une vidéo d'une conférence de l'université du Ramadan, Serigne Moustapha Sy disait que Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba avait dit que tous les individus qui ne se conformeraient pas aux recommandations de Dieu et du Prophète ne sont pas ses disciples même s'ils s'identifient à lui. Et pour réitérer cela devant Dieu, il aurait choisi El hadji Malick Sy pour être son témoin. D'après le guide du *Dahira Moustasidine Wal Moustachidati*,[62] son grand-père l'a accepté sous réserve d'une information que Serigne Touba devrait adresser à ses légataires pour que nul ne l'ignore.[63] En voulant éviter de frustrer ou de vexer ses coreligionnaires mourides, Serigne Moustapha Sy a fait preuve d'une grande ingéniosité en évoquant la relation des deux marabouts mais le discours a fini par provoquer l'indignation d'une partie de la communauté mouride. Il a utilisé le grand potentiel esthétique d'un récit factuel insondable. Ici, il est possible de parler de la notion de *tactiques* qui désigne « des pratiques qui sont autre chose que des erreurs de manipulation, et qui correspondent à des intentions, voire des préméditations ».[64] Il s'est basé sur des schémas cognitifs intégrant un ensemble de valeurs, des représentations spécifiques, une mobilisation émotionnelle et une incitation à juger ou à prendre position. Il serait nécessaire de distinguer, dans cette stratégie, l'utilisation de la persuasion ou de l'influence

62 Voir Samson 2005.

63 Pour écouter les propos de Serigne Moustapha Sy:
Rendez-vous du savoir, « Li Serigne Touba niane Mame Maodo Malick Sy. » Vidéo, 05:06. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgkVb9FeKRI, mise en ligne 20 octobre 2019.

64 Perriault 1989, 203.

dans le message émis[65] par le marabout. On pourra questionner, du point de vue des différents commentaires, la dialectique entre l'interprétation et l'imagination pour arriver à penser le fonctionnement de ce genre de déclaration. Les propos mêlent différents aspects qui produisent des ambiguïtés en ce sens qu'ils font coexister différents buts destinés à diverses audiences. Selon une figure religieuse interrogée à propos de la vidéo :

> Les publications sur les différentes confréries sont reçues de manière différente, c'est la raison pour laquelle on doit faire attention sur ce qui se dit sur internet. Il y a des gens qui changent toujours les histoires si cela ne les arrange pas. Par exemple, tout le monde n'admet pas que Serigne Touba était le seul qui a prié dans l'enceinte de la salle d'audience pourtant tous les autres marabouts étaient présents ce jour. Lorsqu'on explique cela beaucoup de personnes sont en colère. Mais les gens doivent être en colère contre leurs marabouts et non pas contre Serigne Touba.[66]

Notre interlocuteur a privilégié un regard contempteur et moraliste dans l'interprétation de cette vidéo. Pourtant, des points de vue différents ont été exprimés par d'autres disciples.

Certaines publications qui apparaissent comme des *flames* sont partagées par des leaders religieux dans une perspective de contre-offensive informationnelle et de dénonciation. La vidéo « *Serigne Moustapha Sy lii nga wax du mbind'um Serin Tuuba* »[67] relève de cette catégorie. Elle a été réalisée par Serigne Abdoulaye Diop Bichri en réponse aux propos du responsable moral du *Dahira Moustacidine Wal Moustachidati*. Il considère que le marabout a partagé des informations trompeuses et diffusé une fausse interprétation d'un propos en mettant en avant l'irrévérence.[68] Le conférencier mouride ajoute que l'utilisation des propos d'autrui, à des fins narcissiques, serait incompatibles avec le Coran et la Sunna. D'ailleurs, pour lui, remettre en cause l'enseignement de Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba au Sénégal relèverait de la provocation. Ici, l'irrévérence serait le produit d'appropriations et de détournements de problèmes subjectifs et d'affiliations spiri-

65 Duteil-Ogata et al. 2015, 174.

66 Propos recueillis lors d'un entretien, le 24 Octobre 2019, avec un membre de la commission d'organisation du Magal des 2 *Rakkas* de Saint Louis. L'interviewer a tenu à garder l'anonymat.

67 Ma traduction : « Serigne Moustapha Sy, votre propos n'est pas l'écriture de Serigne Touba ».

68 Serigne Abdoulaye Diop Bichri L'Officiel. « #TOOÑ_BAAXUL #SERIGNE_MOUSTAPHA_SY lii nga wax du mbind'um#SËRIÑ_TUUBAA. » https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=470957210197748&extid=rgLu6nFKvjDVlGv3, mise en ligne 14 novembre 2019.

tuelles.[69] Il a articulé son intervention autour de la riposte contre le contenu dénigreur à l'endroit de la communauté mouride avec des considérations affectives et émotionnelles.

Par ailleurs, faire taire un adversaire en l'intimidant permet d'occuper l'espace du débat et d'assurer une visibilité optimale aux leaders et aux arguments islamiques que l'on défend. Pour comprendre cette approche, il faut aborder les imaginaires qui émanent du rapport spécifique que les « musulmans connectés » entretiennent avec l'irrévérence. On pourra également le questionner, du point de vue des différents commentaires, de la dialectique entre l'interprétation et l'imagination pour arriver à penser la constitution et le fonctionnement de cette pratique. La consultation des commentaires permet de constater que le recours aux communautés de discussion n'implique pas de participation aux échanges, mais seulement la consultation des informations diffusées. Les propos virulents constituent pour les « musulmans connectés » un moyen de gagner en reconnaissance dans les communautés de discussion, d'apparaître comme une personne ressource, voire un « leader d'opinion ». La pratique du *flaming* deviendrait, dans une certaine mesure, une démarche d'auto-affirmation qui encouragerait une logique de marchandisation de soi et de sa connaissance religieuse au Sénégal.

Une prise de parole stratégique

Les pratiques d'irrévérence ne datent pas d'hier au Sénégal mais certaines tendances irrévérencieuses apparues récemment semblent être amplifiées sur les réseaux sociaux. Ce qui est nouveau est, d'une part, l'émergence du *flaming* dans le débat religieux sur internet permettant la viabilité d'une nouvelle modalité de prise de parole et, d'autre part, le fait que des « musulmans connectés » se prétendent émancipés des normes de révérence. La question du *flaming* s'inscrit au cœur du débat religieux au Sénégal.

Beaucoup d'acteurs ont adopté cette modalité de prise de parole pour amplifier le débat religieux. Les injures et les attaques verbales sont associées aux

69 Même si le religieux est différent de l'ethnie ou de la race, il est possible de postuler que certains référents ethniques, linguistiques et raciaux ont une rigidité quasi-sacrée et cela justifie en grande partie les dérives associées à ces éléments. Toutefois, le religieux est de l'ordre d'une induration sociale plus ancienne souvent construite sur des préceptes et des traditions organisés dans un Texte ou des « Écritures » dans les religions abrahamiques.

prêches par des « musulmans connectés ». Oustaz Makhtar Sarr[70] est l'un des prédicateurs qui a brisé les règles de révérence auxquelles étaient habituées les générations précédentes en plaçant ses *flames* contre *El Cheikh* au centre du débat religieux.[71] En inscrivant sa position dans le registre des stéréotypes, des préjugés et des rumeurs, sa prise de parole s'est presque vidée de sa substance religieuse parce que n'étant pas justifiée par le Coran et la Sunna. Le *flaming* lui permet d'entretenir un certain « entre soi », qui est une ressource stratégique efficace pour maintenir sa popularité et son sentiment d'affirmation. En fait, il exclut sa cible du débat religieux par l'affront et le déraillement de sa communication. Les « musulmans connectés » s'affranchissent des conventions de retenue et des codes de la politesse pour affirmer leur quête de reconnaissance. Ils profitent de la protection de l'anonymat, l'invisibilité ou le manque d'autorité sur les plateformes en ligne pour exprimer leur opinion dans un débat religieux dont les limites précises entre le permis et l'interdit restent indéterminées.

Toutefois, il serait intéressant d'envisager d'autres approches méthodologiques pour étudier les pratiques d'irrévérence en ligne au Sénégal, par exemple, en mobilisant plus largement l'observation ou en ayant recours aux entrevues en ligne qui s'échelonnent généralement sur une plus longue durée.

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70 Célèbre prédicateur proche de la branche de la *Tidjaniyya* de Tivaoune.

71 Le lecteur peut visionner la vidéo de la page *Taxawu Sunu Tariqa Tijani* : « Oustaz Makhtar SARR "arrête" El Cheikh et clôt le débat. » sur ce lien https://www.facebook.com/TaqawouSunuTariqa/videos/641299509610664/, mise en ligne 14 novembre 2019.

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Bourahima Diomandé

Les « *imams chocos* » ou la mutation de la figure de l'autorité religieuse musulmane en Côte d'Ivoire contemporaine

Un oxymore, « *imam choco* »

La décennie 1970 est un tournant majeur dans l'histoire de l'islam en Côte d'Ivoire. Elle correspond à la fois à la création au niveau national de la première association de jeunesse musulmane, l'Association des élèves et étudiants musulmans de Côte d'Ivoire (AEEMCI),[1] au retour d'une importante vague de diplômés arabophones issus des universités arabes[2] et à l'intensification de la crise doctrinale entre les musulmans dits « wahhabites » et ceux appelés « traditionnalistes », terme générique utilisé pour désigner les anti-wahhabites.[3] Suivant ces mutations, ladite décennie fut, dans une certaine mesure, le point de départ d'un nombre important de travaux de recherche sur les communautés musulmanes ivoiriennes. Ces travaux ont principalement rendu compte de la situation générale de l'islam, c'est-à-dire de la pénétration et de l'évolution de ladite religion, souvent à travers les relations entre l'État et les musulmans.

Contrairement à ces réflexions généralisées, peu d'études ont porté sur le vécu quotidien des musulmans, leurs manières d'être et de faire.[4] S'inscrivant dans la dynamique contemporaine du religieux, la présente étude porte sur les pratiques des imams, des figures du religieux perçues souvent comme immuables. L'une des transformations dans le champ de l'imamat est indéniablement le renouvellement des conditions d'exercice de la mission de l'imam.[5] S'il est vrai que l'imam d'aujourd'hui continue d'accomplir les mêmes fonctions que celui d'hier, les conditions d'exercice de sa mission ont été repensées. En Côte d'Ivoire, cette

1 Touré 2008, 110.
2 Binaté 2012, 658.
3 Miran 1998, 14.
4 LeBlanc 2005.
5 Seze 2012, 37.

Bourahima Diomandé: Global Studies Institute, Université de Genève, 30, Quai Ernest-Ansermet, 1211 Genève 4, Switzerland, e-mail: bourahima.diomande@unige.ch

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manière de faire des imams est intervenue dans un contexte de construction, ce que Marie Miran a nommé l'« islam moderne ».[6]

À ses débuts, l'islam dit moderne ambitionnait constituer une « sorte de troisième voie entre le wahhabisme marginalisé par son sectarisme et la tendance des associations islamiques du courant traditionnel asphyxié par sa politisation ».[7] En clair, il s'agit d'un islam qui prétend s'accommoder à l'évolution de la société. Ce mouvement fut porté par une poignée de guides religieux aidée par des élèves et étudiants issus de l'école laïque puis de cadres et intellectuels musulmans. Longtemps resté le monopole de personnes âgées, le champ de l'imamat en Côte d'Ivoire s'est ainsi fortement reconfiguré au cours de ces dernières années.

Contrairement aux vieux[8] cheikhs qui ne divulguaient jamais le rituel de leur mission, les générations d'imams qui virent le jour à partir des années 1970 s'adonnent, dans la transcendance de la foi, à des pratiques nouvelles. Cette mutation s'est in fine traduite par l'émergence, dans les années 2000, d'un genre nouveau d'imams appelés de façon vernaculaire *imam choco*. Adjectif qualificatif dérivé de l'argot ivoirien, le mot *choco* est un terme créé par les artistes de la musique urbaine ivoirienne, le *coupé-décalé*, un style musical né de la crise ivoirienne. Il est le diminutif du mot *chocolaté* qui signifie sucré ou intéressant. Le mot *choco* est employé pour désigner les personnes qui se démarquent par leurs manières de faire aussi bien au niveau vestimentaire qu'au niveau comportemental.

Dans un sens plus large, le terme choco renvoie à tout ce qui touche aux modes de vie de la société mondaine par opposition au milieu populaire. Généralement, il est utilisé par les jeunes pour faire allusion à ceux d'entre eux qui ont un goût prononcé pour la mode. De ce point de vue, le vocable choco tranche indéniablement avec le statut d'imam, une fonction perçue comme austère. Nonobstant cette antinomie, l'*imam choco* est défini comme un imam qui s'adapte aux réalités du monde contemporain. Il s'agit prosaïquement d'un imam « à la mode ». Circonscrit au départ, à quelques mosquées de la ville d'Abidjan, la mégapole ivoirienne, le phénomène d'*imams chocos* se propage progressivement à l'intérieur du pays du fait du dynamisme des guides religieux et de l'exigence des fidèles.

Comparativement aux travaux relativement abondants sur l'islam en Côte d'Ivoire, la figure de l'imam est moins présente dans l'historiographie portant sur

6 Miran 2006, 295.

7 Ibid.

8 Ici, le terme « vieux » est utilisé pour renvoyer à une catégorie sociale et non à une cohorte d'âge. Il n'a pas une connotation péjorative. Il a été choisi parce qu'il était beaucoup utilisé par nos enquêtés pour faire allusion aux premières générations d'imams en Côte d'Ivoire.

le fait religieux. Probablement parce qu'il est difficile à départir de la vie communautaire en islam, l'imam a moins retenu l'attention des chercheurs intéressés par ladite religion dans ce pays.[9] Pourtant, de par la centralité de sa fonction, l'imam est un acteur indispensable dans la vie communautaire musulmane. Cette réflexion se propose de décrire et d'analyser les nouvelles habitudes observées dans le champ de l'imamat en Côte d'Ivoire dans un contexte de réveil islamique, de quête d'égalité politique et d'internationalisation des pratiques religieuses. La particularité du cas ivoirien réside dans le fait que cette métamorphose de l'autorité religieuse musulmane a une forte connotation chrétienne (catholique et pentecôtiste) et révèle, en dehors du profil classique de l'imamat, quelques cas atypiques.[10]

La méthodologie employée pour cette étude, outre la recherche bibliographique, s'appuie sur des articles de presse ainsi que des enquêtes de terrain menées entre 2018 et 2019 à Abidjan et dans des villes de l'intérieur de la Côte d'Ivoire : Bouaké, Korhogo, Yamoussoukro, Odienné, Touba, Daloa, Bondoukou, Bouna. Concernant l'étude des pratiques, lors des observations de terrain, l'accent a été mis plus particulièrement sur les manières d'être et de faire des imams aussi bien dedans qu'en dehors des mosquées.

Les séances d'observations participantes ont été assorties d'entretiens formels. Ces entretiens semi-directifs ont permis de collecter des données empiriques auprès de catégories sociales différentes, dont des imams (vieux et jeunes), des responsables d'associations musulmanes, des journalistes ou de (simples) fidèles musulmans. Suivant une approche à la fois historique et ethnographique, le présent travail articule trois axes principaux : le premier retrace le contexte d'émergence de ce qui est convenu d'appeler aujourd'hui *imamat choco* ; le deuxième décrit les parcours et stratégies des *imams chocos* ; le troisième axe analyse les enjeux des mutations observées.

Sur les traces des précurseurs de l'*imamat choco*

Tel que connu aujourd'hui, le phénomène de l'*imam choco* prend sa source dans le contexte du mouvement de réislamisation de la société ivoirienne initiée dans

9 En dehors de notre travail (Diomandé et Bamba 2020), seule Marie Miran a consacré deux articles sur les trajectoires de vie de deux célèbres imams en Côte d'Ivoire (Miran 2000 ; Miran et Touré 2012).

10 Aguib Touré, un chantre devenu imam ; Hamidou Berthé, un basketteur amateur devenu imam de façon autodidacte.

les années 1970. Il est l'aboutissement des actions d'imams dits néo-réformistes, revenus des instituts supérieurs de formation islamiques des pays arabes.

À la recherche du savoir

Dans le souci de parfaire leur connaissance religieuse, des étudiants ivoiriens commencèrent à se rendre individuellement, à partir des années 1950, dans les pays arabo-musulmans pour y poursuivre leurs études. Timide au départ, cette entreprise de formation religieuse connait un tournant majeur en 1962. C'est à cette date, à l'initiative du roi Saoud d'Arabie Saoudite, que fut créée l'Université islamique de Médine ; une institution dont le but premier était de former des missionnaires imprégnés de l'idéologie wahhabite et capable de la diffuser dans leur pays d'origine.[11] Ainsi, en marge des départs individuels, des voyages collectifs furent organisés par des instituts de formation islamique.

Localement et dans le but de mettre les musulmans à l'abri des influences idéologiques du monde arabe, engagé dans une guerre contre Israël depuis 1948, et de préserver leurs relations avec l'État hébreu, les autorités politiques ivoiriennes adoptèrent une attitude méfiante vis-à-vis des pays arabes. Cette méfiance envers les États arabes contraignit les étudiants issus de la Côte d'Ivoire à se rendre dans des pays voisins (Niger, Ghana, Mali, etc.) pour y mener les démarches administratives en vue d'effectuer le voyage dans les universités arabes.[12] C'est ainsi qu'un certain nombre d'entre eux arrivèrent dans le monde arabe.

En analysant le parcours de ces derniers, deux profils se dégagent : celui d'une orientation théologique et un autre scientifique et technique arrimé à une formation islamique. Dans le cadre de notre étude, c'est le second profil qui nous intéresse. Il comprend également deux catégories : d'un côté, les étudiants qui n'ont été que dans les médersas ou madrasas (terme utilisé pour désigner l'école islamique nouvelle par opposition à l'école coranique traditionnelle) en Afrique subsaharienne (Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, etc.) ; de l'autre, ceux qui, après avoir effectué des études dans le système éducatif islamique et/ou laïque en Côte d'Ivoire, ont continué leur formation dans les universités et centres de formation supérieurs du Moyen-Orient.

11 Schulze 1993, 25.
12 Binaté, Ouédraogo et Audet-Gosselin 2019, 20.

Le retour au bercail

Anémie spirituelle, frictions intra-communautaires

À partir des années 1970, les étudiants diplômés des universités arabes commencent à retourner progressivement au pays. À cette époque, l'opinion publique ivoirienne avait de l'islam l'image d'une religion aux antipodes du progrès. Compte tenu du fait que les quartiers à dominance islamique, les *dioulabougous,*[13] étaient synonymes de mendicité autour des mosquées et d'insalubrité, l'islam était perçu comme une religion exclusivement compatible avec les quartiers populaires, les milieux ruraux ou encore les personnes âgées. En conséquence, les jeunes exprimèrent peu d'engouement dans la fréquentation des mosquées. Suivant ces perceptions, et craignant d'être pénalisé dans leur carrière professionnelle, les cadres musulmans étaient moins zélés à extérioriser leur foi.[14] Ils se satisfaisaient, pour la plupart, de la pratique d'un islam limité à l'espace privé.

En outre, depuis 1946, date du retour de La Mecque de Tiékoro Kamagaté, premier adepte officiel du wahhabisme[15] en Côte d'Ivoire, les musulmans étaient confrontés à des divisions communautaires sur fond de crises idéologiques. Les années 1970, période de multiplication des communautés wahhabites par ricochet des projets de construction des mosquées de l'obédience religieuse éponyme, constituèrent l'âge d'or de ces clivages intra-communautaires. De nombreux centres urbains du pays furent le théâtre de ces querelles doctrinales. Schématiquement, la crise divisa les musulmans en deux groupes (musulmans dits « wahhabites » d'une part, musulmans dits « traditionalistes » d'autre part) entre lesquels toute possibilité de réconciliation paraissait impossible. L'islam était aussi en butte à une autre difficulté : la surveillance étatique.

Allah pris en otage

Félix Houphouët-Boigny, dans le double objectif de tenir les musulmans loin des influences idéologiques arabes et de s'assurer de leur soutien permanent, développa vers l'islam un ensemble d'approches alternant entre cooptation et surveillance. Cette politique revêtit plusieurs variantes, notamment l'imposition d'un

13 Miran 2006, 47.

14 Kamagaté 2018, 105.

15 L'espace cultuel musulman était auparavant le monopole du rite malékite, plus connu sous le nom « islam traditionnaliste ».

haut fonctionnaire d'État comme représentant officiel des musulmans. De 1960 à 1985, Mamadou Coulibaly, président du Conseil économique et social, troisième personnalité politique de l'État, occupa ladite fonction. Durant son exercice, ce dernier utilisa l'islam pour assurer le soutien indéfectible des musulmans au pouvoir. Il alla même jusqu'à proposer une réduction du nombre journalier de prières canoniques.[16] Après son décès en 1985, Lanzéni Poto Coulibaly, Garde des Sceaux, ministre de la Justice et membre du Conseil exécutif du Bureau Politique du Parti unique, le Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), le remplaça et perpétua sa mission.

L'État se faisait également représenter lors de la célébration de fêtes islamiques (Ramadan, Tabaski). Dans les années 1960, la plupart des représentants de l'État participant aux fêtes musulmanes étaient des chrétiens. À compter des années 1970, face aux critiques de quelques imams, ils furent remplacés par de hauts responsables politiques musulmans. Dans cette mission, leurs tâches étaient bien définies. Dans les villes à l'intérieur du pays, sauf rares exceptions, les élus locaux assistèrent à la prière dans la grande mosquée de leur localité. Dans les communes d'Abidjan, les membres du gouvernement étaient les hôtes d'honneur des principales mosquées. S'il est vrai que cette présence attestait de la solidarité du chef de l'État envers les musulmans, elle ne demeurait pas moins une continuité de la politique musulmane de l'administration coloniale avec son corollaire de contraintes, à savoir le contrôle des marabouts (imams), des mosquées, des écoles coraniques et des livres islamiques.[17]

De même, l'État ne fit pas de l'organisation du hadj à La Mecque une priorité.[18] Par exemple, jusqu'en 1995 il refusa d'acquérir un bâtiment pour loger les pèlerins. Aussi bloqua-t-il d'importants transferts de fonds concédés par les organismes islamiques internationaux à des associations islamiques nationales.[19] Il retarda également la reconnaissance officielle de certaines associations islamiques, notamment la plus grande organisation de jeunesse musulmane de Côte d'Ivoire, l'AEEMCI créée en 1972, mais reconnue officiellement en 1979. Dans la même logique, l'État s'opposa à toutes les initiatives islamiques jugées suspectes, notamment la création d'une fédération des associations islamiques. Dans les années 1960, un préfet musulman d'Abidjan qui avait souhaité l'organisation centralisée de la Tabaski dans la capitale fut muté.[20]

16 Miran 2006, 177.
17 Triaud 1974.
18 Madore et Traoré 2018, 179–208.
19 Miran 2006, 181.
20 Miran 2006, 182.

Le contrôle exercé par l'État sur l'espace public musulman finit par entraîner un assujettissement de l'islam vis-à-vis du pouvoir politique. Conséquemment, les mosquées devinrent des espaces de soutien aux actions de l'État et les imams, les principaux acteurs. Il n'était pas rare, en effet, dans les sermons ou après d'importantes cérémonies religieuses ou politiques que l'imam fut soumis à un entretien radiodiffusé émaillé de l'actualisation de la fidélité des musulmans au chef de l'État. Parlant de ce musellement de l'islam sous Félix Houphouët-Boigny, le guide de la communauté musulmane, le Cheikh *al Aïma* Boikary Fofana (ou Aboubacar Fofana) fit remarquer que : « Sous le parti unique, le PDCI avait complètement embrigadé les imams. Ils étaient même plus militants du PDCI ».[21] Dès lors, pour ce dernier, une redéfinition de la place de l'islam dans la société, voire dans la République, était nécessaire.

Au chevet de la *Oumma*

De retour du monde arabe, les nouveaux diplômés s'installèrent majoritairement à Abidjan et à Bouaké, deux villes qui concentrent la quasi-totalité des instituts supérieurs islamiques du pays et des sièges des associations musulmanes. À Abidjan, cette installation se fit à une période où l'islam sortait des communes populaires, telles qu'Adjamé et Treichville pour s'introduire dans les quartiers des communes de Cocody, de Yopougon et du Plateau. Dans ces quartiers de moyen et haut standing où les fidèles sont généralement constitués d'intellectuels, ils furent sollicités pour guider spirituellement les communautés musulmanes qui s'y formèrent. En plus de leur jeunesse, la particularité de ces imams résidait dans le fait que leur choix ne se fit pas selon le critère de filiation maraboutique, mais en vertu de leur savoir islamique.[22]

Compte tenu des difficultés (susmentionnées) auxquelles l'islam était en proie, ces imams initièrent un mouvement de réveil islamique. Faisant partie des premiers à regagner le pays, Tidiane Ba,[23] Aboubacar (Boikary) Fofana[24] et Mohamed Lamine Kaba[25] furent les précurseurs de ce mouvement néo-réformiste ; le quartier de la Riviera à Cocody, le point de départ. Ils y animèrent heb-

21 Boikary Fofana, président du Conseil supérieur des imams, Cheick *al Aïma* de la communauté musulmane en Côte d'Ivoire, le 27 février 2019 à Abidjan (Cocody).

22 Ibrahim Doumbia, ex-rédacteur en chef d'*Islam Infos*, responsable actuel de la presse islamique en ligne *Plume Libre*, le 5 mars 2019 à Abidjan (Cocody).

23 Miran 2000.

24 Miran et Touré 2012.

25 Miran 2006, 301.

domadairement les causeries-débats du mois du ramadan en français. L'usage du français comme moyen de communication dans l'espace public musulman ivoirien était déjà une nouveauté, car auparavant le dioula était la principale langue usitée. Dans le but de les faire connaître et de les faire accepter par les fidèles dès leur retour au pays, de jeunes prédicateurs en formation dans les pays arabes étaient programmés aux côtés du trio.[26] À l'instar de leurs prédécesseurs, ces derniers devinrent imams dès leur retour.

Issu de l'école laïque en Côte d'Ivoire, ce nouveau groupe d'imams était constitué majoritairement d'anciens membres de l'AEEMCI et de personnes ayant poursuivi leurs études supérieures dans des universités arabes, notamment en Arabie Saoudite et en Égypte. Nous avons, entre autres, Cissé Djiguiba (diplômé en sociolinguistique), Sékou Sylla (diplômé en biosciences) et Binaté Ibourahima (diplômé en histoire). Ces imams étaient parfaitement à l'aise dans les langues et systèmes culturels français et arabes. Titulaires de diplômes islamiques basés sur la raison analytique, une logique de pensée présente chez les diplômés de l'école laïque, ils furent très vite adulés par une frange de la communauté musulmane, notamment la jeunesse estudiantine pour leur éloquence, leur culture générale et connaissance des problèmes de société.

Parlant de cette mutation, Ladji Sidibé, un journaliste chargé de couvrir les activités islamiques pour le journal d'État, *Fraternité Matin*, rapportait :

> Les temps ont changé et les imams avec (. . .). Ce sont les "imams de la mondialisation" qui ne souffrent d'aucun complexe et qui peuvent aborder tous les débats. Il est loin le temps où nos imams traitaient de "Kaffiris" tous ceux qui osaient dire que la terre tournait autour du soleil. Nos imams sont à cheval sur les cultures islamiques et occidentales, ce sont des hommes imprégnés aussi bien des connaissances théologiques que scientifiques et techniques.[27]

Ce constat faisait suite à l'apparition d'imams habillés en pantalon, chemise et cravate ; mode vestimentaire qu'ils gardèrent parfois pour officier les prières.[28] Pourtant, dans l'histoire de l'islam en Côte d'Ivoire, le boubou fut généralement présenté comme le signe distinctif des *talibés* à la différence de la culotte courte et du pantalon réservés aux élèves et lycéens. La nouvelle orientation dans le champ imamal n'augurait pas seulement d'un changement de forme, mais aussi

26 Touré 2008, 45.

27 Miran 2006, 366.

28 Dosso Mamadou, imam principal de la « mosquée rouge » à Adjamé et directeur de Cabinet du président du Conseil national islamique, le 9 février 2019 à Abidjan (Adjamé).

de l'évolution de la pensée musulmane en Côte d'Ivoire comme l'attestait l'imam Tidiane Ba lors d'un échange avec un journaliste français :

> Vous me voyez vêtu comme vous, d'une chemisette et d'un pantalon. Quand j'étais jeune, les gens de mon entourage n'auraient pas admis que je m'habille de la sorte. Cela faisait occidental, européen : c'était bon pour les garçons qui suivaient "l'école française". Mais pour moi, il fallait porter un boubou et un turban. Car j'ai accompli des études religieuses.[29]

Dans la même dynamique, les nouveaux guides religieux apportèrent le message de l'islam sur les ondes de la télévision ivoirienne dans le cadre de l'émission islamique *Allah Akbar* animée par Souleymane Doumbia.[30] Ils profitèrent aussi des dissensions autour de l'observation du croissant lunaire pour la fixation de la date de la fin du ramadan pour créer, en 1988, un Conseil des imams, l'ancêtre de l'actuel COSIM (Conseil supérieur des imams, des mosquées et des affaires islamiques), afin de donner une assise formelle à l'élan islamique. Les propos de l'imam Boikary Fofana sont évocateurs du rôle primordial que ces imams ambitionnaient jouer dans la vie communautaire musulmane et, par-delà, nationale :

> Il est temps que nous prenions nos responsabilités et ne pas laisser la religion dans la main de ceux qui ne sont pas compétents en la matière. On a suffisamment suivi les autres. Il s'agit de notre affaire.[31]

La prise de responsabilité des musulmans se matérialisa par la création, en 1993, du Conseil national islamique (CNI). Cet organe fédératif s'occupait des questions temporelles tandis que le COSIM avait la charge des questions spirituelles. À titre de rappel, la question de la synchronisation des fêtes islamiques poussa Alpha Cissé, le directeur de l'Institut de géographie tropicale, à établir un calendrier annuel pour servir de référence aux musulmans en Côte d'Ivoire. Après la mort de Cissé en 1984, les dissensions ressurgirent. Les communautés ivoiriennes suivaient des instructions contradictoires tandis que les communautés étrangères s'alignèrent sur les recommandations de leur pays d'origine.

Étant donné que la nouvelle génération d'imams ne s'attaquait pas frontalement à l'ancienne, la cohabitation entre les deux groupes se fit sans heurts visibles. Toutes ces actions donnèrent un visage nouveau à l'islam ivoirien. À partir de 2006, elles ont fini par faire naître, dans le parler populaire ivoirien, le terme *imam choco*, sous lequel ces nouveaux imams sont souvent désignés.

29 Miran 2001, 299.
30 Miran 2006, 319.
31 Ibid., 372.

Les pratiques de l'*imam choco*

S'inscrivant dans la continuité des actions du trio d'imams (Tidiane Ba, Aboubacar Fofana et Mohamed Lamine Kaba) et de leurs acolytes, le phénomène de l'*imamat choco* correspond, dans ses manifestations, à une évolution de la figure de l'autorité religieuse musulmane en Côte d'Ivoire contemporaine. Celle-ci est observable à plusieurs niveaux.

Un rapport désinvolte au texte

Comparativement à l'homélie du prêtre, le sermon ne se limite pas uniquement aux questions cultuelles.[32] D'évidence, il est un puissant moyen de mobilisation communautaire entremêlant questions cultuelles, politiques, économiques et socioculturelles. Fait en arabe au départ, le sermon commença à se faire en dioula du fait des wahhabites. Après y avoir introduit le français, les néo-réformistes songèrent à sa professionnalisation dans les années 1990, dans un climat sociopolitique marqué par les amalgames (entre Dioula, musulmans, étrangers) liés au concept de l'ivoirité.[33] Le premier séminaire de grande envergure de formation des imams organisé par le COSIM à l'École supérieure internationale de l'électricité (ESIE) de Bingerville à l'approche des élections présidentielles de 1995, boycottées par l'opposition, fit de la « conduite » du sermon l'un de ses axes clés.[34] Par la suite, le Conseil des imams organisa d'autres séances de recyclage des imams. Elles visèrent toutes à inculquer aux guides religieux des aptitudes nécessaires pour mieux exercer leurs missions.

Se faisant naguère selon un recueil de textes immuables, le sermon est désormais inspiré de l'actualité sociopolitique. Ainsi, dans son appropriation par les *imams chocos*, le sermon de l'*imam choco* suit un ensemble de techniques. Dans son prône, l'*imam choco* ne traite qu'une seule thématique. Il ne fait plus autant de digressions dans ses explications. Il ne lit plus intégralement le texte de son sermon ou du moins très peu. Il s'exprime d'une voix audible assortie d'une communication gestuelle. S'inspirant assurément des prédicateurs des mouvances pentecôtistes en la matière, les *imams chocos*, dans leurs sermons, mettent un point d'honneur à utiliser le langage corporel afin de faire vivre aux fidèles des

32 Reeber 2000.
33 Konaté 2003, 254.
34 « Le COSIM recycle les imams. » *Fraternité Matin*, 11 octobre 1995.

émotions (tristesse, colère, peur, joie, etc.) visant à aboutir à une repentance sincère.

S'il est vrai que les sermons des *imams chocos* sont couramment donnés en dioula et en français, une large portion horaire est accordée à la seconde langue. Certains imams vont même plus loin en traduisant leur texte en anglais. Ayant étudié l'anglais à l'université d'Abidjan puis à l'Institut de langues et d'études islamiques d'Arabie Saoudite (Université du roi Abdel Aziz), Djiguiba Cissé, l'imam principal de la grande mosquée du Plateau (Abidjan), traduit ses sermons dans la langue de Shakespeare.

Contrairement à l'imam de l'ancienne génération qui était un parfait récitant du Coran, les *imams chocos* n'ont pas toujours mémorisé le texte coranique dans son intégralité. Ils mettent beaucoup plus l'accent sur la dimension herméneutique du sermon : le contexte de révélation du texte est retracé, suivi d'un commentaire souvent en lien avec l'actualité. De la sorte, ils se présentent comme des « utilisateurs avertis » du texte sacré.[35] C'est fort de ce principe que dans le cadre des nouvelles formes de célébration du mariage dans les mosquées (appelées « mariage COSIM »),[36] des imams proposent des entretiens prénuptiaux aux futurs époux et recommandent de faire des tests médicaux comme celui du VIH-SIDA.[37] Chez d'autres *imams chocos*, ces tests sont exigés.

L'*imam choco* a un rapport profondément désinvolte vis-à-vis des textes religieux, c'est-à-dire qu'il ne mobilise plus uniquement les versets coraniques et hadiths dans la transmission de son message. Dorénavant, il enrichit son sermon de citations extraites d'autres livres religieux (la Bible et la Thora) et non-religieux. Les auteurs sur lesquels il s'appuie ne sont pas obligatoirement musulmans. C'est ce que nous avons pu observer dans le cadre de nos observations de terrain, lors des sermons auxquels j'assistais hebdomadairement. Dans l'un de ses sermons, Cissé Mamadi, l'imam de la mosquée des étudiants de l'Institut national polytechnique Houphouët-Boigny (INPHB), invitait ses fidèles (étudiants) à s'investir plus dans leurs études. Pour mieux faire passer son message, il s'inspira de citations issues de milieux divers. Un rendu en est présenté ci-après :

35 Moussaoui 2009, 31.

36 Mariages célébrés sous forme de mariage civil avec papier d'état civil (cf. Miran 2015, 255). Sur la conformité de ce mariage avec les textes islamiques, l'imam Cissé Djiguiba soutient que les musulmans ne sont pas dans l'innovation. Pour lui, c'est Napoléon Bonaparte qui, de passage au Caire en Égypte, a copié ce rite malékite (Magazine *An-Nour*, Spiritualité, Société, Santé, n° 001, mensuel, juin 2015, 32).

37 Miran 2015, 256.

> Le Prophète a dit : "celui qui fait l'effort atteint son but". Un critique a dit : "la victoire aime l'effort". Un auteur a dit : "ce qui vaut la peine d'être fait, vaut la peine d'être bien fait". Le Prophète a dit : "celui qui veut poser un acte, qu'il le pose de bonne manière". Dans la Thora, il est dit : "il n'y a pas de camarade plus vilain que l'ignorance". En islam, le musulman est invité à "aller chercher le savoir partout même si c'est en Chine".[38]

La jonction établie entre les propos du Prophète de l'islam et les autres propos visent à présenter l'islam comme une « religion totale » en phase avec son temps.

L'*imam choco* tend à dépouiller son sermon de la peur du « feu de la géhenne », des châtiments de l'enfer. Il met beaucoup plus en avant les mérites des bonnes actions, les délices du paradis. Plutôt que d'apeurer, il rassure, il réconforte. Ainsi invite-t-il les fidèles à ne jamais désespérer de la miséricorde divine. L'islam étant une religion qui n'autorise pas la confession comme dans le catholicisme, il les invite à se repentir et à se confier à Dieu. Il s'agit ici d'un genre littéraire plus pédagogique.[39] L'approche choisie est la « moralisation et la responsabilisation du fidèle » afin de l'amener à une prise de conscience personnelle.[40]

Coquetterie imamale : l'*imam choco*, un showman

Dans les nouvelles formes de présentation de soi observées au niveau de l'imamat en Côte d'Ivoire, les pratiques de l'*imam choco* sont comparables à celles d'un personnage de scène, c'est-à-dire un homme de spectacle. De ce point de vue, la société, y compris la mosquée, le lieu de déploiement de ces nouvelles habitudes, correspondrait au spectacle, les fidèles au public et l'imam à l'homme de spectacle. Dans sa stratégie de fidélisation de son public, l'homme de spectacle ou l'artiste cherche toujours à plaire, à séduire en se réinventant constamment. Ainsi procède-t-il, par exemple, à un relooking de son apparence physique. Ce besoin de métamorphose peut s'étendre aussi à sa voix, un élément central dans l'exercice de son art. Ces mêmes pratiques sont transférables chez les *imams chocos*.

Aujourd'hui, en raison de la pratique de l'écoute de cassettes audios et de CD de célèbres récitants du Coran (saoudiens, égyptiens, soudanais, etc.) qui pullulent dans les librairies des grands marchés de l'espace urbain, l'esthétique sonore du religieux est devenue un élément déterminant pour le guide religieux.[41] En effet, dans de nombreux cas, en plus des compétences religieuses, la qualité

38 Cissé Mamadi, imam des étudiants de l'INPHB, le 13 août 2018 à Yamoussoukro.
39 Seze 2012, 39.
40 Youssouf Ouattara, secrétaire permanent du COSIM, le 3 mars 2018 à Abidjan (Treichville).
41 Sounaye 2011, 1–20.

musicale de la voix de l'imam occupe une part non négligeable dans sa capacité à attirer les foules, surtout les jeunes, dans sa mosquée. Cet enthousiasme pour la voix de l'imam est perceptible dans les choix opérés par ces derniers durant le mois de ramadan, précisément lors de la prière de *tarawih* ou de *tahajjud*.[42]

Les *imams chocos* se démarquent des vieux clercs par leurs nouvelles habitudes vestimentaires : port de boubous impeccables et souvent richement brodés. Mais lorsqu'il n'est pas vêtu en boubou, l'*imam choco* peut s'habiller en tenue occidentale, costume cravate, par exemple. Lorsqu'il porte une barbe, l'*imam choco* en prend minutieusement soin. Cette coquetterie des nouveaux guides religieux n'est pas sans influence sur la jeunesse. De plus en plus en Côte d'Ivoire, il n'est pas rare de voir des jeunes qui gardent la barbe.[43] Il n'en a pas toujours été ainsi. Si cette attitude des jeunes ne traduit en rien leur islamité, elle met cependant en filigrane l'attrait, même limité, qu'exerce la posture de ces nouveaux guides religieux sur cette catégorie sociale.

La coquetterie imamale se traduit également par la mise à disposition d'un bureau. À l'instar du curé, l'*imam choco*, à partir de ce bureau, reçoit et échange avec ses visiteurs. Cette « institutionnalisation » traduit l'influence des chrétiens (ici les catholiques) sur le mode d'organisation des musulmans en Côte d'Ivoire.

La quête de l'autonomie financière

Contrairement à l'imam d'hier (agriculteur, thaumaturge, commerçant, enseignant à l'école coranique, etc.) qui faisait de l'imamat une activité subsidiaire, l'*imam choco* fait de la fonction d'imam une fonction à part entière, un métier. Cette professionnalisation de l'imamat implique de nouvelles exigences sociales dans le monde capitaliste. Les guides religieux musulmans doivent désormais faire face à de nouvelles réalités sociales : les problèmes de logement, transport, santé, etc. Ils ont également le souci de la scolarisation de leurs enfants. À eux seuls, les aumônes et autres dons faits par la communauté ne peuvent pas satisfaire ces besoins. Face à ces réalités existentielles, les imams cherchent à s'émanciper financièrement en intégrant des postes de l'administration publique ou privée.

42 Prière nocturne des dix derniers jours du mois de ramadan. Considérée au départ comme une prière des wahhabites, elle a fini par s'imposer aujourd'hui dans presque toutes les mosquées de Côte d'Ivoire.

43 Ousmane Keita, imam principal de la mosquée Maoula de Koumassi, chef du département affaires sociales du COSIM, le 27 février 2019 à Koumassi.

L'imam principal de la mosquée du complexe de Koumassi en est une parfaite illustration. Après avoir intégré la maison d'édition de la fondation al-fallel en Égypte comme traducteur (en 2003) et un cabinet d'avocat en Arabie Saoudite (en 2006), Almamy Diaby a servi d'assistant à un homme d'affaires durant une année en Côte d'Ivoire. À l'occasion de la visite d'une délégation saoudienne en terre ivoirienne en 2012, il est sollicité comme traducteur au ministère des Affaires étrangères. À l'issue de ladite visite, Almamy Diaby est finalement recruté au sein dudit ministère en tant que traducteur.

Certains imams qui n'ont pas cette opportunité s'investissent dans de petites et moyennes entreprises. L'enseignement, le commerce, l'immobilier, l'organisation du hadj[44] sont désormais leurs activités de prédilection. À Bouna, l'imam central de la ville, Cissé Ibourahima, opère dans le domaine de l'immobilier. À Yamoussoukro, l'imam Cissé Mamadi est démarcheur privé pour le hadj. D'autres imams font carrière dans le domaine de l'entrepreneuriat religieux. De la sorte, dans le but de réduire l'hégémonie chrétienne dans le service humanitaire, des imams ont créé, dans le contexte la crise militaro-politique de 2002, des organisations socio-caritatives.[45]

L'imam de la mosquée du Centre Hospitalier Universitaire de Treichville (CHU Treichville, Abidjan), Haroun Koné, a créé en 2002 l'ONG Al Muwassat, la Consolation. Cette organisation caritative intervient en milieu hospitalier pour soutenir et soulager les malades indigents sans (officiellement) indépendamment de leur affiliation religieuse.[46] Dans son fonctionnement, l'ONG Al Muwassat met à la disposition de l'hôpital partenaire des fonds collectés, notamment dans les mosquées et auprès de mécènes, pour recouvrir les ordonnances de malades indigents.

L'imam hors de la mosquée

Le changement majeur chez l'*imam choco* réside incontestablement dans son rapport quotidien à la société. L'*imam choco* est beaucoup impliqué dans les réalités de la vie quotidienne. Il ne se gêne pas à fréquenter les cafés aux coins de

44 Madore et Traoré 2018.

45 Binaté 2016.

46 Ouattara Dabila, chercheur privé sur l'islam en Côte d'Ivoire, président d'honneur de l'ONG Al Muwassat-Bouaké, le 20 mars 2018 à Bouaké.

rue, les *grins*.[47] Il prend part aux échanges qui s'y déroulent, mais ses analyses se font toujours à l'aune des prescriptions religieuses. Le week-end, il s'adonne à des activités sportives, telles que le football, le karaté, le jogging. Lorsqu'il ne pratique pas lui-même le sport, il peut en être un passionné. L'*imam choco* peut également avoir un véhicule personnel. Certains ont à leur disposition des chauffeurs. D'autres ont un programme journalier pour suivre des télénovelas. D'autres encore organisent des sorties récréatives en famille ou avec des amis. En atteste la sortie récréative de la section locale du COSIM Yopougon en 2018 sur les côtes balnéaires de Grand-Bassam.[48]

Conscient de l'engouement suscité par les nouvelles technologies de l'information et de la communication auprès des jeunes, l'*imam choco* en a fait un outil important dans l'exercice de sa fonction.[49] À partir d'un compte facebook, youtube ou whatsApp, il dispense non seulement des enseignements religieux, mais donne aussi son avis sur la vie politique nationale et internationale. L'imam Aguib Touré en est le modèle. Âgé de 36 ans, Aguib Touré est né dans la commune de Koumassi à Abidjan. À bas âge, il quitte l'école laïque pour l'école islamique. Là-bas, il apprend successivement auprès de plusieurs maîtres dont l'imam Ba Konaté, fils de l'imam Anzoumana Konaté, ancien cheikh du COSIM. Il continue par la suite sa formation à l'Institut d'apprentissage et de mémorisation du Coran de Bâ Ishaq, sis à Anyama.[50]

Pour parfaire sa formation, Aguib Touré se rend en Mauritanie, dans la localité d'Adel Bagro, chez l'imam Baba Lahmad. De retour en Côte d'Ivoire, il repart chez les Konaté où il est reçu à un test de renforcement de capacités. Fort de ses connaissances islamiques, Aguib Touré est d'abord révélé au public ivoirien en tant que chantre avant d'être connu comme imam de la mosquée Al Houda wa Salam située au quartier Paillet extension (Williamsville, Abidjan). Loin de se satisfaire de son public, Aguib Touré ratisse au large sur les médias sociaux en publiant des vidéos de ses sermons sur facebook. Dans un langage dénué de diplomatie, il aborde des thèmes qui dérangent : l'homosexualité, la cohabitation entre musulmans et chrétiens, la corruption, la cherté de la vie, etc. Ses critiques envers l'État lui ont valu d'ailleurs en 2018 de passer un séjour à la Maison d'arrêt et de correction d'Abidjan (MACA).[51]

47 Il s'agit d'espaces publics où des individus échangent, le plus souvent autour d'un thé, sur des sujets d'ordres divers, comme la politique, le football, la religion ou les faits de société.

48 Youssouf Ouattara, secrétaire permanent du COSIM, le 3 mars 2018 à Abidjan (Treichville).

49 Keïta 2011 ; Madore 2016, 156–78 ; Binaté 2017.

50 Binaté 2010.

51 « Touré Aguib. Imam ou terroriste ? » *Allo Police*, n° 443, 16 au 22 juillet 2018.

Du fait des opportunités qu'offre l'école laïque en termes d'accès à la fonction publique, à la sécurité du salariat et au prestige social, l'*imam choco* a plus tendance à envoyer ses enfants dans le système éducatif officiel, qui est laïque.[52] Par conséquent, il peut avoir des enfants occupant de hautes fonctions dans l'administration publique (magistrats, enseignants à l'université, médecins, etc.) ou privée (ingénieurs, banquiers, etc.). Nous pouvons citer le cas de l'imam des étudiants de l'INPHB, Cissé Mamadi, dont la fille est institutrice. Il en est de même pour l'imam central de Yamoussoukro, Saïd Sylla, dont un des enfants est banquier et un autre est en formation à l'École des forces armées.[53] Sur ce point, l'*imam choco* s'oppose à l'imam d'hier qui mettait l'accent sur le renouvellement perpétuel du savoir islamique au sein de sa progéniture.

Mais s'il est vrai que l'école islamique n'est plus présentée comme le passage obligatoire pour l'éducation religieuse des enfants, il ne faut pas en déduire que ce type de formation n'est plus important dans la vie domestique de l'*imam choco*. Pour la respectabilité sociale de sa famille, l'*imam choco* continue de se préoccuper de l'éducation islamique de ses enfants. Tandis que certains inscrivent leurs enfants dans des écoles confessionnelles islamiques où ils ont l'avantage d'acquérir une double formation (islamique et laïque), d'autres consacrent les pauses scolaires (jours fériés et/ou vacances) à la formation islamique des leurs à la faveur de colonies de vacances, de cours de vacances ou de cours à domicile.[54]

Les enjeux d'une mutation : entre quête de légitimité et contraintes sociales

Le fait social n'est jamais un fait isolé. Il est le résultat d'un cheminement façonné au gré des circonstances. Ce que donne à voir ces figures de l'autorité religieuse musulmane en Côte d'Ivoire, c'est une étroite relation entre les nouvelles formes de vie qui se projettent sur les façons d'être et les façons de faire des musulmans d'aujourd'hui. Elles sont le résultat de facteurs divers.

52 Mounirou Ouattara, grand cheick de Yorobodi, le 6 décembre 2018 à Yorobodi.
53 Lancina Sylla, membre de la communauté Odiennéka de Yamoussoukro, le 8 août 2018 à Yamoussoukro.
54 Abahebou Kamagaté, membre de la communauté musulmane d'Aghien (COMUDA), ex-membre du bureau national du CNI, le 16 février 2019.

L'érosion de l'autorité

L'*imamat choco* est, dans un certain sens, le résultat d'un travail de reconstruction identitaire qui répond à l'effritement de l'autorité de façon générale. En fait, de nos jours, toutes les instances d'exercice de l'autorité semblent souffrir d'une crise de légitimité. Cette remise en cause de l'autorité ne se perçoit pas seulement au niveau politique. Elle se perçoit également au niveau de la religion.[55] Dans une société en perpétuel bouleversement, le délitement de l'autorité musulmane se fait, de plus en plus, visible. La nouvelle génération d'imams est sujette à cette problématique. Pour autant, il ne faudrait pas en déduire que l'imam d'hier, pris de façon isolée, avait une autorité incontestable sur ses fidèles. La crise de l'autorité n'est pas nouvelle.[56] Elle est juste une réalité de plus en plus perceptible.

Une enquête de Raymond Delval sur les musulmans d'Abidjan en 1975 révélait que seule une partie des musulmans reconnaissait se soumettre à l'autorité de l'imam.[57] L'imam d'hier n'avait donc pas une influence toute puissante sur ses ouailles. Quoique relatif, son pouvoir reposait sur des symboles qui entouraient sa fonction ; symboles à mettre en lien avec son âge élevé (gage de respect dans une société gérontocratique) et à sa réputation de détenir de nombreux savoirs ésotériques. Tout cela conférait à l'imam d'autrefois une certaine légitimité. Aujourd'hui, ces normes sociales semblent avoir reculé. Les nouvelles générations d'imams qui ne sont pas toujours détentrices de ces « pouvoirs » sont envahies par un désir d'« exister », de se faire (re) connaître car ils veulent gagner leur vie en tant qu'imam. Cette nécessité de (re) construction de soi passe par l'adoption de pratiques autres que celles d'hier.

Le changement générationnel

Le facteur générationnel joue un rôle important dans les nouvelles formes d'appropriation du religieux chez les *imams chocos*. L'appartenance à des générations différentes peut expliquer les manières dont des personnes s'engagent dans la société à laquelle elles appartiennent.[58] Contrairement aux vieux cheikhs, les imams choco sont majoritairement jeunes. Ils ont grandi dans un contexte sociopolitique différent de celui des vieilles générations d'imams. Il s'agit de la période

55 Vanvyve 2016.
56 Arènes 2015.
57 Delval 1980, 20.
58 LeBlanc 2005.

de la réinstauration du multipartisme en Côte d'Ivoire en 1990. La reconnaissance du multipartisme dans la vie politique en Côte d'Ivoire rima avec l'affirmation de libertés publiques et la multiplication des revendications et contestations sociales. Ce décloisonnement de la vie politique ne profita pas seulement aux politiques. Il profita également aux religieux. Chez les musulmans, il favorisa le foisonnement d'associations islamiques, une certaine liberté de parole et une présence plus prégnante de l'islam dans l'espace public.[59]

Mais s'il est vrai que le facteur générationnel est capital, il convient de préciser qu'il n'est pas un critère indispensable. De la sorte, l'*imamat choco* n'est pas exclusivement une affaire de jeunes. Mes observations de terrain ont révélé que cette forme d'imamat en Côte d'Ivoire a fait des émules au sein de vieux imams. Dans de nombreux cas, de vieux imams s'en sont accommodés dans le but de « fidéliser » leurs ouailles. Cette adaptation peut prendre plusieurs formes. Lorsqu'ils se sentent incapables de faire sienne la flexibilité des *imams chocos*, les vieux imams acceptent de partager le territoire de la prière avec de jeunes imams. Ces imams ont, le plus souvent, une conception considérée comme moderniste de la fonction imamale.

D'autres vieux imams décident, eux-mêmes, de braver les difficultés pour se mettre au même niveau que les jeunes. Pour cela, ils se louent les services de personnes capables de leur enseigner, entre autres, la « pédagogie du sermon ».[60] Saïd (Sekou) Sylla, l'imam central de la grande mosquée de Yamoussoukro, s'est loué les services d'un enseignant de lycée pour améliorer son niveau de langue et ses techniques d'expression en français.[61] D'autres imams vont plus loin. Le cas le plus connu est celui de l'imam Doumbia Mamadou de la mosquée « extension » du quartier Marais de Daloa. Grâce à sa persévérance, ce sexagénaire est parvenu à obtenir le baccalauréat de l'enseignement secondaire en 2018 en formation continue. Dans un entretien, il en donnait les raisons :

> À partir de la seconde, je me suis dit que vu les responsabilités que j'occupe socialement, étant un imam, je suis un communicateur. Donc, il est mieux d'améliorer, de me perfectionner en termes de communication. Donc, je me suis dit que le premier défi d'abord, il faut avoir le Bac (. . .). L'objectif pour acquérir le Bac c'était de pouvoir avoir un diplôme, me faciliter la communication, me perfectionner en termes de communication.[62]

59 Savadogo 2005 ; Gary-Tounkara 2005.

60 Ibrahim Doumbia, ex-rédacteur en chef d'*Islam Infos*, responsable actuel de la presse islamique en ligne *Plume Libre*, le 5 mars 2019 à Abidjan (Cocody).

61 Saïd (Sekou) Sylla, imam de la grande mosquée de Yamoussoukro, président du COSIM local, le 8 août 2018 à Yamoussoukro.

62 Groupe Cerco, « Doumbia Mamadou bachelier à 60 ans et étudiant de Cerco ». Vidéo, 03:10.

Le rôle des fidèles-jeunes

Les fidèles-jeunes jouent un rôle important dans la mutation de la figure de l'autorité religieuse musulmane en Côte d'Ivoire. Aujourd'hui, ils constituent la frange la plus importante de personnes qui fréquentent régulièrement les mosquées. S'exprimant généralement en français, même s'ils ne sont pas tous allés à l'école laïque, ils sont souvent de « grands consommateurs » de culture occidentale. Ainsi sont-ils, de plus en plus, exigeants vis-à-vis des imams au sujet de l'adaptation de leur fonction. Comparativement donc aux générations précédentes, les attentes de la plupart des fidèles vis-à-vis des imams semblent avoir changé. Ils veulent des imams bien imprégnés des réalités du monde. Aujourd'hui, il est récurrent qu'une communauté, après avoir bâti sa mosquée, saisisse le COSIM pour lui affecter un imam tout en prenant le soin d'indiquer à l'organisation ses critères : un imam jeune, maitrisant le français et/ou l'anglais.[63]

Autre critique des fidèles : les conditions de vie matérielle des imams. Dans les années 1990, les situations financières précaires de la plupart des imams leur ont valu l'appellation railleuse d'« imams de sacrifice ».[64] Tous ces reproches sont faits en comparaison de l'exemple des guides chrétiens, généralement mieux épanouis financièrement et ayant un niveau d'instruction (école laïque) respectable. Ironiquement, les fidèles fustigent, aujourd'hui, l'embourgeoisement des imams. Selon les communautés et les contextes, ces critiques peuvent se faire ouvertement ou tacitement. Ce « contrôle » des fidèles sur les imams entraîne chez ces derniers une certaine transformation.[65] D'où l'éclosion de pratiques décrites plus haut chez les *imams chocos*.

À l'instar de l'influence des fidèles, l'environnement social impacte fortement la figure de l'autorité religieuse des *imams chocos*. Il existe d'ailleurs un lien étroit entre ces deux aspects. Mes observations de terrain m'amènent à dire que dans les milieux où les fidèles issus de l'école laïque sont nombreux, le phénomène de l'*imamat choco* est plus remarquable tandis que, dans les zones populaires, où le taux d'analphabétisme est généralement élevé, sa présence est moins visible ou inexistante. À Abidjan, dans la commune résidentielle de Cocody, les imams ont, pour l'essentiel, « une instruction élevée, une assise financière et parle[nt]

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=haxiM_WdYAY, téléchargé 27 mars 2019.

63 Ousmane Diakité, secrétaire exécutif national du COSIM, le 20 mars 2019 à Abidjan (Treichville).

64 Lire à ce propos le premier entretien accordé par l'imam Koudouss dans la presse *Fraternité Matin* du 23 au 24 janvier 1993.

65 Camara Mohamed, imam à la mosquée de vendredi du commerce (mosquée plein air) de Bouaké, le 24 avril 2019 à Bouaké.

généralement bien le français ».[66] À l'opposé, dans les communes populaires, comme celles d'Abobo, ce constat est loin d'être général. Sur ce point précis, on pourrait parler d'un imamat à double vitesse en Côte d'Ivoire.

L'influence du parcours

Les expériences et trajectoires ont probablement façonné les pratiques des *imams chocos*. Lors de leur séjour d'étude dans les pays arabes, l'environnement social parait avoir influencé ces guides religieux ; rien n'est sûr cependant à ce niveau. Ce qui est en revanche sûr, c'est que certains en sont revenus avec de nouvelles idées et pratiques. À ce propos, le cas de l'imam Almamy Diaby de la communauté musulmane Al Farouq de Koumassi est instructif. Almamy Diaby débute sa formation dans l'enseignement général dans la commune de Koumassi à Abidjan. En 1981, sur instruction de son grand-père, il part à Samatiguila pour y suivre des cours à l'école islamique traditionnelle. Il intègre, par la suite, la toute première médersa du village. Diaby se rend ensuite à Bouaké où il obtient un Certificat d'études primaires élémentaires (CEPE) en 1987 à l'école islamique Sakafat islamiyya. En 1992, à Abidjan, il obtient à l'institut Sabil Nadja de Treichville son brevet d'études du premier cycle (BEPC) en arabe.

La même année, Diaby obtient le même diplôme au niveau de l'école laïque en formation continue. En 1996, grâce à une bourse, il part à l'institut Al Azhar en Égypte. Il y passe cinq années couronnées par l'obtention du Baccalauréat et d'une Licence au département *fiqh* et langue en 2003.[67] De retour en Côte d'Ivoire, Almamy Diaby commence ses activités religieuses en tant que secrétaire particulier du président du COSIM, Boikary Fofana, en 2006. À la suite d'un malentendu avec ce dernier, il s'établit dans la commune de Koumassi au quartier Sicogi 2. Dans la mosquée du complexe de Koumassi où il devient imam et influencé probablement par le modèle de l'organisation des Frères Musulmans en Égypte,[68] Diaby crée une cellule de scoutisme pour les jeunes. Dans la même lancée, il met en place un programme de remise en forme hebdomadaire au profit de ses fidèles. Ce programme se tient chaque dimanche matin sur l'esplanade de la mosquée.

66 Koné Abdoulaye Blacky, président du Comité de gestion de la grande mosquée de la Riviera Golf, le 1 mars 2019 à Abidjan (Cocody).

67 Almamy Diaby, imam de la mosquée du complexe de Koumassi, le 13 mars 2019 à Abidjan (Koumassi).

68 Koné et Diomandé 2019.

Des pionniers aux affaires

L'arrivée des précurseurs de ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui l'*imamat choco* à la tête du COSIM, la plus grande instance en charge de l'autorité musulmane en Côte d'Ivoire, est un autre élément catalyseur dans l'émergence de ce groupe d'imams qui bouscule les codes classiques dans ce domaine. Il est bon de rappeler qu'en Côte d'Ivoire, durant plus de deux décennies, le poste honorifique de cheikh des imams (Cheikh *al Aïma*) fut détenu par les grands imams des mosquées de Treichville et d'Adjamé. Traditionnalistes, non francophones et peu impliqués dans le militantisme associatif, les premiers présidents du COSIM avaient été choisis en vertu de leur âge élevé.

Contrairement aux trois premiers, le quatrième cheikh des imams fut choisi en dehors des mosquées phares de Treichville et d'Adjamé. L'imam de la mosquée d'Aghien, Boikary Fofana, avait un profil différent des autres : ancien cadre de banque maitrisant le français et ayant un militantisme islamique associatif avéré.[69] Fort de ses expériences en matière de gestion associative, Fofana prit un ensemble de mesures qui permirent de transformer l'association des imams. Cela se matérialisa par la concrétisation d'un vieux projet datant de 1996 : la création d'un institut sous-régional ayant pour vocation le recyclage des imams en fonction et la formation de nouveaux imams.

La mise en place d'un tel centre, l'Institut International de l'Imamat (3I), n'était pas sans rappeler les instituts de formation des guides chrétiens. Elle traduisait également l'ambition des autorités musulmanes de donner aux imams les mêmes aptitudes intellectuelles que celles de leurs homologues chrétiens catholiques. En 2008, lors de l'inauguration dudit institut, le Cheikh Boikary Fofana exprimait clairement cette volonté :

> L'imam de Yopougon doit avoir le même niveau que l'évêque de Yopougon. Il faut que nos imams connaissent leur environnement social, politique, juridique, anthropologique (…) et ne soient plus en marge des débats sur les grands événements du pays.[70]

Ces propos sont un autre indicateur de l'influence chrétienne sur l'organisation des musulmans en Côte d'Ivoire.

Mais, en Côte d'Ivoire, l'imamat reste un domaine non encadré par des dispositions uniformes. Les critères de désignation des guides musulmans (système

69 Miran et Touré 2012, 318.

70 « Inauguration de l'Institut international d'imamat en Afrique. Cheick Boikary Fofana : l'imam doit être au même niveau de connaissance que l'Évêque. » *Le Patriote*, n° 2720, mardi 4 novembre 2008.

de rotation par communautés ethniques, ascendance maraboutique, lien de parenté, etc.) varient d'une communauté à une autre. En conséquence, plusieurs personnes ont pu accéder à ladite fonction souvent au mépris des canons islamiques qui privilégient le savoir d'abord, la vertu ensuite et l'âge enfin. Avec l'arrivée des pionniers du réveil islamique ivoirien (les néo-réformistes) à la tête du COSIM, le profil des imams connut des changements. Ainsi, en 2012, lors de la troisième conférence ordinaire des imams affiliés au COSIM, un texte fondateur, appelé Charte de l'Imamat et des Mosquées, est adopté en vue d'uniformiser l'organisation et le fonctionnement des mosquées en Côte d'Ivoire.

Ladite charte aborde de nombreuses questions dont les critères de choix de l'imam, les organes de gestion de la mosquée et la prise en charge financière des imams. Elle fait partie des stratégies du COSIM pour façonner à son goût le profil des imams en Côte d'Ivoire. À titre illustratif, selon ledit texte, le COSIM a le monopole de la destitution des imams. Il a également le même droit au niveau de l'affectation des imams en accord avec la communauté concernée. Dans son application, la charte reste en butte à de nombreuses pesanteurs socioculturelles en raison du fait qu'elle « démocratise » les conditions d'éligibilité à l'imamat et confère un droit de véto à l'imam dans la validation de toutes les décisions afférentes à sa mosquée et cela parfois au détriment des fidèles.[71]

De nouvelles voies d'accès à la réussite

En règle générale, les conditions de vie difficile des imams tranchent avec la prospérité économique de biens de leurs coreligionnaires. Cette situation est la résultante de facteurs multiformes, dont des perceptions (certains fidèles nourrissent l'idée selon laquelle la rétribution de l'imam dépend de Dieu), des contraintes (des fidèles qui se considèrent comme les propriétaires de la mosquée caporalisent les ressources financières qui y sont collectées) et des rumeurs (les imams recevraient une aide financière de la part de l'État).

Dans le but de surmonter ces difficultés, des imams exploitent aujourd'hui de nouvelles marges d'autonomisation financière. À Daloa, par exemple, Fanny Drissa, l'imam principal de la mosquée « hadja », située au quartier Abattoir 2, gère un kiosque à café à proximité de son lieu de culte. L'imam Hamidou Berthé de la mosquée Banco d'Attécoubé est « promoteur » d'une école confessionnelle islamique dans ladite commune. L'enjeu de toutes ces initiatives est la restauration de la dignité des guides religieux. De ce point de vue, l'*imamat choco*

71 Conseil supérieur des imams en Côte d'Ivoire (COSIM) 2012, Titre III, Article 16.

peut être compris comme la manifestation d'autres formes d'accès à la « réussite sociale »[72] que celles reposant traditionnellement sur l'acquisition de diplômes provenant de l'école laïque. En effet, dans la conscience collective ivoirienne en général, l'école laïque a longtemps été considérée comme le seul moyen d'accès à la réussite.

Auparavant, l'école islamique était perçue comme un obstacle à l'ascension sociale. Par la réinvention de pratiques nouvelles, les *imams chocos* expriment un désir d'émancipation de la tutelle des fidèles. Ce besoin d'émancipation qui prend progressivement des ampleurs démesurées[73] est préjudiciable à la respectabilité de la fonction d'imam. Le désir de l'argent et des richesses dans le milieu des imams est aujourd'hui un secret de polichinelle. C'est une critique qui nous est constamment revenue durant nos causeries informelles avec les fidèles. Il en ressort que des imams tiendraient compte de la capacité financière des familles requérantes dans l'accomplissement des tâches religieuses (lecture du Coran, célébration des baptêmes, mariage, etc.). Certains vont même jusqu'à instaurer une grille tarifaire : 60.000 francs CFA pour la lecture complète du Coran. À Abidjan, les communes de Cocody et du Plateau semblent les plus touchées par cette vénalité des guides religieux.

Vers la valorisation d'un autre rôle de l'imam

Acteur central dans l'animation de la vie communautaire musulmane, l'imam n'est pas en marge des changements en cours dans la société, comme en témoigne la réinvention des conditions d'exercice de sa mission en Côte d'Ivoire. Autrefois, l'apanage exclusif de personnes âgées et/ou issues de familles maraboutiques (vieux cheikhs), l'autorité religieuse musulmane s'est fortement reconfigurée au cours de ces dernières années. Conscients du fait que les pratiques d'hier ne répondent pas toujours aux situations actuelles dans la plupart des aspects de la vie, les nouvelles générations d'imams s'adaptent aux réalités de leur époque. Cette volonté d'adaptation a abouti à la naissance d'un nouveau type d'imams désignés sous l'expression populaire ivoirienne « *imams chocos* ».

Se considérant comme un citoyen, l'*imam choco* est un imam qui refuse d'être confiné uniquement à ses prérogatives religieuses. Il considère d'ailleurs sa fonction comme étant pluridimensionnelle. De fait, à l'instar des autres citoyens, il

72 Banégas et Warnier 2001.

73 C'est un problème qui concerne l'imamat en Côte d'Ivoire de façon générale.

se réserve le droit de donner son opinion sur les sujets qui touchent à la vie de société. Dans la conduite de cette mission, l'*imam choco* entretient un rapport « relâché » aux textes sacrés, à la société et aux fidèles. Par ces approches, l'*imam choco* cherche à gagner en reconnaissance et en légitimité afin de se positionner comme une figure incontournable dans un champ religieux « éclaté » et en perpétuelle évolution.

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Fulera Issaka-Toure

Trajectories of Islamic Family Law in Accra

A Perspective on a *Malam*

"I'd never heard any Ghanaian *malam* speak like him before",[1] a man said admiringly in a discussion about Hajj Umar Ibrahim Imam's interventions into the ongoing national debate over the right to veil or not in secular schools.[2] Hajj Umar's response to the *hijab* controversy was given different meanings by Muslims. Some saw the entire debate as irrelevant because Hajj Umar did not give a direct answer to the question of the relevance of the *hijab*. His response in fact settled the entire debate, which was seen as blasphemous by some Muslims, including influential Muslim women such as the convenor of The Hijab Is My Identity.[3] Equally impressed, a woman recounted how, when her husband refused to grant her a divorce although she had moved out long before, Hajj Umar ended the marriage without her husband's consent.[4] These interlocutors' views of Hajj Umar, as he is popularly called, signal the special quality of his authority regarding the personal issues facing the Muslim community in Ghana – in particular, those that concern women.

1 Okaishie, Accra, June 7, 2020.

2 This old debate resurfaced during the vetting of a judge who had been nominated to the Supreme Court. The nominee, Justice Issifu Omoro Tanko Amadu, was the first Muslim to be nominated to the highest court of the land. At the time, some Muslims were unhappy with his response to a question raised by parliamentarians about the issue of veiling in secular schools. See Kwame Acheampong, "Muslims fume over Justice Tanko Amadu's comment on Hijab." https://starrfm.com.gh/2020/05/muslims-fume-over-justice-tanko-amadus-comment-on-hijab/, accessed September 12, 2022.

3 This is a Muslim women's group which emerged during the heat of the public discussion regarding the ban on *hijab* in some public institutions in Ghana. The group, convened by Bashiratu Kamal, organized a peaceful walk to campaign against the ban.

4 Nima, Accra, July 23, 2020.

Fulera Issaka-Toure: Department for the Study of Religions, College of Humanities, University of Ghana, Legon. P. O. Box LG 66, Legon-Accra, Ghana, e-mail: fissaka-toure@ug.edu.gh

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Scholars have already established the significance of the *'ulama* – *malam* (pl. *malamai*) – in Muslim societies.[5] As Zaman and Pontzen have demonstrated, a *malam* is a key authority figure whose actions have an immediate impact on the lives of Muslims, particularly in the context of rituals and interpersonal relationships.[6] The nature, bases, and performance of religious authority, such as that of the *malam*, and its relationship both to textual traditions and to local contexts, have long been topics of interest and debate in Islamic Studies. On the one hand, studies on Islamic religious authority in Muslim societies and cultures view authority as performative, whereby a speaker who bases his/her speech on Islamic knowledge (*'ilm*) influences the practices and thoughts of the listeners.[7] On the other hand, such studies raise other issues including the nature of the plurality of Islamic religious authority,[8] the role of human agency,[9] and the interaction between texts – the Qur'an and Hadith – and the competing 'texts' or practices at play in specific societies.[10]

Other scholars, frequently questioning earlier scholarship in which Islamic family law is represented as static, have examined legal reasoning.[11] Scholars concerned with Islamic law have also explored how the law is produced and promulgated.[12] Still others have demonstrated the relevance of the law from the perspective of the people for whom it is made,[13] as well as how law is used or featured in actual court practice.[14] Still, a question that consistently arises from these broad disciplinary discussions is: how is authority produced?

Although the Ghanaian Constitution is the overarching law of the land, the Ghanaian legal system recognizes customary family law, granting groups as well as citizens the right to choose the legal framework that will apply to their personal matters. The issues most frequently treated under customary legal frameworks are marriage, divorce, and inheritance. There are as many customary frameworks

5 The Arabic term *'ulama* denotes individuals with particular authority in Muslim societies and cultures. Defined by some scholars as bearers of Islamic tradition, *'ulama* acquire their position through a long process of learning. *'Ulama* go by different names in different contexts, for example *mullah*, or *Afa* or *Alfa*. See Zaman 2002; Zaman 2011.

6 Zaman 2002; Pontzen 2021.

7 Lincoln 1994; Krämer and Schmidtke 2006; Pontzen 2021.

8 Kerstin and Olsson 2013.

9 Zaman 2011; El Fadl 2001; El Fadl 2009.

10 Lambek 1990a; Lambek 1990b.

11 Schacht 1964; Jeppie, Moosa and Roberts 2010.

12 An-Na'im and Deng 1990; An-Na'im 2005; An-Na'im 2006.

13 Fluehr-Lobban 1987; Hirsch 1998; Stiles 2009.

14 Mir-Hosseini 2000; Hirsch 1998; Stiles 2009.

as there are recognized ethnic groups in the country, and while 'Islam' is not an ethnic category, Islamic family law is treated as a variation of customary law. Just like any other customary framework, Islamic family law is identified, promulgated, and produced through informal customary channels by the authorities charged with it. These authorities are *malamai*, such as Hajj Umar. The state does not exercise direct control over the application or repeal of particular customary laws, but it may intervene if it deems any customary law to infringe on the rights of individuals.[15]

In Hausa, the word *malam* is used to refer to a knowledgeable person. Pontzen has already elaborated on the significance of *malamai* in the lives of Muslims in Ghana and their ritual roles. The position of *malam* is both earned and imposed. The *malam* is a person who, through a long process, acquires Islamic knowledge and becomes the custodian of Islamic tradition in his community. Such people do not usually refer to themselves as *malamai*; it is the community(ies) which give(s) them this attribution.[16] Muslims may decide to consult a *malam* not only on matters concerning family law, but also on other aspects of life and Islamic ritual. Muslims' choice to consult a *malam* on legal matters is a personal one, for they also have the option to turn to the nation's secular courts. Again, individual Muslims decide on their choice of a *malam*, although his decisions are not binding.[17]

I propose to explore the constitution of a *malam*'s authority through his understanding of 'living law'. Here I emphasize the fact that the force of law also arises from a *malam*'s receptiveness to social issues.[18] In this regard, I analyse Hajj Umar's work and position – how it is constituted in specific cases – to illuminate the interplay between Islamic family law and cases' concrete realities in a contemporary Ghanaian context shaped by the plurality of customary family law.

The law is not only incarnated or performed but also experienced by women – the majority of Hajj Umar's clients. I will focus on Hajj Umar's decisions in two contexts: inheritance for 'illegitimate' children and *khul* – a type of divorce that, unlike the more well-known male-initiated form *talaqa*,[19] can legitimately be requested by women. The empirical data on which the chapter draws, consisting of interviews, informal discussion, and personal observation of Hajj Umar

15 Essien 1994; Bamba 2007; Issaka-Toure 2020.

16 Pontzen 2017; Pontzen 2021.

17 Observations from the field.

18 Cheffins 2004; Berg 2013; Issaka-Toure and Alidou 2020.

19 The *talaqa* is a type of Islamic divorce in the form of repudiation. See Stiles 2009 for more discussion.

at work in his office, was collected in Nima, a suburb of Accra, Ghana, between 2014 and 2020.

The Person of Hajj Umar

I met Hajj Umar in 2007 when I began doing research in the Office of the Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'a (ASWAJ).[20] Even as a child growing up in Accra, however, I was already very familiar with Hajj Umar's name.[21] In Accra, and Ghana more generally, Hajj Umar, a well-known Salafi,[22] is one of the *malamai* who "speaks"[23] for Islam. Born, according to oral history, in 1933, Hajj Umar has been the national imam of the Salafi-oriented ASWAJ movement since 1997.

The emergence of organized Salafism on the Islamic religious landscape in Accra in the late 1960s was started by Hajj Umar. It quickly developed into a religious force that competed with the established Islamic religious order of the day – the Sufi Tijaniyya.[24] Umar's initially humble Salafi activities caught the attention of Muslim Western-educated elites of the day who were disgruntled with the dominant order and the particular kind of Islam that prevailed at the time. According to Kobo, this movement was connected to Hajj Umar's representation of Islam as a religion of modernity.[25] These elites saw Hajj Umar's message, which reconciled Islam with modernity, as a departure from that of the existing order; to them, the established religious authorities seemed to speak primarily of how God's wrath would be visited on disobedient servants, without working to address pressing social needs. For such a category of Muslims, the prevailing order presented Islam as a religion of backwardness and superstition.[26] The

20 I remain ever grateful to my mentor and lecturer, Dr. Rabiatu Ammah of the University of Ghana, for introducing me to Hajj Umar.

21 The person of Hajj Umar Ibrahim Imam – Hajj Umar – and his development and activities as a *malam* have been discussed elsewhere. See Kobo 2009; Kobo 2012; Kobo 2015.

22 According to Meijer 2009, the Islamic Salafiyya movement has been characterized as a contemporary Muslim reform movement. Its reform agenda varies according to context. Simultaneously both global and local, it cannot be easily defined.

23 Pontzen 2017, 44.

24 A dominant Islamic Sufi group not only in Ghana but throughout West Africa and beyond. For a broader discussion on the movement, see Seesemann 2011.

25 Kobo 2012.

26 Kobo 2009; Kobo 2012; Kobo 2015.

movement culminated in the formation of the Islamic Research and Reformation Centre.[27]

The Islamic Research and Reformation Centre continued to grow and in 1997 became the Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'a – the current name of the Salafi movement started by Hajj Umar. He has headed the ASWAJ since he was appointed in absentia by a congress in Wa, Upper West Region. The primary objective of the ASWAJ is Islamic proselytization within its Salafi understanding. However, recognizing the significance of social issues in the lives of Muslims, it includes a Counselling and Arbitration Unit, of which Hajj Umar is the sitting mediator. It is within this framework that he offers his legal expertise.

When Muslims in Accra are asked who Hajj Umar is, they say: he is a *malam*, a mediator, a women's man, a reformer, a rebel, and a controversial man, among others. Depending on one's perspective, all these designations are valid. Hajj Umar's active participation in public life can be pegged at a little over half a century (1968–2019). In his public life, he is a renowned Islamic scholar whose esteemed reputation stems from the fact that he was trained not only in Ghana but also "in the land of the origin of Islam"[28] – Umar was the first Ghanaian to graduate from the Islamic University of Medina, Saudi Arabia, with a diploma in Islamic Sciences after ten years of study. Notably, he has no Western secular education.[29]

Ghana has a national chief imam – a man from the Tijaniyya – and most Muslims in Ghana would say that there is only one national imam. However, according to my interlocutors, Muslims who are opposed to the dominant group view Hajj Umar as *their* national imam. Nevertheless, both his followers and followers of the Tijaniyya, as well as Muslims who do not claim to belong to any group, see him as a *malamai*. Describing himself, Hajj Umar has said, "I am an imam without a mosque. I do not lead prayers." He occasionally appears in the media and grants interviews to journalists when they need him to resolve their personal matters. Due to his Salafi views, some of his utterances in the past have evoked controversies among Muslims over what constitutes proper Muslim practice. But although some Muslims, and, in particular, Tijanniya *malamai*, have viewed Hajj Umar as controversial, especially from the beginning of his career through the 1990s, in recent years Hajj Umar's relations with Muslims across these divides have been cordial.

27 Kobo 2009.

28 An interlocutor's view, ASWAJ office, Nima, Accra, March 13, 2014.

29 State education in Ghana, part of the British colonial legacy, focuses on secular subjects.

Despite the many differences between Tijaniyya and Salafi views, Hajj Umar's activities as a mediator transcend group belonging because, in fact, both Muslims who identify as Salafi and those associated with the Tijaniyya turn to him for mediation. On an average day, he mediates ten cases. Most of his clients are women, and marital cases, followed by inheritance disputes, form the majority of his caseload. As the 2012 annual ASWAJ report suggests, women represent over 80 per cent of those requesting Umar's mediation. At present, Umar's followers are drawn from all segments of society – a departure from the beginning of his career, when he was largely followed and supported by Western-educated Muslims.

Yet, demonstrating the way that authority depends on the community's recognition, Umar did not set out to become a 'judge'. He acquired his position because of how people perceived and defined him, and how they behaved towards him. "When I came back from Saudiyya [Saudi Arabia]", he explained, "people started coming for mediation. Then the news started spreading, and this is where we are now."[30] He works in his office from Monday to Saturday except on Fridays. He also hears cases privately at home.

His organizational ability, as well as his quickness to adapt to and assimilate multiple perspectives on Islam, make him stand out as a modernist.[31] Additionally, the way he carries out the activities of the Counselling and Arbitration Unit is telling. The Unit's original intention was to counsel Muslims on pre- and post-marital issues. However, as I have observed, the Unit mainly mediates marital conflicts and disputes about inheritance.[32]

Before Hajj Umar's rise to prominence, Salafi activities were already seen in some parts of the country. This reform movement, which Iddrisu refers to as a "home grown phenomenon",[33] has long-standing local roots in Ghana. But Hajj Umar's activities signalled the beginning of increased external influence, emanating from both individual efforts and bilateral relations with Gulf Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia. Even today, Salafism in Ghana promotes the reform of Muslim practices and opposes the Tijaniyya order.[34]

30 Personal interview in his office, Nima, Accra, April 18, 2014.
31 Kobo 2012.
32 Field research data gathered via informal discussion and observation.
33 Iddrisu 2012, 6.
34 Kobo 2009; Kobo 2012; Iddrisu 2012; Ibrahim 2011; Dumbe 2013.

Fig. 1: Hajj Umar in his office, Nima, Accra. © Fulera Issaka-Toure

Fig. 2: Hajj Umar listening attentively to visitors' complaints. © Fulera Issaka-Toure

Islamic Inheritance Law in Hajj Umar's Work: The Example of "the Bastard Child"

The Sunni and Shi'i schools of Islamic jurisprudence describe varying inheritance systems. Though similar in their commitments, their logic differs. Gender inequalities in inheritance formulae and the exclusion from inheritance of children born out of wedlock have been observed in both.[35]

However, reform is taking place in various contexts based on two propositions: Islamic feminists' re-reading/interpretation of Islamic sources[36] as well as pressure from global human rights conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Kinds of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, both of which Ghana has signed.[37] While both Islamic feminists' readings and global human rights conventions stand for gender equality, the former has its grounding in Islamic sources, while the latter emanates from presumed external pressures.

In particular, Islamic feminists who ground their arguments in Islamic sources argue that Islamic jurisprudence, constructed largely through a masculine lens and with biases that affect women in patriarchal societies, has been elevated to the status of the Qur'an. In other words, feminists contend that human constructions have been given divine status similar to the Qur'an.[38] With these discussions in the literature on Islamic systems of inheritance in mind, this section examines how Hajj Umar attends to inequalities that are embedded in the system.

I witnessed sixteen inheritance cases and received access to thirteen past records pertaining to inheritance. In all, only two concerned children born out of wedlock. I discovered two reasons for the small number of past records in the office of ASWAJ. The first has to do with not publicizing the mistakes of a loved one in relation to Islamic norms, because Muslim culture frowns on having children out of wedlock. Therefore, in the case of a father's death, his family members and children can decide to share his estate with a child born out of wedlock in order to protect the image of the loved one among the Muslim public. It is when such children are excluded that they resort to avenues such as the ASWAJ or even the secular Ghanaian state court. The second reason for the dearth of cases is that the record keeping of ASWAJ is not done by a specialist, hence records are likely to go missing in the course of time. As a result, I refer to the two cases below in

35 Kimber 1998; Barlas 2002; Mzee 2016.
36 Barlas 2002; Wadud 2006; Ali 2006.
37 Dzorgbo and Gyan 2016.
38 Mzee 2016; von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 2012; Sulong 2015.

addition to Hajj Umar's experiences in handling such cases for analysis. Both cases of inheritance involving illegitimate children are important for our discussion.

A past ASWAJ record concerns a case of disinheritance between Rabiu and his half siblings. Rabiu was born out of wedlock, and from the record it can be deduced that he is quite mature, as his age is not stipulated. The record noted that the case was recorded in 1999. Rabiu explained that his father had three wives with several children, but he was born out of wedlock from another woman.[39] Although he did not live with his late father while growing up, he had a personal relationship with him, and he was known in the family and outside as one of his late father's children. However, he was considered illegitimate with regard to inheritance rights (the report did not indicate who had deemed him illegitimate, but from all indications it was *malamai*, with no objection from the family) upon the demise of their father. Rabiu wanted Hajj Umar to intervene and redistribute the inheritance. The record indicated that, having established that Rabiu had been accepted by his late father, Hajj Umar redistributed the inheritance according to the one-half formula. With this, Rabiu received a share equal to those of his male half-siblings.

The second case is one I witnessed in Hajj Umar's office one afternoon, when a young woman in her early twenties made the *salama* (Muslims' salutation of peace) and walked in. This young woman, a beautician trainee who had completed senior secondary school, had come to Hajj Umar at her friend's suggestion. She laid out her problem: "My father passed on two years ago, and after a year the *malamai* came to share out his [her father's] inheritance. To my surprise, I did not get anything (. . .) I was asked to vacate the part of the house I was occupying. The reason I gathered was that I was born out of wedlock."[40]

Hajj Umar asked who had taken care of her before her father died, and the young woman stated that her father had done so. She had grown up in his house with her stepmother and siblings. This young lady's case was not unusual. The general observation I have made among Muslims concerning children inheriting from their father's estate is that, according to Islamic legal understanding, those born out of wedlock are not expected to inherit from their fathers. In practice, however, some such children have received shares from their father's inheritance while others have been denied. Hajj Umar asked her to return the following week with relatives from her father's side.

39 The names of Rabiu and all others mentioned in this chapter have been changed to protect the parties' and individuals' privacy.

40 Personal narration, ASWAJ Office, Nima, Accra, May 22, 2015.

When the young lady left the office, I asked Hajj Umar his views on this aspect of Islamic inheritance. He responded:

> Madam, you see things have changed. This is Ghana after independence. This aspect [illegitimate children born out of wedlock] of Islamic family law, the state will not condone it. If this [illegitimate children] should go to the court, the inheritance shall be divided according to the laws of the land which is not Islamic. They will give both girls and boys equal share [according to state laws regarding equality]. But if we do it according to Islam [give half of a boy's share to a girl] then we give justice to every child of a deceased, boy or girl, according to our understanding of one half of a boy's to a girl, then things are better. Besides, we think that the shame of the deceased must be covered. All we need is evidence that the late father accepted responsibility while he was alive. If so, we just go and redistribute the inheritance. There are several cases in court pending judgement because people [Muslims] want to have their way. If something is not in their favour they go to the state. Now, this girl who has been asked to vacate her place, where does she go to? This is one of the difficulties we Muslims are facing. If she goes out who knows what she will encounter in the street? The Muslim community needs to wake up.[41]

I later learned that, in this young woman's case, the inheritance was redistributed according to the Islamic legal requirement of a one-half ratio given to girls, and she received her share.

Hajj Umar tries to apply Islamic law as purely as he can, but the pluralistic legal context in which he works makes it difficult to do so. Even though the state does not actively interfere in specific rulings, Muslims are very aware of the state's position on paternity and inheritance. Where in Islamic law an 'illegitimate' child cannot inherit, in Ghanaian national law paternity does not depend on marriage, and therefore every child has an equal right to inheritance. A child being denied her or his inheritance under Muslim law could, Hajj Umar knows, turn to a secular court for resolution. But this would result in Islamic law being disregarded, not just in the case of one illegitimate child, but in the case of each child's inheritance – including that of legitimate children. The Muslim community is strongest, Hajj Umar feels, when Muslims turn to Muslim authorities for help in resolving their affairs. His legal reasoning, nonetheless, takes into account Muslim law, Ghanaian law, and the wellbeing of Muslims and their communities.

Umar's negotiation is particularly important because of how he views state-community relations with respect to individual rights. The critical issue that arises here is what propels Hajj Umar's negotiation between state laws and community laws. One can say that Hajj Umar's negotiation is based on Muslims' citizenship rights as well as the state's coercive nature, which he cannot disregard but must

41 Interview, Nima, Accra, June 13, 2015.

instead find a common ground between it and Muslim law. This whole process of negotiation is a signal towards the constitution of his authority in matters of inheritance pertaining to illegitimate children.

Hajj Umar's rationale for (re)distributing inheritance to include children born to unwed parents is not just rooted in his attentiveness to the larger legal context. It is also rooted in his central concern for human security. This concern with the children's safety plays an important role in the constitution of Hajj Umar's authority, and in how it is negotiated. He sums this up with these questions: "Now this girl who has been asked to vacate her place; where does she go to? This is one of the difficulties we Muslims are facing. If she goes out, who knows what she will encounter in the street?" Proceeding from these critical issues of human safety and wellbeing, Hajj Umar also believes that Islamic law must, above all, be responsive to human needs. Because he is in a position of authority, he has the agency to implement unusual legal reasonings that take the needs of vulnerable children into account.

Both cases are primarily about 'redistribution' in a context where the dominant view is that children born out of wedlock have no right to inheritance. While other equally qualified Islamic religious authorities had already distributed the inheritance according to their understanding, Hajj Umar viewed their work as null and void. In contrast to *malamai* who had made prior judgements in both cases, Hajj Umar centres his position on the interaction between state laws and Islamic inheritance law. This is a critical position that questions not only the law – Islamic or otherwise – according to its sources but asks: *what makes a law alive?* In effect, in Hajj Umar's legal practice, laws are laws when they respond to needs on the ground. One can clearly see that various individuals – *malamai* – serve as authorities, but one authority – Hajj Umar's – is much more evident and weightier. Islamic texts are connected to society in exercising authority, but what entrenches an authority is also the ways, in this context, in which an authority – *malam* – navigates his way in linking Islamic text to human life and society.

While Hajj Umar speaks in the name of Islam, he is also receptiveness to social issues. While others speak on such matters in the name of Islam, they try to apply Islamic law wholesale, without regard to the pluralistic legal context and its human complexity on the ground. In contrast, Hajj Umar's decision-making involves adapting Islamic inheritance laws to the Ghanaian socio-legal context, as well as to the needs of vulnerable members of the Muslim community.

Asking who speaks for Islam allows us to see that the landscape of religious authority in Ghana is diffuse and competitive and depends on situated negotiation. Taking negotiation into account deepens our understanding of how Muslims grant authority to certain people or divest them of it. A *malam* acquires authority in this landscape only if affected Muslims find him relevant. Thus, the relevance

of Hajj Umar for disinherited Muslims who seek his legal services is evidence of the social receptiveness of his legal practice. His authority is constituted through the negotiations he undertakes with the law in order to serve Muslims and Islam in this pluralistic legal landscape.

So far, the discussion has dwelled on the client and Hajj Umar, but there are other actors who add some significant layers to understanding the ongoing negotiations of applying this aspect of the law. In Rabiu's case, other actors such as *malamai* and family members were present. Rabiu's experience is similar to that of the young woman. In a separate interview, the young woman explained her life story and how she turned to Hajj Umar:

> I was with my mother until I was twelve when I moved to settle with my dad, stepmother and my siblings. He [her late father] gave me education, accommodation and all the basics of life. It was after my secondary education that I started this training [beauty craft] and along the line he [her late father] passed on. With my stepmother, I know I am not her biological child, but with my father and other siblings I felt there was no difference. He gave birth to all of us and took care of us as expected of a father. I thought I was just like any of my father's children until this happened [transfer of inheritance]. I had a normal relationship with my siblings [half brothers and sisters] before the demise of our father. But when this happened none of them said anything to counter the verdict of the *malamai*. I feel some resentment toward them, and the relationship has gone some way I am not happy about, but at least they should have said something (. . .) even if their mother might have a different thought about the whole issue. But the first set of *malamai*, in my opinion, did not do a good job and I just don't understand, some of the [extended] family members too, I don't know whether there is some connivance with the *malamai* [first set], my siblings and my stepmother. I am saying this [last statement] because of what is happening. Well with the help of my friend's suggestion Hajj Umar has solved the problem without any resistance from any angle [*malamai* or family].

The young woman identifies multiple other actors who were involved in her situation, including other *malamai*, extended family members, her siblings, her stepmother, and a friend. Nevertheless, she is the central actor – just as Rabiu was – in untangling the practical application of the law. These actors and the knowledge they deploy are significant in the negotiation and constitution of Hajj Umar's authority because of the inherent confirmation of Hajj Umar's status from the side of the persons asking for his mediation.

Khul Divorce at Hajj Umar's Legal Service

Khul is a category of divorce that is tied to *mahr*.[42] *Mahr* is money and/or gifts given to a bride by a groom to validate a marriage. *Mahr* becomes very important in divorce, especially when a divorce proceeding is initiated by a woman. The understanding of *khul* practice originates from Qur'an 2: 229, which reads: "you are not allowed to take away the least of what you have given away to your wives, unless both of you fear that you will not be able to keep the limits set by God. If you cannot maintain the bonds fixed by God, there will be no blame on either if the woman redeems herself." Based on this verse, Islamicists such as Esposito argue that *khul* is divorce based on mutual consent.[43] According to such scholars, a woman must return some or all of her *mahr* in order for the divorce to be approved. Tucker calls *khul* "women's divorce" since it is initiated by women.[44] Stiles, however, likens women's actions in *khul* to "buying a divorce" and further shows that *khul* is not always a divorce by mutual consent or through women's initiative, but can also be enacted through judicial ruling.[45]

Further anthropological works on Muslim contexts in Africa have also demonstrated the complexities that can arise in the application of *khul*. In particular, it has been demonstrated that there are different articulations of *khul* in various contexts around the world. While *khul* in classical Islamic jurisprudence refers to female-initiated divorce which is connected to *mahr*, practical application of the law can alter this position.[46] Elsewhere, I have highlighted the complex meaning that *khul* can have in Accra, indicating that, although it is generally considered to mean divorce initiated by women and actualized by women alone or in conjunction with *malamai*, it is contested by men.[47]

Like his approach to inheritance by illegitimate children, Umar's approach to *khul* is intimately shaped by his perception of the context in which he works and his own *Weltanschauung* – worldview – in relation to Islam. The discussion is based on my observations during arbitration of a total of fifty-three divorce cases, out of which forty-six were initiated by women, in addition to thirty-two past records that involve divorce. Of those past records, twenty-nine were initia-

42 To avoid the controversy between the competing concepts of 'bride wealth' and 'dowry', I adopt the Islamic term *mahr* to denote the gift handed to a bride to validate a marriage in Muslim cultures.

43 Esposito 2001.

44 Tucker 2008.

45 Stiles 2009.

46 Sonnenveld and Stiles 2019; Stiles 2019.

47 Issaka-Toure 2022.

ted by women. I also conducted interviews about some of the more memorable cases that have been brought to Hajj Umar. Across the cases, women were almost always granted the divorce they sought.

In *khul*, just as in the inheritance context, Hajj Umar's understanding and adjudication of a case – and thus the constitution of his authority – requires meeting the other social actors and parties concerned. When Hajj Umar receives a complaint, he invites both parties and their representatives to the office. He follows this same procedure when women seek his legal service on divorce matters. However, his invitation can be accepted or declined. As the parties converse, sometimes very heatedly, it becomes clear that almost all cases have already been considered and discussed in the extended family networks of both sides and sometimes by other *malamai* before the parties come to Hajj Umar.

Mr Garba, one of Hajj Umar's assistants, commented on the often lively *khul* discussions, likening Hajj Umar's office to "a site of comic relief".[48] He described what happened when a woman called Bushra initiated divorce proceedings against her husband, Lamine. Mr Garba told me that the initial agreement to a startlingly high financial settlement of USD 100.000 had been facilitated by Hajj Umar. It was Bushra who had named this figure as her payment to Lamine for her release when Lamine wanted some form of settlement. Yet after the case had been closed, she did not follow through, according to her husband. The case was reopened after Lamine petitioned the state court without a resolution. During this process, Bushra remarried. According to Mr Garba, Lamine came to Hajj Umar one day with a letter from the court stating that the divorce litigation between Lamine and Bushra could not be settled and that Hajj Umar should apply Islamic divorce law to their case.

Bushra, an uneducated but successful businesswoman, had reportedly never paid Lamine the amount facilitated by Hajj Umar but went on to remarry. Lamine, litigating over his *mahr*, went to a secular Ghanaian national court and opened a case against Bushra for not paying the amount agreed for her divorce. The court, however, could not settle the case and it was referred back to Hajj Umar. When Hajj Umar had first mediated Bushra's petition for a divorce, Bushra had promised to pay the outlandish sum of USD 100,000 to settle her divorce from Lamine. No one in the meeting believed her, as this amount was far too much. It far outweighed the *mahr* Lamine gave to Bushra. She, however, insisted that she would pay this sum in exchange for her release. According to Mr Garba, because she failed to fulfil her promise and the court was unable to resolve the case, it went back to

48 Formal discussion with Mr Garba, Office of the ASWAJ, Nima, Accra, June 8, 2015.

Hajj Umar. However, both parties insisted they had settled one another regarding Hajj Umar's earlier resolution:

> Bushra said, "I have paid". But Lamine said you have not paid. Bushra then told Hajj Umar to ask Lamine whether he remembered the amount of USD 100,000 he had collected from one of her clients without her knowledge. When he [Lamine] confirmed her statement to Hajj Umar, she opined that the amount is for her release. That is why she had always maintained that she had paid for her release. This closed the case, and she got her freedom.

Lamine was defeated and the divorce was decreed. It turns out that in rare cases of *khul*, when the woman is exceptionally wealthy, very large sums are involved. It was difficult to acquire any specific information about the details of the exact sum agreed on between the parties and Hajj Umar because the file was missing. The official responsible for Bushra and Lamine's case no longer worked at the office. Hajj Umar's accounts of *khul*, together with anecdotal evidence, suggest that cases of expensive *khul* do exist. I had expected Lamine to contest the legality of Bushra's remarriage, because men would normally object to such a marriage while divorce proceedings in an existing Islamic marriage were ongoing.[49] But Mr Garba reminded me that, as she had already remarried, nothing could be done.[50]

I observed in Hajj Umar's legal practice that judicial enactment of *khul* is very prominent when women initiate divorce. Rabi, a woman with only a primary education, sought Hajj Umar's help in divorcing her husband, Salimu. "I have come to tell you", she said, "that I am no longer interested in my marriage to my husband, Salimu. He hasn't changed his bad habit." On the appointed day, both husband and wife restated their positions in the presence of their families and witnesses to their marriage.

Rabi had already come to see Hajj Umar in 2014, complaining that Salimu had not lived up to his marital responsibilities. Although Hajj Umar invited Salimu and his family to a meeting, neither Salimu nor his family came. Hajj Umar decided, however, that since Rabi had accepted Salimu's apology, the marriage should continue. When, a year later, Rabi complained a second time that nothing had changed, Hajj Umar called on Salimu again. This time, Salimu appeared with his family. Rabi explained: "I have been married to Salimu for some years and I have come to the conclusion that I cannot continue." Adding that Salimu did not support her financially, and that the responsibility for running the household fell on her, she said: "I am the man of the house (and) he is a drunkard." Rabi repor-

49 Issaka-Toure 2022.

50 Formal discussion with Mr Garba, Office of the ASWAJ, Nima, Accra, June 8, 2015.

ted feeling humiliated by Salimu's addiction, saying: "Sometimes I have to find men to carry him home in a state of drunkenness."

Hajj Umar asked if Rabi was claiming that Salimu was irresponsible. Rabi confirmed her position: "He does not give me chop money. Everything is my business. Is this the way a Muslim man should behave towards his wife?" She begged Hajj Umar to end the marriage.

Salimu concurred with Rabi's description of the state of their marriage, but he did not want a divorce. "I have offended her badly and I ask that she pardons me", he said, promising to repent. Hajj Umar urged the couple to try to reconcile and to return to his office a week later. Again, Rabi insisted that she did not want to remain in the marriage, adding that she would no longer perform her wifely duties. Although Salimu continued to beg for forgiveness and promise to change his ways, Rabi was intransigent, and, since the couple had no children, Hajj Umar decreed that, after three months, after performing *iddah*,[51] Rabi could come to claim her divorce certificate.

In our later discussions, Umar explained that the following Prophetic saying shaped the logic behind his application of *khul*. "A woman went to the Prophet and said she did not want her husband, although all was well in the marriage, and the husband fulfilled his duties. The Prophet asked her to return the *mahr* for her release." For Hajj Umar, *khul* is a Prophetic tradition, and he emulates it in his mediation. However, Umar neither mentioned the term *khul* nor asked for the return of the *mahr*. Hajj Umar added: "I do not mention *khul* and its features because of what is prevailing in our context. This is the case that women have become men [maintaining themselves instead of receiving maintenance from husbands]. They do what men should do according to Islam." He offered a second Prophetic saying to defend his position on *khul*: "The Prophet once asked one of his emissaries to Yemen what principles he would apply in governing his province. The emissary said first the Qur'an, then the Sunnah, and then the intellect in the absence of the first two. This, the Prophet affirmed." For Hajj Umar, therefore, the human intellect is a powerful tool that can serve human needs in case of the absence of scriptural intervention because, according to the Prophetic tradition he refers to, the scriptures have not touched on every problem Muslims might face.

Hajj Umar's perspective on *mahr* was further corroborated by his administrator, who stated that "the sadaki [*mahr*] given to women is usually something very symbolic and in some of the very few cases, women are given to husbands

51 A period of three menstrual cycles for the determination of pregnancy, *iddah* can also sometimes effectuate a change of mind.

as *sadaqa* [gift]". In other words, Umar understood *khul* in the context of Muslim women in Accra, whose situation is different from that of women who lived in the Prophet's time. For Hajj Umar, human agency matters a great deal in applying the law.

Hajj Umar's work thus broadens our understanding of female-initiated divorce in two ways. *Khul* has been described as 'buying divorce', and Bushra did give her husband money. But the law says clearly that in *khul*, only the *mahr* has to be returned, and what Bushra gave far exceeded the *mahr* she had received, and furthermore, the sum was her own suggestion. If this is also *khul*, it is clearly a particularly complex case, for we cannot argue that it is a 'purchase'.

In the case of Rabi, Hajj Umar enacted *khul*, but without any connection to *mahr*. He enacted the *khul* because, in his view, "the woman turned into a man" – a symbolic statement in reference to the husband's failure to provide for his wife, a legal provision of Muslim marriage. His rationale is that a lack of maintenance alone is a sufficiently valid reason for a woman to seek divorce in Islam. Moreover, in both cases the husbands objected. Therefore, these are not cases of *khul* through mutual consent. Rabi's case is actually a female-initiated divorce actualized by Hajj Umar's enactment, while Bushra's was also female-initiated but without direct return of the *mahr*.

There is, then, in Hajj Umar's practice no straightforward or single approach to *khul*, either as divorce purchase or divorce by mutual consent. What is common to both cases, however, is Hajj Umar's interest in individuals and how the complexity of their lives relates to the nature of the law.

Hajj Umar is consciously working in a pluralistic legal context. The back and forth of Bushra's case – first going to Hajj Umar, then to a secular Ghanaian court, and finally back to Hajj Umar – presents us with a clear interconnection between the state and Islamic religious authorities in delivering justice. Here, the roles of the individual actors as well as of the *malamai* and judges are significant in applying the law. Evidently, Muslims have at their disposal both customary law and a state legal system that is articulated within a secular framework, and they can avail themselves of either one. In the end, however, it is the state which gives people the option of turning to customary law to settle civil cases. In other words, Hajj Umar's position as a *malam* is relevant for the state's application of a pluralistic legal system.

Significantly, Muslims' choice of a particular authority is voluntary. As I observed in Hajj Umar's practice, most of the complainants are women, and in some cases their husbands do not respond to Hajj Umar's or any other *malam*'s invitation. However, this does not prevent Hajj Umar from applying the law. As is evident from the interlocutor I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, Hajj

Umar mediates cases even when the husband refuses to heed his invitation, a point that stresses his authority among the local Muslim community.

Life after Legal Reasoning

Revisiting the discussion about how authority is constituted with regard to the interaction between Islamic family law and a pluralistic legal system, the chapter has demonstrated how a *malam*'s perception of social life is vital. Significantly, the chapter traced the social receptiveness in the legal practice of the central figure of the chapter, Hajj Umar. Hajj Umar is highly alert to the fact that Islamic family law in Ghana is 'customary law' and thus subordinate to state law. One example of an interaction between the realms of state law and Islamic law is the court's request that Hajj Umar, as a *malam*, mediate Lamine's claim, which the state designated as a 'customary' issue. Thus, Hajj Umar's authority results from the state's view of his abilities and status, as well as from the actions of Muslims who seek his legal advice.

The constitution of Hajj Umar's authority in speaking for Islam is particularly important. Paying close attention to the Muslim cultural context, he takes the law's consequences for the lives of individuals into consideration. His adaptation of Islamic family law responds to both the dignity of individuals and the pluralistic legal and cultural context, in which he views the state as the final arbiter.

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Ulrike Freitag

The Projection of Saudi Arabian Influence in West Africa

Introduction

In 1940, Hajj Mahmoud Ba Diowol returned from twelve years of study in Mecca. On his return journey, the French authorities arrested him and his party for their lack of papers at the border between British-ruled Nigeria and French-ruled Niger. They confiscated 40 crates with 60 kilograms of Arabic books. It required the intervention of local notables to allow the African scholar suspected of disseminating pan-Islamic ideas to continue his journey to his native Mauritania.[1] From there, he set out to become an influential educator and Islamic advisor, as I will describe. Only a few years later, a group of former Azhar students appeared in Bamako propagating reformist ideas against the local brotherhoods and their cooperation with the colonial authorities. In spite of the marked differences between Egyptian reformism and the Saudi Wahhabiyya, as well as between political authorities in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, this group soon became designated as Wahhabis, too. This term thereafter developed into a synonym for reformist Islam in the French West African colonies in general.

These episodes need to be understood against a background in which Middle Eastern Islam was regarded with general suspicion by the French authorities and classified as Wahhabi. The term denoted a particular anti-esoteric, non-Sufi notion of Islamic reform that is now often used synonymously with 'Salafiyya'.[2] There is widespread conceptual confusion about the origins and, more pertinently, the

1 Kane 1997, 431–65, here 441–42.

2 Seesemann 2002, 109–39, here 111–12; Kaba 1974, 5 and passim; on the French discourses against the Wahhabiyya in Mali see Brenner 2000; cf. Loimeier 2016, 31; Amselle 1985, 345–57.

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Ulrike Freitag: Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient, Kirchweg 33, 14129 Berlin, Germany, e-mail: ulrike.freitag@zmo.de

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development of the Salafiyya. Wahhabi Islam has become closely identified with a more quietist version of Salafi Islam, the other version is more activist-oriented and often associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. But these definitions hide many cases of the "cross-pollination of ideas" between the two.[3] This is as true for Middle Eastern discourses on Salafiyya as for those in West Africa. Kaba has shown that, for what was considered to be the West African Wahhabiyya of the 1930s–50s, the roots of the movement lay with both Wahhabi-Islam encountered during the hajj and reformist Islam in Egypt as taught at al-Azhar and propagated by the Muslim Brotherhood and other associations.[4] For the West-African students and *'ulama'*, common aspects in Middle Eastern attempts to return to an original Islam – which were quite different from the hitherto dominant North African influences and which had to be adapted to their local contexts – clearly overshadowed the finer doctrinal and political distinctions between the Wahhabiyya and the Salafiyya.[5]

As the destination of millions of pilgrims visiting the most holy sites of Islam, Saudi Arabia might seem a natural source of inspiration for Muslims worldwide. While religious debates and developments in Mecca and Medina did indeed spread with returning pilgrims, it was more often regional religious centres which exerted a decisive influence on neighbouring Muslim societies before the onset of mass pilgrimage in the last half (or even quarter) of the 20th century. Centres of learning in West Africa – such as Timbuktu and Kano – as well as those in North Africa, were at the heart of religious exchanges in sub-Saharan Africa. It was here that the new ideas arriving with returning pilgrims and the manuscripts they carried were mediated and adapted. This has changed rapidly over the past century, partly due to new infrastructures – from printing to the aeroplane and internet – which allow for the rapid travel of ideas. Rashid Rida's journal al-Manar, published in Cairo from 1898–1935, was perhaps the first sustained attempt to systematically spread a reformist message among Muslims, although its geographical reach remained limited.

Since then, individuals, organizations and Muslim states have multiplied their efforts to rally support for their positions. This competition has gained traction in West Africa since independence, due to the local desire to find alternatives to the educational, social and religious systems inherited from the colonial past. Closer contact with the Middle East and a rising interest in the Arabic language

3 Lauzière 2016, 217.

4 Kaba 1974, 47–92.

5 On the ways in which different reformist movements related to and at times intermeshed with the Wahhabi doctrine, cf. Commins 2009 (pb. ed.), 131–52.

promised deeper understanding of the scripture but also participation in the exchanges of the transnational *umma*.[6] Among those who were at times eager to respond to such African demand, and at times eager to spread their own interpretation of Islam and political agenda, were regional powers such as Morocco, Libya (until 2011) and Egypt, with al-Azhar university and affiliated institutions which are closely linked to the Egyptian government. As will be shown below, new contestants have since entered the field. There is a race to win the hearts and minds of West African Muslims, which is partly linked to and partly independent of an overlapping quest to gain political influence and support in rival bids for leadership of Muslims worldwide.[7]

This article focusses on the role of Saudi Arabia in West Africa. Because of its long-standing religious ties through pilgrimage, which were often enhanced through pilgrims studying in the holy cities, Saudi Arabia is a prominent contender for influence. The close alliance between the Wahhabi movement and the Saudi state complicates the issue in so far as it multiplies Saudi agents who are active in this field. Thus, this article will engage with religious and state institutions (again often closely intertwined) as well as with non-governmental and international organizations in which Saudi Arabia plays a leading role and through which it has projected its influence abroad. My aim is to identify actors and their strategies in promoting Saudi and Wahhabi positions, and to briefly outline some of the fields in which this has played out. This study of attempts at influence is different from any study of the impact of Saudi Islam on West Africa pursued for example, by Thurston or Ahmed.[8] As Otayek has argued, local actors engaging with Saudi Arabian (as well as with other foreign) education or funding or with foreign organizations usually pursue their own agendas.[9] This article will on occasion indicate such independent actions without, however, pursuing such issues systematically.

This article starts out with a brief introduction of the historical alliance between the Saudi state and the Wahhabiyya. It then turns to the 20th century and the challenges that gave rise to the rivalry between different Muslim powers in West Africa. This historical overview aims to prevent a statist view on the topic that the following, more schematic discussion of the different instruments of Saudi actors might imply. It should be clear from the outset that neither doctrine and *realpolitik*, nor religious, private or state actors always converged harmo-

6 Otayek 1993, 7–18.
7 For example Dorsey 2019.
8 Thurston 2016.
9 Otayek 1993a, 15–18.

niously in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia or in Saudi Arabian pursuit of its interests abroad, not least because of divergences in interest between local actors. I therefore argue that neither the terms 'Wahhabi' nor 'Saudi' are sufficient for understanding support for particular religious or political trends in West Africa.

The Wahhabiyya and the Establishment of Saudi Arabia: A Historical Overview

The Wahhabi *daʿwa* (call or mission) emerged in the Najd region of the Arabian Peninsula in the 18th century.[10] Given the peripheral character of the region in relation to the political and economic centres of the Muslim world, and in relation to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina in the Hejaz, the Ottoman empire – seat of the Islamic caliphate – made little attempt to control the Najd beyond trying to secure the pilgrimage routes to Mecca and Medina which were under nominal Ottoman control. The oases of Najd, forming small emirates, also served as centres of Islamic learning and jurisprudence, generally following the Hanbali school of law. Muhammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhab (1703–1792), the founder of what became known as the Wahhabiyya, came from a family of religious scholars. After memorizing the Quran, Muhammad performed the pilgrimage, adding to it a two-month stay of study in Medina before returning to study locally. The main subjects were *hadith* (Traditions of the Prophet), *tafsir* (Quranic commentary), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), and *usul al-din* (Principles of Jurisprudence). He started to preach at a young age, advocating renewed attention to Quran and *hadith* over the interpretative traditions (*taqlid*). Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab explicitly rejected philosophy (*kalam*) and Sufism (*tasawwuf*). Urged by local leaders to leave his hometown, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhab returned to Mecca and Medina. Here, he studied *hadith* with the renowned Najdi scholar ʿAbdallah b. Ibrahim b. Sayf and the Indian specialist in *hadith*, Muhammad Hayyat b. Ibrahim al-Sindi. Both were admirers of the teachings of the Hanbali reformer Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) and his disciple Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292–1350).[11]

From Medina, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhab moved to Basra in present-day Iraq to study *hadith* and *fiqh*. In Iraq, he encountered Shi'ite as well as Christian communities. The experience of their religious practices is said to have influenced

10 For accounts of the early Wahhabi mission, its doctrine and early Saudi history, see, for example, Commins 2009, 7–70; DeLong-Bas 2007, 7–91; Vassiliev 1998, 29–139.

11 On Ibn Qayyim, see Bori and Holtzman 2020.

his perspective on *tawhid*, the one-ness of God or strict monotheism: the core of his doctrine. This seemed, in his view, endangered by Shi'ite beliefs and rituals, such as the commemoration of the death of al-Husayn during Muharram or visits to the shrines. Perhaps his rejection of the Bedouin practice of praying to trees or rocks perceived as holy also fed into this. Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab condemned such practices as *shirk* (polytheism). He also began to preach against ritual innovations as well as against the building of minarets, which he saw as an adaptation from Christianity. He further turned against urban phenomena such as luxurious living, tobacco smoking, music and dance.

Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab's most important work is *Kitab al-Tawhid*, which deals with doctrine rather than law, as do his other works.[12] Central to his understanding of Islam is the demand that a true Muslim must not only affirm God's one-ness but also explicitly reject idolatry. Otherwise, one can no longer be regarded as a Muslim and might be subjected to just war. Another part of this doctrine of the one-ness of God is its rejection of intercession with God (*tawassul*) by righteous individuals who are traditionally venerated as saints. This extreme emphasis on God's one-ness prompted the followers of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab to call themselves 'unifiers' (*muwahhidun*), whereas opponents of the movement used the shaykh's name to identify them, hence the term 'Wahhabi'. Despite the term's derogatory origin, it has become widely used and lost its polemical meaning.

In 1744, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab settled in Dirʿiyya after concluding an alliance with the local emir Muḥammad b. Saʿud. The latter promised to introduce Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab's teachings as compulsory, while the shaykh promised political loyalty and agreed to Ibn Saʿud's levying of (un-Islamic) taxes, laying the basis for the practice of political silence from Wahhabi scholars in exchange for a ruler implementing an Islamic regime and listening to their advice. The alliance was bolstered by the introduction of the Islamic institution of *hisba*: the duty to promote moral rectitude which came to be considered an individual obligation of every Muslim.[13]

In the course of Saudi expansion across the Arabian Peninsula, sanctuaries in Kerbela (present-day Iraq), Mecca and Medina were destroyed in the Wahhabi battle against idolatry. These shrines were protected by the Ottoman Empire and their destruction openly challenged the authority of the caliphate. The Empire therefore intervened through its governor in Egypt, leading to the thorough defeat of the first Saudi state in 1818 and the execution of its emir. From 1824 onwards, a weak second Saudi emirate re-emerged, only to collapse after infighting in 1891.

12 For this, see Commins 2009, 12, for the following ibid., 12–17.
13 Cf. Thielmann 2007.

In 1902, ʿAbd al-ʿAziz b. ʿAbd al-Rahman Al Saʿud reconquered Riyadh. The town became the basis for renewed Saudi expansion on the Arabian Peninsula and the creation of the so-called Third Saudi State. A crucial moment was the conquest of the Hijaz in 1924–25. This laid the basis for the proclamation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by ʿAbd al-ʿAziz b. Saʿud (also known as Ibn Saʿud) in 1932.

Ibn Saʿud's army consisted of Bedouin troops, the so-called *Ikhwan*, who were greatly influenced by the Wahhabi doctrine. Although many tombs in the Hijaz had been destroyed during the earlier conquest, the Ottomans had rebuilt a good many of them, prompting a second wave of destruction of the tombs of the Prophet's companions and family as well as other saints by the *Ikhwan* between 1924 and 1926. This was received with horror in many parts of the Muslim world, resulting in calls for the internationalization of the Holy Cities and the pilgrimage. The religious fervour of the *Ikhwan* posed serious problems for Ibn Saʿud. Hence, between 1927 and 1930, Ibn Saʿud, engaged with them on several occasions and eventually quelled their opposition. This shows the primacy of politics over strict Wahhabi doctrine in Saudi politics, and has thus been considered a "turning point in the history of the Wahhabiyya and the Saudi state".[14]

Despite controversies with *ʿulamaʾ*, the major legitimizing force in the country, Ibn Saʿud imposed the Wahhabi doctrine on what, in 1932 and with British support, became the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He appointed Wahhabi teachers, judges and imams. Public manifestations of Sufi (or in the Eastern Province, as well as in Medina, of Shi'i) practices were outlawed or severely restricted. Due to the at first slowly, then rapidly increasing oil revenues, Saudi Arabia embarked on an ambitious programme of modernization from the 1950s onward. During the Cold War, it positioned itself clearly in the conservative camp, most notably after the overthrow of the Egyptian monarchy in the Revolution of 1952. After Ibn Saʿud's son Faysal (ruled 1964–75) had asserted his authority, he combined a pro-Western political orientation and the modernization of the Kingdom with a more religiously oriented brand of politics, as will be discussed in more detail in the next section.[15]

14 Steinberg 2005, 11–34, here 24.

15 For this and the following, see Matthiesen 2018, 217–33; and Steinberg 2005.

Saudi Arabia as a Claimant for Leadership of the Muslim World

The Saudi takeover of Mecca and Medina occurred just a year after Mustafa Kemal in Turkey had abolished the Ottoman caliphate, in March 1924. This led to an open contestation for the vacant leadership of the Muslim world which, in some ways, is still ongoing in the present day. By July 1924, the Sharif of Mecca had assumed the title, but was disposed as King of the Hijaz and had to flee the country soon after. Parallel to his actions, Egyptian scholars began to prepare for a caliphate congress in May 1926, rivalling the Sharifian ambitions. The congress adjourned among bitter rivalries. Ibn Saʿud was mainly interested in being recognized as the new legitimate guardian of the Holy Shrines, but also resented the notion of an Egyptian caliphate. He in turn convened an international Islamic Conference during the hajj of 1926 to decide on the governance of Islam's most holy sanctuaries. By the time of the conference, Ibn Saʿud was no longer willing to negotiate this issue. Nevertheless, the conference became a forum for a controversial debate on the future religious policy of the Hijaz. Similarly, a Muslim conference on the future of Jerusalem in 1931 ended amidst bitter rivalries.[16]

After World War II, the Muslim Brotherhood became a driving force behind attempts to unite Muslims beyond the borders of the newly founded nation states. However, from 1949 onwards, international meetings regularly highlighted attempts by Pakistan, Egypt and Indonesia to usurp the notion of pan-Islamism for distinctly national aims. This became even more pronounced after the Egyptian revolution of 1952, when Gamal ʿAbd al-Nasser (Nasser) and Saʿud b. ʿAbd al-ʿAziz began to fight for leadership of the pan-Islamic movement.[17] With Nasser's shift towards Arab socialism and the onset of the Cold War in the Middle East, Egypt and Saudi Arabia became protagonists of the two diverging camps among Muslim nations.

At the same time, rapidly increasing oil revenues allowed Saudi Arabia to embark on an ambitious programme of internal modernization and active external policies. In the Cold War era, and particularly after the power struggle between Ibn Saʿud's sons Saʿud (ruled 1953–64) and Faysal (ruled 1964–75) had ended with Faysal's victory, Saudi Arabia became a champion of the pro-Western camp. This meant, at the time, a conservative and religious policy both internally and

16 Kramer 1986, 80–141; Schulze 1990, 70–104.
17 Schulze 1990, 104–22.

in relation to international affairs.[18] This fitted well with the international agenda of the West because, in the context of the Cold War, religion – both Christianity and Islam – was perceived as a bulwark against communism, which was taken to include explicitly anticolonial and non-aligned policies. In the Arab world, this became a confrontation between the pan-Arabism promoted by Nasser and his allies and the pan-Islamism promoted by Saudi Arabia. Consequently, Saudi Arabia accommodated scores of Islamists, often members of the Muslim Brotherhood, who were persecuted in Egypt, Syria and Iraq. Some of these, such as former Syrian Finance Minister, Defence Minister and Prime Minister, and prominent member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Maʿruf al-Dawalibi, became important allies and advisors of King Faysal (ruled 1964–75). Dawalibi led several Saudi delegations abroad and helped found the Muslim World League and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (now: Cooperation, OIC), on both more follows.[19] This illustrates how Saudi foreign policy became linked with the Muslim Brotherhood, which was, however, never allowed to operate as an organization in the Kingdom but has only more recently become distinctly shunned. One important aspect of these Cold-War alignments was the direct support of several governments and movements for the fight against communism, culminating in the financing of the Afghan jihad after 1979, which involved collaboration with radicals such as Usama Bin Laden – who only broke his ties with the Saudi regime in 1990. Even if the engine of the Saudi export of Wahhabism cannot be reduced to US demands, as has been claimed by Crown Prince Muḥammad b. Salman, there was strong encouragement from that side.[20]

The question of leadership of the Muslim world also influenced the competition between Christian and Muslim missionaries, given the struggle of both faiths to convert Africans. This occurred in parallel to the Saudi-Western alliance. Through the pilgrimage, and later through its support for religious education and mission (*daʿwa*), Saudi Arabia has been involved in the effort to proselytize. Ba Diowol's example points to the historicity of these connections.[21]

Saudi Arabia's attempt to assert itself as the leading Muslim power was challenged in 1979 on two fronts. Internally, Islamist opponents of the Saudi government occupied the Great Mosque in Mecca and were only driven out after a prolonged siege. The Saudi government responded by persecuting the perpetrators but also by increasing the authority of the ʿ*ulama*ʾ in imposing their teachings and

18 Matthiesen 2018, 217–33; Steinberg 2005.
19 On him in detail Helfont 2019.
20 Mandaville and Hamid 2018, 15.
21 Heibach 2018a, 8.

behavioural codes, thus prompting an increased 'Wahhabization' of the country. At the same time, the Iranian Revolution sparked an enthusiastic response from Shi'ites in Saudi Arabia and beyond. Iranian attempts to spread the revolutionary message abroad resulted not only in the distribution of pamphlets and events hosted by embassies but included offers of scholarships. This resonated internationally, including in West Africa. One example is Northern Nigeria. In response to the growing enthusiasm for the new Islamic Republic, which led to the emergence of a Shi'ite movement under Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky in 1980 after visited Iran, Saudi religious actors such as the Dar al-Ifta' began to support Nigerian Islamic activists such as Shaykh Aminuddeen Abubakar from Kano, as well as to increase their support for Abubakar Gumi and similar salafi reformers, on whom more in what follows.[22] The Saudi-Iranian controversy had even prompted a split in the local Muslim Students' Society by 1982.[23] The events of 1979 are said to have convinced the Saudi state to "engage even more deeply with Islam as a strategic asset that could both threaten and help them achieve their interests", nationally as well as internationally.[24]

By 1990, the presence of American troops to defend the Kingdom against a possible threat by Iraqi troops, who had occupied Kuwait, caused the radicalization of younger *ʿulama*ʾ and their followers. This led to the eventual rise of Islamic militancy and, after 2003, the first terrorist attacks inside Saudi Arabia as well as to the so-called Ṣaḥwa-movement, which challenged the Saudi system on Islamic as well as political grounds.[25] These developments laid the foundations for the eventual Saudi engagement in the fight against Islamist extremism, a term used not only for militants but also for those religiously inspired forces that dared to challenge the political silence of Wahhabi *ʿulama*ʾ. Since the Saudi government was accused of having laid the ideological foundations for the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, the US and Saudi Arabia started to cooperate not only in the infamous 'War on Terror', but also in the production of a 'softer Islam', which has been mockingly called 'Wahhabism Lite'.[26] According to Ismail, this evolved into an institutional partnership between Washington and the Crown Prince (from 2005–2015: King) ʿAbdallah. Part of this was the opening of a National Dialogue to (re)introduce tolerance towards non-Wahhabi religious orientations including Sufis and Shi'ites, another part was the review of school

22 Ben Amara 2020, 84–85.
23 Kane 2003, 78–81, in more general terms cf. Back 2008, 423–45, here 437–40.
24 Helfont 2019, 6.
25 Hardy 2008, 99–112, here 106; on the ṣaḥwa movement in detail see Lacroix 2012.
26 Ismail 2008, 113–31, here 128; Aarts 2020.

textbooks with regard to questions of apostasy and idolatry.[27] The pace of change considerably accelerated after King Salman ascended the throne in 2015 and appointed his son Muḥammad b. Salman Crown Prince in 2017. The power of the religious police was dramatically curtailed (April 2016) and prominent Ṣaḥwa-cleric Salman al-ʿAwḍa was put on trial for maintaining contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood and Qatar. It should be noted that this move against al-ʿAwḍa and other clerics was echoed by the detention of liberal and secular critics and must be seen in the wider context of autocratic reform, which includes establishing exclusive control over the public sphere. Thus, almost all cultural and Sufi circles in Saudi Arabia have also been forced to close in the past two years.

Regarding religion, the change found its culmination in current Crown Prince Muḥammad b. Salman's proclamation that Islam in Saudi Arabia was highjacked by extremists in 1979 and that the nation had to return to an earlier, conservative but essentially tolerant version of the religion. In a widely quoted interview in 2018, he even denied the existence of anything called 'Wahhabism'.[28] This did not mean an increase in tolerance towards internal opponents, as he had already made clear earlier: "We won't waste 30 years of our life combating extremist thoughts, we will destroy them now and immediately".[29] He further stated that Islam was a religion that was meant to peacefully spread the word of God while a "triangle of evil", consisting of Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaʿida, were promoting violent politics – and are hence staunchly persecuted inside the country. He strongly argued that "independent nations should focus on their own interests, in building good relations on the foundation of UN principles".[30] Given that "national interest" at times warrants coalitions with partners who are not subject to such Saudi prescriptions, the country has long been silent about the alliance of its Yemeni ally, the Islah-Party, with the Muslim Brotherhood in order to combat the Iranian-backed Houthi movement.[31] Goldberg has argued strongly that

> rather than steering the course and direction of Saudi foreign policy, Islam became an effective means of providing it with ideological legitimacy in the eyes of the Saudis and other Arabs and Muslims. Islam enhanced the Saudi position and counterbalanced accusations

27 Doumato 2006, 153–76, here 159–63. Interestingly, the German Wikipedia entry "al-Walaʾ wa-l-baraʾ" is very thorough (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Wal%C4%81%27_wa-l-bar%C4%81%27) while the English one is only a stub, accessed August 2, 2020.

28 Goldberg 2018. For an overview of the changes, cf. Potter 2017, 51–64.

29 Chulov 2017; cf. Lacroix 2019, 97–101.

30 Goldberg 2018.

31 Middle East Eye 2020.

that Saudi Arabia was too pro-Western. But while Islam has been a feature of Saudi foreign policy, it was not the interests of Islam that the foreign policy was designed to promote, but the interests of the Saudi dynasty.[32]

West Africa as an Arena in the Struggle for Muslim Leadership

The second decade of the 21st century has seen renewed struggle for supremacy in the Muslim world, and sub-Saharan Africa is increasingly becoming a major arena in this struggle.[33] Renewed tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which already found their echo in Nigeria, have been one major contributing factor. In the religious field, this has translated into a redoubling of efforts to support religious and educational institutions. Thus, in Senegal, Saudi Arabia is supporting the Islamic Preaching Association for Youth, while Iran has founded and supported the al-Mustafa University.[34] In Mali, Iran funds the Mustafa International school. Documents released by WikiLeaks in 2015 showed Saudi concern about this, despite the Shi'ites forming a very small minority in Mali. In 2009, Saudi diplomats wanted to fund rival projects such as mosques, schools, cultural programmes, *daʿwa* and summer courses in order "to strengthen the growing position of the (Saudi) kingdom in Mali and promote the country's image as the 'protector of the noble Islamic faith'".[35] The goal of fighting the Iranian influence could also be a motivation for Saudi Arabia's engagement in Nigeria, where it hopes to weaken the Islamic Movement funded by Tehran. As rival influences play out in different fields, Saudi Arabia adapts its policies accordingly. For example, Riyadh has started investing in South Africa's economy to prevent a growing Iranian influence.[36]

Meanwhile, new players have entered the international competition for Islamic leadership. One is Turkey which, became interested in Africa at the turn of the century. In 2005, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared a new policy of "Opening to Africa", resulting in a dramatic increase in embassies on the continent, a three-fold increase in the volume of trade between 2003 and 2016 and a surge of

32 Goldberg 1986, 187; Helfont 2019 argues the same, 2.
33 Heibach 2018b, 4–5; for a thorough discussion of this issue and many further examples, see Bahi 2018, 26–40.
34 Cocks and Sharafedin 2017.
35 Raymond and Watling 2015.
36 Heibach 2018a, 8.

Turkish foreign investment in Africa. Turkey, like Saudi Arabia, supports educational initiatives in Africa from the primary to the tertiary level. Beyond governmental agencies, Turkish NGOs are involved in this enterprise.[37] Heibach argues that Africa is increasingly turning into an arena in which the regional (i.e. Middle Eastern) power struggle between Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey is being played out.[38]

Other Gulf states, too, are leaving their mark. Of particular importance are, in addition to Kuwait, the Emirates and Qatar. While even close allies such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE are competing, the case of Qatar has become particularly prominent because of the political confrontation between Qatar and Saudi Arabia since 2017. In the course of this crisis, Mauretania, Gabon, Chad, Senegal and Niger broke off their ties with Qatar, illustrating the point that Africa is an arena for Middle Eastern power struggles. As a consequence, the emir of Qatar redoubled his efforts to support neutral countries such as Ivory Coast, Ghana and Burkina Faso with projects in the fields of health, education and development.[39]

Other rivals in the region, beyond Western powers, are Israel and China.[40] Thus, it would be wrong to reduce the region's foreign policy to a concern with Islamic affairs. Although a shared Islamic faith provides an important context, Saudi Arabia, which established diplomatic relations with most countries in sub-Saharan Africa during King Faysal's reign, was concerned about selling its crude oil and hydrocarbon products in the region. Since the first decade of the 20th century, food security has risen up in the Saudi agenda. Thus, the Agricultural Development Fund has subsidized investment in farmland in Sudan, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, but also in Senegal, Mali and Niger.

More recently, Saudi Arabia has also invested in security cooperation. Thus, it has, for example, financially supported the Sahel Joint Military Force, an offshoot of the regional G5 Sahel organization which is combining development work with combatting terrorism, organized crime and human trafficking in Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauretania, Niger and Chad. While this undertaking is also supported by the European Union, Saudi Arabia's support is widely seen as another indication of Riyadh's determination to fight Iran.

While Saudi Arabia tends to present its policy as magnanimous support, it comes with clear strings attached. Thus, Saudi Arabia is also willing to impose

37 Habiyaremye and Ǫğuzlu 2014, 65–85; Aslan 2019.

38 Heibach 2018b, 6–7.

39 Faleg and Palleschi 2020, 69–73.

40 Girling 2017; Heibach 2018a, 307–24. If not indicated otherwise, the following is largely based on this article as well as Heibach 2018b.

sanctions if it feels that its interests are not sufficiently respected. These can include the withdrawal of support and aid, the imposition of barriers for African products in accessing the Saudi and GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) market, limitations on the number of migrant workers (and sanctions against those present in the country) and a lowering of the contingent of pilgrims for the hajj.[41] It is probably for these, and other, reasons that many African countries are wary of being counted in the Saudi, Iranian, Turkish or any other external camp.

The following discussion of the Saudi projection of the Wahhabi doctrine and, very recently, of 'moderate Islam' on West Africa will concentrate on the employment of 'religious soft power', which is often inseparable from political aims.[42] Beyond the pilgrimage, this comprises of the fostering of Islamic schools, universities and international governmental and nongovernmental organizations aimed at instilling a particular religious world view and political loyalty to the Kingdom. Since this loyalty was central for political leaders, their concern was often less about the spread of doctrine and more about the establishment of firm links with groups or individuals who could help achieve Saudi political aims.

However, there is an important caveat: the term 'Saudi support' in the literature can point to many different actors within the Kingdom. Multiple institutions are involved in the transmission of religious learning and ideas, and many of them foster external relations, as has been shown with the Dar al-Ifta'. Furthermore, many very wealthy individuals, often but not always members of the very large royal family, engage in charity – which is how religious support is mostly labelled. Thus, competing visions of the role of religion in society and state are being exported, although the Saudi government has tried to streamline these processes since 2001. Hence 'Saudi support' does not always indicate a targeted government action, and it is beyond the scope of this article to disentangle this and give a complete picture.[43]

41 Heibach 2018a, 316. On the issue of sanctioning states cf. Bahi 2018, 37.

42 Mandaville and Hamid 2018, 6.

43 On this see Hertog 2005, 111–43; cf. Mandaville and Hamid 2018, 3, 10–12; Nonneman 2005, 315–51.

Saudi Internal Tools for Pursuing the Wahhabi Mission in West Africa

The Pilgrimage

The pilgrimage to Mecca has been considered a duty incumbent on every Muslim at least once in his or her life. For most of history, only a very small group of people was able to comply, but with the introduction of steam-shipping in the mid-19th century, motor-transport and then air-travel in the early to mid-20th centuries, the number of pilgrims increased rapidly. Thus, since the end of World War II to 2019, numbers rose from a few thousand to about 2.5 million.[44]

The number of pilgrims from West Africa reflects these general trends. Opposition to French colonial rule sparked a process of conversion, significantly increasing the Muslim population. New technologies, together with colonial rule, also prompted the emergence of new pilgrimage routes, partly making use of French-organized hajj services and partly aiming at circumventing particular territories. It is worth noting that these new technologies also allowed for a significant increase in the number of women benefitting from safer travel with less exposure to the public.[45]

Mahmoud Ba Diowol's journey, invoked at the outset of this article, was part of the early increase in the number of travellers. Having memorized the Quran and studied Islamic sciences in several places in Mauritania, in 1928 he set out on a journey that took him across the Sudan (a region stretching from Western to eastern Central Africa). Via Nioro, Bamako, Karakoro, Ségou, Mopti, Niamey and Fort Lamy he reached Addis Ababa in Ethiopia and eventually Sana'a in Yemen. From there he continued to Mecca.[46] It was common then to earn one's living along the route, combining the search for livelihood with the pursuit of knowledge and the pilgrimage.[47] After arriving in Mecca and performing the hajj, Ba Diowol did what many pilgrims did in the earlier days: he pursued his Islamic education. Thus, he studied at a number of schools, including Madrasat al-Falah: a private school teaching religious as well as secular subjects (such as

44 For more information on the growth of the hajj, see Bianchi 2004, 50–69.

45 Lecocq 2012, 187–214; for this particular hajj route, Birks 1978.

46 For all information on his trajectory, see Kane 1997, here 434–38; cf. Brenner 2000, 65–73; Loimeier 2016, 88–90.

47 Lecocq 2012, 203.

geography and accounting).[48] He also sought scholarly contacts in Mecca, among them the famous Sufi Shaykh ʿAlawi al-ʿAbbasi al-Maliki, the grandson of Umar Tall (Seydou Nourou Tall) and one of the most prominent scholars at the Grand Mosque of Mecca.[49]

Upon his return to his native Diowol in 1940, Ba Diowol opened a school teaching Arabic, Quran, sciences and even physical education (following the example of the Falah school in Mecca). He organized board for students from distant villages. In 1944, he moved his school to Dakar but, in 1945, opened another school in the quieter rural environment of Kayes. He also began to voice opinions on legal issues, as well as to preach in local mosques, the construction of which he encouraged. His more advanced students were sent to al-Azhar in Cairo and to Saudi Arabia, and he himself returned to Saudi Arabia with a delegation. There, he met with his former classmate and then Minister of Education, ʿAbdallah Ba 'l-Khayr, who introduced him to King Saud who provided him with money and books. Overall, Ba Diowol, who later became an advisor on Islamic Affairs to the Mauretanian government, is credited with founding 76 schools in Senegal, Mauritania, French Sudan, Guinea, Cameroun, Liberia and Zaire, as well as 81 mosques. Although Ba Diowol clearly adopted Middle Eastern views of Islam that were alien to West African society at the time and stood accused of being a Wahhabi due to his educational focus and lack of obvious Sufi affiliation, Brenner concludes that "there is no clear record of Mahmoud Ba having embraced the doctrines of Wahhabism as such".[50]

Ba Diowol's trajectory is interesting in a number of ways. Firstly, it shows one impulse for pursuing the hajj, namely learning, which fits with the old Islamic dictum of travel in search of knowledge (even beyond the quest to fulfil the duty of hajj). This is something which, over time, became increasingly limited: Saudi Arabia has, since the 1980s, in cooperation with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, allotted pilgrimage quotas to each country (in proportion to the number of Muslim inhabitants) in order to manage the rise in the number of pilgrims.[51] Furthermore, immigration control, which initially had been very liberal towards Muslims, has been considerably tightened, something made possible by the arrival of pilgrims by air, in conjunction with measures to control and stre-

48 On this school as an institution and on its Jeddah branch, see Freitag 2015.
49 On al-Mālikī cf. Sinani 2020, 46.
50 Brenner 2000, 72.
51 Bianchi 2016, 131–51, here 135–39.

amline the presence of foreigners more generally.[52] Thus, individually determined arrivals and extensions to stay to study in Mecca or Medina were curtailed, although this was partly compensated for by the broadening of educational opportunities for international Muslim students, as will be discussed in the next section. Furthermore, Ba Diowol's story illustrates the complicated relationship between acquaintance with the Wahhabi version of Islam, and even funding by the Saudi monarch, and the recipient's own acts and convictions. Indeed, it is revealing that, among Ba Diowol's Meccan acquaintances, a Sufi shaykh is given special mention. This illustrates that, while a stay in Saudi Arabia clearly was a way to get acquainted with Wahhabi preaching, the holy cities offered a variety of diverse people and positions for visitors to encounter. And thirdly, the fact that his educational efforts were funded points to one of the ways in which the Saudi government has attempted to spread its interpretation of Islam.

While the Hajj is now managed much more tightly, it also accommodates hugely increased numbers of pilgrims. The pilgrimage thus offers a prime occasion to preach *tawhid* and pass on Muhammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhab's teachings. It is not surprising that more returnees than before become influenced by certain outward (and sometimes inward) trends of Wahhabi Islam, such as clothing or a certain manner of conducting prayer. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia sponsors certain pilgrim groups, who are then accompanied by preachers, which also creates opportunities for *daʿwa*.[53]

Ba Diowol's story also shows the importance of prolonged stays in the Kingdom, which facilitated the establishment of networks but also left an impression of how Islam should be practised and lived. This draws attention to another important but even more diffuse way of spreading Wahhabi Islam, namely the impression it leaves on the many foreign workers who often spend decades in the Kingdom and invest some of their income in religious institutions in their home countries.[54] And finally, it highlights the importance of education in the transformation of local Islamic practices, and the possible spread of Salafi and/or Wahhabi positions, something to which the article will now turn.

52 On the open-door policy until the 1950s, see Errichiello 2012, 389–413, here 408–09; for the complicated patterns of Saudi migration policy Thiollet 2011, 103–21.

53 On Saudi hajj-management in general see al-Sarhan 2016, 196–212; Kenny 2007, 363–81, here 369; Laguerre 2011, 102–03.

54 Mandaville and Hamid 2018, 12.

Education

When Mahmoud Ba Diowol studied in Mecca, the institutions where he studied, namely the al-Falah and al-Salwatiyya, dated back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries and were not specifically influenced by the Wahhabi doctrine. This was different when he was attending lessons or sermons at the Great Mosque, where Ibn Saʿud had replaced many imams and where tight control was imposed on prayers held outside the Great Mosque, as well as on religious life more generally.[55]

However, the Saudis were quick to support institutions which were close to their own outlook. The Indian movement of the Ahl-i-Hadith, which shared some but not all of the views of the Wahhabi school had supported the Saudi claim to the Holy Places in India.[56] Shaykh Ahmad al-Dihlawi, a member of the movement, had moved to Medina in 1926, following the Saudi takeover. Hence, he was allowed to found a school, Dar al-Hadith, in Medina in 1931 and another one in Mecca in 1932. These were organized as comprehensive schools with a strong religious component. Similar institutions sprang up elsewhere, such as the Maʿhad al-Riyad al-ʿIlmi, which was a religious school in Riyadh training ʿ*ulama*ʾ and teachers and preparing students to study abroad. This institute had a somewhat more official character, given that it was founded with the strong endorsement of King Saʿud and the Grand Mufti, whose brother became the director of the new institute.[57]

The Riyadh Institute had been inspired by al-Azhar. However, the centralization of al-Azhar under Nasser between 1961 and 1964 and the founding of the Majmaʿ al-Buhuth al-Islamiyya, which was an explicitly missionary institution, prompted a Saudi reaction in the context of the Arab Cold War and the struggle for Islamic leadership between the two systems. As mentioned before, Muslim Brothers who felt that Nasser's initiative led to state control over religion, fled to Saudi Arabia and were instrumental in pressing for an Islamic University, while others acquiesced and joined al-Azhar.[58]

It is in this context, but also against the controversial backdrop of the opening of the secular King Saʿud University in Riyadh that King Saʿud announced in 1961 the founding of the Islamic University in Medina. In this, he was supported by international scholars such as the Senegalese Shaykh al-Islam, Ibrahim

55 This is described in some detail in Steinberg 2002, 511–67.
56 Cf. Preckel 2007.
57 Ahmed 2015, 83–89 and 111–14.
58 Schulze 1990, 152–59.

b. ʿAbdallah Nyas al-Kukhi. The rector of the new university was the Grand Mufti Muhammad b. Ibrahim Al al-Shaykh. ʿAbd al-ʿAziz b. ʿAbdallah b. ʿAbd al-Rahman Al Baz (Bin Baz), who was one of strictest followers of the classical Wahhabiyya (and Grand Mufti from 1993–99), became his deputy, compensating for the unease some ʿ*ulama*ʾ had felt regarding the expansion of secular education.[59] The new university incorporated older institutions such as Dar al-Hadith in Mecca and Medina. Its main aim was *daʿwa* in Southeast Asia, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.[60]

Among the staff were many Muslim Brothers. To them were added a number of Indians and scholars from other regions who widened the religious prestige of the university. They all belonged to broadly salafi trends, albeit with different positions on the finer points of doctrine and practice, as well as on whether or not Muslims should involve themselves in politics, and, if so, how.[61] Many came from different parts of sub-Saharan Africa.[62] The teachers, as well as their students later, not only helped spread the Saudi doctrine to Africa, they also helped "to tailor the Kingdom's approach to *daʿwa* to the context of Africa and thereby to 'localise' it".[63]

Students for the university were recruited both directly and through the Rabitat al-ʿAlam al-Islami, the Muslim World League, which will be discussed further. In order to attract students, different countries were visited by university staff. Embassies, graduates of the university and different institutions were mobilized. Thus, Mecca-born Shaykh Umar Fallata, who had studied at the Dar al-Hadīth in Medina and become Secretary General of the University, visited Nigeria to recruit students. His example points to the importance of shaykhs from different regions of the world who attracted students and pilgrims from these areas. Due to the university's mission of *daʿwa*, over eighty per cent of places were allotted to fully funded foreign students.[64] The aim was to educate students for global Islamic leadership.[65]

Students were even more diverse than the teaching staff. While there were of course those who had chosen Saudi Arabia for its religious outlook, others chose

59 Schulze 1990, 157–59.
60 Ahmed 2015, 143.
61 Farquhar 2016, 87–99; Ahmed 2015, 190.
62 Ahmed 2015, 142.
63 Thurston 2016, 66–67, 74–86.
64 Farquhar 2016, on the founding and mission of the university, 67–85, for the broadening of academic staff beyond Wahhabi scholars, 87–99, for the funding of foreign students 160. For a shorter version of his argument, see Farquhar 2015, 701–21.
65 Laguerre 2011, 102–03.

to study there because proximity to the Prophet's mosque had its own spiritual attraction – quite apart from the opportunity to study with scholars in the mosque of Medina or attend private Sufi sessions. Furthermore, the scholarships offered a unique educational opportunity for many, notably the high-school scholarships that were awarded as a basis for entry into the International Islamic University, but which could also be used to apply elsewhere. Under King Fahd, Saudi Arabia began to cut back international scholarships, instead funding Islamic schools abroad.

Michael Farquhar's study of the Islamic University discusses a range of different reactions by former students to Wahhabi teachings. These could vary from full adoption of Salafi and/or Wahhabi teachings to their rejection and, in extreme cases, the departure of students. Thus, he emphasizes the search by graduates for their own individual future religious trajectory. Many of these graduates became important and influential teachers in their countries of origin: Muhammad Yahya from Niger became the head of the teaching of Arabic in public schools. Musa Shaddad obtained the same function in Mali and taught in a branch of the Medinense Dar al-Hadith in Bamako. Others propagated Wahhabi teachings not only as preachers but also through recorded audio and video lectures, such as Jaʿfar Mahmoud Adam in Kano.[66] Thurston links the question of whether students brought back a distinctly salafi outlook to places of origin and to era. While many students in the 1960s came from the Southwest of Nigeria, recruitment in the North, where salafi ideas found much more resonance, increased from the 1980s.[67]

Since 2011, the university has also started to offer new subjects, from pharmacy to computer sciences, which greatly increases its international draw. The Saudi government also offers scholarships in such subjects at other universities.[68] This is most likely in line with Saudi Arabia's more general re-orientation, which it wants to project abroad. In this context, the university has been enlisted in recent attempts to propagate a reformed and moderate Islam that combats extremism.[69] Overall, the university has been an important tool for the establishment of a transnational network of salafis.[70]

66 Brigaglia 2012, 1–23.
67 Thurston 2016, 89–95.
68 Farquhar 2020, 145.
69 Ibid., 194.
70 Ibid., 188–94. On the more general arguments about Salafi Islam, cf. Loimeier 2016.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs and the Media

In 1993, Saudi Arabia established a Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance. Its task was to take over the supervision of all charitable endowments, mosques, prayer rooms and the printing of the Quran. Furthermore, it was to organize international competitions for the memorization of the Quran. It was to also organize the "call to God in the interior and exterior", undertake sponsorship of Islamic centres and universities, support Muslim minorities and migrant communities and coordinate with Islamic organizations, "highlighting the attempts of the Kingdom in the support of Islamic action".[71] Judged to be "a major provider of resources (...) for international proselytization activities (...) and the organization of lecture tours by religious scholars and da'is (preachers)", the Ministry has established a significant base abroad.[72] Thus, it has Islamic attachés attached to embassies in Senegal, South Africa, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, Kenya, Djibouti and Chad, in addition to a number of offices or representatives at embassies in the Arab world, Asia, Europe and North America.[73] Since 2018, it has been headed by a member of the Al al-Shaykh, the descendants of Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhab.

According to a recent report, the Ministry was active in 35 countries worldwide "to promote Islamic values of moderation and tolerance. The programme included scientific activities, preaching, advocacy, awareness lectures and training sessions."[74] Support for educational institutions figures among the activities of the Ministry. It is thus not surprising to see it among the donors of the private King Faisal University in N'Djamena, which was established in 1991–92, alongside the Islamic World Relief Organisation of Saudi Arabia, local Ministries, and Libyan and Egyptian institutions. The university, which aims at spreading the Arabic language and Islamic culture, maintains good relations with a variety of Islamic organizations and countries, and is member of both umbrella organizations of Islamic universities.[75] This seems to confirm the impression that it tries to avoid being pulled into one particular political or religious camp.

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71 Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance, accessed August 2, 2020, my translation from Arabic.

72 Mandaville and Hamid 2018, 10; cf. Laguerre 2011, 99–100.

73 Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance, accessed August 2, 2020.

74 Arab News 2020, accessed July 29, 2020. Unfortunately, the website of the Ministry does not seem to contain all the promised information, for example when it comes to information on *daʿwa* abroad, https://www.moia.gov.sa/Dawah/Pages/External.aspx, accessed August 2, 2020.

75 Moussa 2016, 157–77.

Saudi Arabia has also made extensive use of the media. In 1991, a brother-in-law of King Fahd launched the Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) in London, which has since moved to Dubai. In the early 1990s, Prince Khalid b. Sultan seized the widely distributed Lebanese daily *al-Hayyat* and Saudi control of the other widely distributed Arab daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat* was consolidated. Subsequently, satellite entertainment networks were either set up (Orbit, ART) or (partly) acquired (LBC). Satellite television in the Arab world really took off with the Qatar-based *al-Jazīra* channel, modelled on the BBC (1996). MBC reacted by starting *al-ʿArabiyya* to broadcast their own views of world affairs, although it has not reached the same level of international reception as the English-language edition of Al-Jazeera.[76]

Cooperation with West Africa through International Organizations

Non-Governmental Organizations

The Muslim World League

Besides the International Islamic University, the Muslim World League (MWL, *Rabitat al-ʿAlam al-Islami)*, a governmentally directed non-governmental organization, was an important instrument in projecting Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi mission abroad.[77] Making use of the presence of high-ranking officials and heads of state during the pilgrimage in May 1962, Crown Prince Faysal organized a meeting of 111 delegates from 33 different countries and announced the founding of the MWL, a project implicitly directed against the Egyptian influence in the Muslim world. As the conference was organized spontaneously, its delegates had very different positions and ranks, ranging from scholars to politicians and heads of state. Attempting to establish as wide a base as possible, the Constituent Assembly of the MWL was meant to represent the Muslim world as a whole, not limiting itself to adherents of Wahhabi or Salafi positions. Thus, it even included the Senegalese Shaykh al-Islam, the Tijani Ibrahim Niyas, alongside other traditional *ʿulamaʾ* and notables such as Ahmadu Bello, at the time Prime Minister of

76 For these developments and some more in-depth analysis see Hammond 2008, 335–52.
77 If not indicated otherwise, the following is based on Schulze 1990, 181–313.

Northern Nigeria, exemplifying the pragmatism necessary to rally a wide range of African Muslims to the Saudi cause. Internally, this pragmatism was evident in the appointment of a representative of the Hijazi elite, Muḥammad Surūr al-Ṣabban, to the position of Secretary-General, responsible for international relations. In contrast, the presidency was reserved for the Saudi Grand Mufti Muḥammad b. Ibrahīm Al al-Shaykh, whose Wahhabi outlook dominated the theological and ideological orientation of the organization. The office of president seems since to have disappeared.[78]

The initial programme was widely cast, emphasizing the propagation of Islam through a variety of means such as publications, support for pilgrims and missionaries, the spreading of the Arabic language and the establishment of a Fatwa-commission. This aimed at laying the foundations for proper Islamic governance that would reform Muslim societies. The Wahhabi outlook manifested itself in such actions as the excommunication of the Ahmadiyya or the *takfir* (declaration of apostasy) of Sudanese scholar Mahmūd Muḥammad Taha in 1975. Furthermore, the organization aimed at furthering Islamic cooperation as well as several specific demands, such as the Saudi claim to the Buraymi oasis or a boycott of Israel.[79]

The MWL funded mosques and Islamic conferences. The height of its activities in sub-Saharan Africa was between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s. In 1976, one of its congresses was held in Nouakchott, leading to the founding of the African Council of Islamic Coordination which, in turn, opened offices in Dakar, Libreville and Brazzaville. This must be seen in relation to the founding of similar continental organizations for Europe, the US, Latin America and the Caribbean as well as Asia. A prominent example of the activities of the African organization was its support for the Nigerian Shaykh Abu Bakar Gumi. One of the founding members of the MWL, and a leading functionary in a number of its committees, Gumi became Deputy and then Grand Kadi in Kano and, in 1962, established the *Society for the Victory of Islam* with the support of Saudi and Kuwaiti funds. Gumi's teachings led to a fallout with Sufis and even attempts on his life.[80] One of his students, Shaykh Ismaila Idris, who had been teaching in Jos, decided to initiate the founding of *the Jamaʿat Izalat al-Bidʿa wa-Iqamat al-Sunna* (*Yan Izala*) in 1978. His aim was to organize institutional support for the anti-Sufi movement.

78 Schulze 1990, 190–91. Today, the League's website only mentions the Secretary Generals, https://www.themwl.org/en/MWL-Profile, accessed August 2, 2020.

79 Schulze 1990, 206–08.

80 On Gumi, see Loimeier 2016, 154–60; cf. Ben Amara 2020, 71–73.

In this, he received critical support from Abu Bakar Gumi, as well as the MWL.[81] The main thrust of the *Yan Izala*'s doctrine was a strong orientation against esoteric beliefs and Sufism, expressed in its determination to fight un-Islamic innovations (*bidʿa*).[82] The Yan Izala movement is a good example of how competing local groups – in this case for the leadership of the organization – tried to use their connections with the MWL to support their own aims, while others, such as Amnu d-Dīn Abubakar frequently shifted institutional affiliations in Nigeria as well as external supporters.[83] This cautions us against equating contacts and supports with a direct transmission of ideas and policies. The case of the *Yan Izala* and related institutions does not mean that the MWL was limiting itself to sponsoring salafi interpretations of Islam. In fact, it relied heavily on traditional African religious leaders, which means that its direct impact remained limited.[84]

The MWL initiated a number of suborganizations, among which was the International Islamic Relief, Welfare and Development Organisation. This supported and founded many schools of its own, including vocational training institutes, and sponsored students and teachers, many of whom spread the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam.[85] Other influential organizations under the umbrella of the MWL are the World Supreme Council for Mosques and an Islamic Fiqh Council. The MWL aims to coordinate and publish information through different news outlets such as the journal of the MWL.

To this day, all Secretary Generals of the MWL have been Saudis.[86] It is not surprising that the direction of the MWL has followed the priorities of the Saudi government and its religious policies. While many earlier holders of the position have emphasized *daʿwa* or Islamic education, the current office-holder (since 2016) and former Justice Minister of Saudi Arabia, Dr. Muhammad b. ʿAbd al-Karim al-ʿIssa's mission is intercultural and interfaith dialogue. His official biography stresses, first and foremost, that he

81 Ben Amara 2020, 98–99.

82 For a detailed discussion of whether or not the Yan Izala can be considered Wahhabi, cf. Ben Amara 2020, 134–41.

83 Ben Amara 2020, 150 ; Loimeier 2016, 169–70.

84 Schulze 1993, 21–35.

85 Laguerre 2011, 100; Kane 2003, 65–66.

86 For a list and the biographies, see Muslim World League, https://www.themwl.org/en/general-secretary, accessed August 2, 2020.

> is widely recognized as a leading global voice on moderate Islam, committed to bringing global awareness to the religion's true message of empathy, understanding and cooperation among all people.[87]

Al-ʿIssa has described his tasks as conveying the true message of Islam, confronting terrorism and false notions (of extremist Islam) and spreading a moderate vision of Islam, subscribing to the notion that Saudi Islam before 1979 was essentially non-radical (meaning it didn't challenge the ruler), even if he acknowledges it held some "legal harshness on some social questions".[88] Beyond his condemnation of political violence, al-ʿIssa has forged an agreement with the Vatican, met a wide range of different religious leaders and visited, on the 75th anniversary of its liberation, Auschwitz concentration camp. This demonstrates clearly that the appointment of the current Secretary-General is very much in line with the current religious policies of Saudi Arabia. It underlines the contention that Saudi Arabia employs Islam as a political tool rather than the state's policies being determined by it.

Other Transnational NGOs

Not all Saudi-sponsored transnational efforts are assembled under the roof of the MWL. One such example is the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), which was established in 1972 in Riyadh and is a Riyadh-based NGO registered with the UN.[89] Its president is the Saudi Minister for Islamic Affairs, which shows the close ties of the organization to the Saudi government. In contrast to the MWL, WAMY is more closely linked with the Saudi religious establishment than the MWL, whose ties are with the Al Sa'ud, according to Mandaville and Hamid. Its aim is to foster solidarity among Muslim youth both at home and, more importantly, when studying abroad, notably in non-Muslim contexts. Furthermore, it offers support through the sponsorship of humanitarian projects and actively collects donations to pious foundations (*waqf*) funding different types of charity work.

87 Muslim World League, accessed August 2, 2020.

88 Background meeting in Berlin at Deutsch-Arabische-Freundschaftsgesellschaft, January 27, 2020.

89 On the World Assembly of Muslim Youth see Mandaville and Hamid 2018, 11; Pew Research Center 2010, accessed August 2, 2020; Philipp 2005; and "World Assembly of Muslim Youth", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Assembly_of_Muslim_Youth, accessed August 2, 2020. The organization's website is https://wamy.org/. A number of WAMY activities in Africa are listed in Loimeier 2016.

It collects money for worldwide scholarships and supports voluntary work.[90] Occasionally, WAMY also invests in large educational projects. Thus, in the early 1990s, it teamed up with a Nigerian foundation to establish Al-Hikmah University in Ilorin.[91]

A large number of further organizations and charities pursue cooperation between Muslims or support Muslim projects both in and beyond Saudi Arabia. Usually, they support a mixture of religious and educational institutions in very different political contexts. This also results in different local patterns of cooperation and scope of action. Given the growing international control of financial transfers in the context of the 'War on Terror', they have increasingly had to justify their humanitarian projects.[92] Humanitarian assistance is also provided through the Saudi Red Crescent, relief campaigns and an international organization called the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

International Organizations: The OIC

Beyond NGOs, Saudi Arabia has also used its clout to initiate and influence international organizations. The most prominent example is the OIC. After an attack on the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem in 1969, a summit of heads of state of Muslim countries, held in the Moroccan capital Rabat, decided to establish an international organization to enhance co-operation among Muslim states. This occurred mostly at the behest mostly of Saudi Arabia and Morocco. Three years later, a conference of ministers of foreign affairs in Jeddah established the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, renamed the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in 2011. This is an international organization with a seat in Jeddah in which diverse Muslim countries are represented and which brings together states who are otherwise open rivals (such as Iran and Saudi Arabia), thus preventing it from developing policies that could be identified as specifically Saudi. Beyond the rivalry of Middle Eastern countries, there are other divisions within the OIC, not least between Arab and African countries. Nevertheless, King Faysal of Saudi Arabia was not only a major force in pushing for the establishment of the organization, Saudi Arabia is also the largest net contributor to the organization's budget and its seat, which gives it weight in the organization.[93] The aim was to establish Islamic

90 WAMY, https://estore.wamy.org/, accessed August 2, 2020.

91 Sirajudeen 2016, 73–91, here 82–83.

92 Further on this issue see Kaag 2014, 74–94; Al-Yahya and Nathalie 2014, ibid., 169–83.

93 On the OIC, cf. //www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=52&p_ref=26&lan=en, accessed August 4,

solidarity and a voice for Muslims in international politics, in early conferences there were even rumours about the re-establishment of a caliphate.

The main tools the OIC uses to further Islamic solidarity are the Islamic Solidarity Fund, the Islamic Development Bank, the Jerusalem Fund and the International Islamic News Agency. Furthermore, support for Islamic education figures high on the agenda. In 1974, the OIC decided to support Muslim education especially in postcolonial Africa where, it was felt, colonial education had been lacking and had particularly disadvantaged Muslims. Thus, the OIC undertook to establish one university each in the Anglo- and the Francophone parts of the continent. Due to the enthusiasm shown by Ugandan president Idi Amin, Uganda was chosen to host the Anglophone university, while the Francophone university was eventually established in Say in Niger. The universities opened in 1988 and 1987, respectively.[94] The OIC also set up the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation which served as an umbrella to the Federation of the Universities of the Islamic World. It became a rival to an older, similar organization, the League of Islamic Universities, which was based at al-Azhar and reflected Egyptian hegemonic claims. Interestingly, numerous Islamic universities are members of both organizations, which shows a local interest in links to a variety of potentially supportive Islamic institutions.[95]

Besides the OIC, Saudi Arabia also participates actively in other international organizations. Overall, it is the largest non-Western provider of humanitarian assistance outside of the West, contributing mostly bilaterally, but also through other international organizations such as the UN Emergency Response Fund or the World Food Program.[96]

Conclusion

This article has discussed the origins and the role of Wahhabi Islam in Saudi Arabia and then focused on the ways in which the Wahhabi mission has spread to sub-Saharan Africa, and how the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has attempted to spread its religious and political influence. While the Wahhabiyya was crucial to the Saudi state-building project, it has been closely entangled with Salafi trends

2020; Reissner 2011, 743–51, here 748–51; Hossain 2012, 287–314; Abkarzadeh and Ahmed 2018, 297–311.

94 Sengendo 2016, 121–33; and Lo 2016, 265–81.

95 Lo 2016, 13–39, here 29.

96 Al-Yahya and Fustier 2014, 185.

since the 1920s. This reached its apex when Saudi Arabia served as a refuge for Egyptian and Syrian Muslim Brothers in the 1950s and 60s. Only since the attacks on the World Trade Center of September 11, 2001 has Saudi Arabia distanced itself explicitly from the Muslim Brotherhood which it has labelled a 'terrorist organization'.

An important group of agents in the spread of the Wahhabi mission were individuals from different countries, often pilgrims, some of whom remained in Mecca and Medina for extended periods of study. Building on older networks, they were able to establish local contacts that could help to fund and provide other support for the mission in their home countries. A prime example of this way of spreading Islam with a Wahhabi interpretation is the case of Mahmoud Ba Diowol, which resulted in the establishment of a network of schools and the financing of missionary movements. The example illustrates the snowball-effect which the activities of individuals can trigger. Other pilgrims decided to remain in Saudi Arabia and establish themselves as teachers in the holy cities and the Islamic University of Medina, attracting large followings of students from their countries of origin.

The Saudi Arabian state's external activities in sub-Saharan and specifically West Africa started in earnest with the onset of oil revenue in the 1950s and picked up with the founding of international organizations during the 1960s and 70s. They coincided with a period of heightened anticolonial struggle in West Africa. This context increased the attractiveness of an Islamic path to a self-determined modernity, with Saudi Arabia as one of several possible role models.

Saudi official efforts concentrated on support for Islamic education and missionary work, in addition to relief for the poor. This was, from the time of King Faysal, supplemented by an official foreign policy concerned with Islamic solidarity, but also with markets for Saudi exports or food security. Since 1979, the Saudi-Iranian rivalry has been a leading factor in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy towards Muslim countries. Recently, competition with Turkey, another Sunni power, has been added.

What this article has not discussed is the extent to which the Saudi agenda – which is itself a complicated concept given the diversity of state- and non-state actors in the country – has been successful. Scholars of Islam in West Africa, for their part, have stressed the importance of the links between religious thought, knowledge of Arabic and the political situation in the late colonial and post-colonial eras. Thus, Ousman Kobo has argued that the spread of Islamic reformist ideas was not just determined by foreign connections but was the result of a religious impetus to transform the cultural, political and social sphere, which had

begun under colonial rule.[97] Thus, a local context that included a pre-colonial experience of jihad formed the backdrop against which new ideas – which ran against many of the traditions in terms of who was entitled to authority or which Islamic practices were acceptable – were appropriated. As the example of Ba Diowol demonstrates, the resulting Islam was often neither traditional nor simply a reproduction of Saudi views.

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97 Kobo 2009, 502–32, here 512.

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Issouf Binaté

Turkey's Religious Soft Power in Côte d'Ivoire

Practices and Constraints in Muslim Communities

A New Millennium, a New Partnership in the Religious Landscape

After more than half a century of religious cooperation with the Arab Muslim world, dominated by a form of Islam supported by Saudi Arabia and a few other Arab Muslim countries, the West African religious landscape began to witness new partnerships emerge in the 1990s.[1] At the start of the new millennium, these changes could be seen in the region through the presence of Turkish social entrepreneurs, actors who had long been on the sidelines of religious interactions in this part of Africa.[2] The expansion of their activities into this area began with economic and diplomatic cooperation, when new businesses and embassies opened, and then extended into social projects, including ones linked to Islam.[3] In Côte d'Ivoire, where Islam has been gaining social visibility over the last three decades, Turkey's policy of positioning itself through the prism of religious soft power is leaving its imprint on the direction of Islam by importing religious practices, materials for constructing places of worship, and the like.[4]

1 Otayek 1993; Galilou 2003; Kane 2003; Bava and Pliez 2009; Binaté, Ouédraogo and Audet-Gosselin 2019.

2 Shinn 2015; Binaté 2019.

3 Between 2008 and 2021, the number of Turkish diplomatic missions in Africa increased from twelve to forty-three.

4 The Recensement général de l'habitat et de la population (RGHP, General Census of Housing and Population) of 1998 indicated that approximately 39 per cent were Muslims and 30 per cent were Christians. In 2014, the Muslim population increased to 42 per cent and the Christian population to 39 per cent.

Translation: by Catherine V. Howard

Issouf Binaté: Université Alassane Ouattara, BP V18 Bouaké 01, Côte d'Ivoire, e-mail: binateissouf1981@yahoo.fr

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This mission is being pursued as Turkey regains a significant place in Eurasia, becoming the seventh largest economy in Europe, and in which Côte d'Ivoire has undergone a transformation of its religious arena after the advent of multiparty politics in 1990, allowing Islamic civil society organizations to emerge. With the greater freedom allowed to association activities, which enjoyed the extensive involvement of Arabisant[5] elites and Francophone intellectuals, this form of Islam has assumed a more bureaucratic character,[6] pursuing secularized objectives geared towards the socioeconomic development of their members and the country. This process, unfolding in an era of cooperation with Turkey, has led to the exchange of ideas between actors in both countries on matters of public interest. The Conseil supérieur des imams (COSIM, Supreme Council of Imams) and Muslim youth associations serve as liaisons for these programmes.[7] An overview of their recent activities, obtained by perusing newspapers, research reports, and social media, reveals the vitality of this growing cooperation.

In 2004, trade relations between Turkey and Côte d'Ivoire were estimated at 34,368,000,000 West African CFA francs (52,470,000 euros).[8] Turkish entrepreneurs belonging to the Türkiye İş Adamları ve Sanayiciler Konfederasyonu (TUSKON, Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists), which is connected to the preacher Fethullah Gülen, expanded their activities to education by creating the Groupe scolaire international Şafak (Şafak International School Group) in 2006.[9] This organization, which became the meeting place for these expatriates while waiting for a diplomatic mission to be established, served as a framework for other Turkish associations that began to mark the Ivorian landscape. Although the Republic of Turkey is secular, it is a member of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and is governed by the conservative Islamic political party Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP, Justice and Development Party), which privileges links with countries having Muslim-majority

5 Muslim trained in Arabic and mostly in Middle Eastern institutions.

6 Miran 2006; Savadogo 2005.

7 COSIM is an umbrella organization of Islamic organizations in the country. Created in 1988, it has been directed by Sheikh Ousmane Diakité since 2021.

8 The currency in eight West African countries, including Côte d'Ivoire, is the franc issued by the Communauté Financière Africaine (CFA, African Financial Community), not to be confused with the Central African CFA franc. In 2004, one West African CFA franc was equivalent to 0.001524 euro.

9 Established in 2005, TUSKON has over 135,000 members representing approximately 100,000 businesses (Angey 2014, 19; Toguslu 2015, 77). Fethullah Gülen, born in Pasinler in 1941, is a charismatic Muslim preacher inspired by the model and teachings of Sufi thinker Said Nursi (1878–1960).

populations. Turkey's strategy of conquest through humanitarian assistance has therefore relied on Islam as a gateway into Ivorian public sphere. Its projects in Côte d'Ivoire include donations for constructing places of worship with building materials imported from Turkey, support to prayer circles organized around the teachings of Turkish Sufi sheikhs, and solidarity with disadvantaged social strata during Eid celebrations. This transfer of religious practices and knowledge occurred at first through individuals serving as intermediaries, eventually becoming institutionalized upon the creation of the Association Ihsane pour le développement et l'éducation (AIDE, Ihsane Association for Development and Education), a Turkish nongovernmental organization (NGO) affiliated with the Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Vakfi (Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation) in Istanbul.[10] With a nondenominational structure defined in its charter, this NGO employs both Ivorians and Turks, being one of many Turkish agencies active in the realm of social services. Although these organizations share the same objective of positioning Turkey internationally, they often run up against the agendas of some actors whose goals are divided between their personal success and the well-being of their local communities.

This chapter is based primarily on empirical data collected between 2016 and 2019 in Abidjan, Bouaké, and Korhogo, Côte d'Ivoire, and in Istanbul, Turkey, through interviews with people of various socioprofessional profiles (school staff, association activists, NGO administrators, students, etc.). Since the actors, both religious and nonreligious, often use social media, I also explored digital networks, particularly Facebook, where participants compete in ingenuity in mediating their activities. My aim in this chapter, using an anthropological approach, is to examine Turkish religious soft power in Ivorian territory – as wielded by the AKP government, the Gülen movement, the Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation, and many other religious organizations – through the prism of Islam. Since this religion has served as a gateway to the domain of social projects, I analyse how the mission of soft power has been appropriated at the local level, influencing how it is put into practice within Muslim circles and beyond. I explore this along three lines: in the first, I focus on the Turkish policy of secularizing Islamic education; in the second, I address Muslims' appropriation and use of Turkish social

10 The Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation was established in 1985 in Istanbul for coordinating Islamic education and charity in Turkey and beyond. Together with the Gülen movement and the Süleymanci (a religious movement founded by Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan [1888–1959]), it is one of three Turkish religious organizations that have spread to Africa as part of Turkey's ambitions towards internationalization and specifically of the Erenköy Cemaati religious community, which is linked to this foundation (Guner 2021). Among these organizations are the Gülen movement and that of the Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation.

assistance; and in the last, I look at the influence of Turkish soft power in the religious context.

Turkey's Education Policy in Côte d'Ivoire: An Offer to Secularize Islamic Learning

The Turkish venture into the realm of social assistance is a reflection of its use of soft power to position itself in Africa. The concept of soft power as a policy of seduction was developed by Joseph Nye to describe U.S. influence in the world during the Cold War.[11] He describes soft power as "the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction" through culture, domestic political values, and foreign policy.[12] In the religious arena in Côte d'Ivoire, this soft power has taken on the shape of religious cooperation from below – through education and humanitarian assistance – involving Turkish social actors (whether or not they are supported by the government in Ankara) and local proponents of Islam (who are sometimes not well known to national organizations representing the religion). It was put into practice through the initiatives of NGOs, some based in Turkey and others elsewhere in Europe. One of the first organizations to have an impact in Côte d'Ivoire was Cansuyu Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği (Cansuyu Association for Assistance and Solidarity, hereinafter Cansuyu), which arrived from Turkey in 2005.[13] It was followed by Hasene, headquartered in Germany, then by other NGOs affiliated with religious organizations based in Turkey, such as Gülen Movement, the Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation, and İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri ve İnsani Yardım Vakfı (IHH, Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief).[14] The Turkish state is the greatest donor as a stakeholder in programmes involving the Agence turque de coopération et de développement (TIKA, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency) and Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı (Turkish Religious Foundation, hereafter Diyanet Foundation).

11 Nye 1990.

12 Courmont 2012, 289.

13 Interview with Mamadou Dembélé, the central figure in the NGOs Hasene and Cansuyu in Côte d'Ivoire, on September 26, 2016, in Abidjan.

14 In Côte d'Ivoire, the Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation is represented by AIDE, while Hizmet is represented by Şafak and occasionally by Kimse Yok Mu, Timetohelp, and Bosphore.

Although they are initiatives of civil society in Turkey, its diaspora, and the state, the aim of these organizations is to restore the country, situated at the intersection of Asia and Europe, to the grandeur of the Ottoman era. This objective is translated on the ground by mission-based associations, vectors of the internationalization of Turkish culture and a vision of the world promoted by national pride at the highest levels of the state. The Ivorian educational sector serves as a framework for implementing a model of education that emphasizes science and the improvement of social morality through religion. The religious schools known in Turkey as İmam Hatip, promoted by the AKP administration and its ally, the Gülen movement, give an idea of the model of society they envision building through a particular type of education.[15] The Gülen movement was behind the initiative of this type of religious soft power in Côte d'Ivoire through the Şafak International School Group. This educational institution opened in Abidjan in 2006, a time when the country, due to its political and military crisis, saw its most prominent international secondary schools close their doors.[16] The project followed the model of similar institutions launched by Turkey in several West African capitals, notably Banjul, Conakry, Dakar, Lagos, Niamey, and Ouagadougou, with a programme modelled on that of the national ministries of education of these countries along with an array of classes devoted to the Turkish language.[17] Unlike the prestigious schools where only children from wealthy families were admitted, Şafak placed social assistance at the centre of its student recruitment policy. Some students received scholarships that covered part or all of the cost of schooling, while those from families with adequate means paid the full school fees. Şafak used merit-based policies to select students from various social strata, bringing them together in a private school in Cocody, an upscale suburban township of Abidjan. Students were admitted to this school based on an exam, the Ivorian Math Competition, which was organized in primary schools in Abidjan and surrounding communities. Although Turkey's characteristic as a Muslim country led Ivorians to think of Şafak as an Islamic religious school, in fact Islam and Arabic were not included in its curriculum. However, its staff were members

15 Guner 2021.

16 In 2004, the Jean Mermoz Lyceum, an important French institution, closed its doors in Abidjan. Its activities were repeatedly ceased as a result of acts of vandalism and looting by the "Young Patriots" directed against it and other French interests. These attacks followed a military intervention by France that destroyed Ivorian army aircraft (MI-24) involved in bombing French positions in Bouaké, when nine French soldiers of the Force Licorne (part of a UN peacekeeping mission) and one American civilian were killed. The American Lyceum was converted into offices for the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI).

17 Angey 2014; Angey-Sentuc 2015; Shinn 2015.

of Hizmet (lit., "service" in Turkish), a movement mixing social and religious activities under the leadership of the Muslim preacher Fethullah Gülen, so good conduct (or *temsil* in Turkish) was one of the school's guiding principles.[18] This discreet proselytizing was promoted through the example set by the staff, who were required to follow the teachings of Islam. The philosophy behind this educational policy was to achieve a "golden generation" (*altın nesil* in Turkish) educated in science and religion, an ideal shared by proponents of Quranic schools in Côte d'Ivoire.

The Turkish presence in the country was growing during a time when the issue of secularizing the teaching of Islam in schools was still being debated between the advocates of Quranic schools and the public authorities.[19]Although the idea guiding the Gülenist approach was widely shared, it was interpreted and put into practice in various ways in the field of Quranic education. In fact, long before a convention signed in 1993 gave it official recognition, the Quranic education system had been developed under the supervision of the Ministère de l'intérieur (Ministry of Interior) in Côte d'Ivoire. The Islamic schools created by this new provision have been modelled after Catholic and Protestant schools and provide bilingual education (Arabic and French). In 2014, there were an estimated 209 Islamic schools, while thousands of madrasas and traditional Quranic schools continued to operate independently without any effective mechanism for integrating students from these private institutions into the national educational system.[20] Likewise, Université musulmane africaine (African Muslim University) and the Université islamique Al Fourquane (Al Fourqane Islamic University), initiatives of COSIM and the Conseil des imams sunnites (CODIS, Council of Sunni Imams), have not been able to respond to the need for secularization, which would offer better opportunities for socioprofessional inclusion of marginalized youth.

Research reports and my own fieldwork findings shed light on the educational pathways of Muslim elites and young professionals who made the transition from Quranic schools to public ones.[21] However, their experiences were unique, resting only on individual actions, and did not give rise to a formal mechanism for bridging the two types of schools until the Turkish NGO AIDE came on the scene in 2015. Through the Centre Ihsane pour la formation et l'éducation des jeunes (CIFEJ, Ihsane Centre for Youth Training and Education), located in

18 Dohrn 2013; Toguslu 2015.
19 Binaté 2012.
20 Binaté 2016, 139.
21 Miran 2006; Binaté, Ouédraogo and Audet-Gosselin 2019.

Cocody Bounoumin, AIDE started a training programme aimed at students from disadvantaged social strata. With the collaboration of the Association des élèves et étudiants musulmans de Côte d'Ivoire (AEEMCI, Association of Muslim Pupils and Students in Côte d'Ivoire), this project consists of recruiting students in difficult circumstances and offering them a quality education. Mamadou Gnénéfoli Ouattara, the president of AEEMCI from 2012 to 2014 and a graduate of the Hadikat Dimiya Madrasa in Aboisso, led this initiative, aimed at students in public and private secondary schools, including madrasas operating outside the supervision of the Ministère de l'éducation nationale (Ministry of National Education).

The first class to participate in this programme gathered in a two-story building in Cocody Bonoumin, made up of students who had passed tests in mathematics, physical sciences, grammar, English, and then interviews, which were organized in Abidjan and across the country.[22] For this pilot project, students were given an intensive curriculum that merged semester courses in mathematics and the physical and natural sciences, enabling them to take the baccalaureate exam after two years. According to Mamadou Gnénéfoli Ouattara, director of the project,

> In the students' first semester, they have thirty weeks of classes; in the second semester, they also have thirty weeks of classes, just like in the final one. Thirty + thirty + thirty equals ninety weeks, which we do in two years. So we do forty-five weeks of classes in the first year and forty-five in the second. (. . .) The students sleep and eat here [at CIFEJ]; they don't leave. We capitalise on the time a student would lose in travel and other things. In addition, we buy their supplies and even additional documents.[23]

The schedule was divided between the official educational programme and Islamic instruction. The amount of time dedicated to the religious component was ten hours per week. It involved the reading of the Quran (four hours); *Fiqh*, Islamic jurisprudence (two hours); *Aqida*, Islamic creed (two hours); and *Sira*, biography of the prophet Muhammad (two hours). The students who achieved the best scores in the baccalaureate exam were promised scholarships to study in Turkey, so a small portion of class time (two hours per week) was devoted to Turkish. Mohammad Soré, born in Abidjan in 1996, was enrolled in the CIFEJ pilot project, which gave his academic career a new direction. The son of a Quranic teacher, Soré studied at the Salatu Sawda Madrasa in Abobo, where he earned the Islamic baccalaureate in 2014. His wish to pursue studies in an institution that

22 This building served as CIFEF's administrative headquarters and also contained classrooms, dormitories, an infirmary, a dining hall, and a mosque.

23 Interview with Mamadou Gnénéfoli Ouattara, April 4, 2015, in Cocody, Abidjan.

would offer him the possibility entering public universities led him to CIFEJ a year later, as he explained:

> I ended up at CIFEJ after graduating with my Islamic bac [baccalaureate] in 2014. An NGO [AIDE] came to see the director Oumar Camara, son of the founder of the Islamic school I was attending, to tell him a centre had been created to help children from poor families continue their studies in Islamic and general education. So I told my parents, who agreed to let me take the test.[24]

Of the twenty-six students in that cohort, Soré was the only one with such a profile. Besides the courses he took at Salatu Sawda, he enrolled in a French literacy programme through evening classes organized by volunteer instructors for adults and out-of-school youth. This gave him the basic knowledge he needed to enter CIFEJ. His admission into the programme was a test for those responsible for the project, which sought to offer better opportunities to madrasa students. At the end of the 2014–2015 academic year, Soré succeeded in qualifying for the final year. However, since CIFEJ was not recognized by state institutions in Côte d'Ivoire, Soré and other students were not allowed to take the exam for the baccalaureate in 2016, even though 53 per cent of the school's students qualified to take it.[25] This administrative problem was resolved in 2017, and the school was able to send all its candidates to the exam at the end of the school year. Soré succeeded in obtaining his baccalaureate and was guided to Alassane Ouattara University to study geography.

This successful experience led the school to open its doors, starting in 2016, to four more students of the same profile from Hidayatou Nachi-ine, an Islamic faith-based school in Abidjan. After three years of study at CIFEJ, they obtained their baccalaureate diplomas and were able to enrol in higher-education institutions of their choice. One of them, Abdou Nassirou, decided to study business management, while another, Arouna Ouédraogo, studied accounting. Although a commitment to secularization underlies this school project, its training is oriented towards inculcating Islamic values in young people. In this context, the religious education the school provides (ten hours per week) and the presence of former madrasa students have proven to be important in educating the other students in Islam. Adama Bamba, a former student of CIFEJ currently enrolled in Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University in Turkey, took advantage of this opportunity for his religious training.

24 Interview with Mohammed Soré, August 17, 2018, in Bouaké.

25 CIFEJ operates through an establishment recognized by the Ministry of National Education.

> I learned a lot of things there [at CIFEJ]. Being in Bouaké [where his family lives], I was like people with Muslim fathers and mothers but who had no Islamic foundation. Now I've improved my Islamic knowledge. I'm pleased to have left Bouaké for CIFEJ, since I've learned a lot about religion, and my parents are satisfied with me because they feel I've become responsible.[26]

At the time of the surveys in 2018, none of the madrasa alumni had received the scholarships to Turkey that had been promised to the best baccalaureate students. This can be explained by difficulties with the language as well as the selection criteria, oriented towards scientific subjects in which students of the secular schools excelled. Students with scholarships for this programme in Turkey were admitted to Ilim Araştirma Merkezi (ILAM, Scientific Research Centre), the training institute of the Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation, to learn Turkish before they entered university.[27] This opportunity for scholarships offered by Turkey to Ivorian students was not limited to the CIFEJ programme. In 2011, five students from secondary schools and madrasas received scholarships from the Diyanet Foundation to study at the Uluslararası Fatih Sultan Mehmet Lisesi, a faith-based Islamic preparatory school in Istanbul.[28] In 2012, Hizmet, the movement linked to Fethullah Gülen, gave scholarships to seven other students of the same profile (four from public schools and three from madrasas) to study in Turkey.[29] They were admitted to the Mustafa Germirli Anadolu İmam Hatip Lisesi in Kayseri. According to Farikou Mohamed Bamba, one of those enrolled in the school,

> In the first semester after we arrived, we focused only on studying the Turkish language intensively. And, in the second semester, we started courses in geography, history, mathematics, and Islamic subjects. (. . .) We learned to read the Quran and Arabic, which carried the most weight. In other words, admission to the next year required good grades in these subjects. If not, that meant dismissal.[30]

At the end of four years of study, he entered Atatürk University in Erzurum, when a new scholarship programme was offered by the Turkish agency Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı (YTB, Directorate of the Turkish Diaspora and Related Communities). Replacing the international cooperation scholarship

26 Interview with Adama Bamba, August 24, 2018, in Bouake.

27 The headquarters of the Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation is located in the Asian part of Istanbul, specifically in Küçük Çamlica. It houses the offices of the foundation's staff as well as an educational institute (ILAM), a mosque, a multimedia publishing house, conference rooms, visitor lodging, and so on.

28 Interview with Prince Junior Adingra, September 3, 2019, in Taksim Square, Istanbul.

29 Interview with Farikou Mohamed Bamba, August 4, 2019, in Taksim Square, Istanbul.

30 Ibid.

known as the Büyük Öğrenci Projesi (the Great Student Project), established in 1992, YTB is aimed at the Turkish diaspora and foreign students. Launched in 2012, YTB is open each year to students with a baccalaureate, bachelor's degree, or master's degree.[31] In recent years, YTB, along with the Diyanet Foundation, has proven to be a strategic positioning tool for Ankara's authority in its conflict with the Gülen movement over the field of education. Many Ivorian and West African students I met in Turkey benefitted from the YTB scholarship, since the activities of Gülen-related schools in Africa were curtailed and then stopped between the start of the economic crisis in Turkey in 2013 and the failed coup in 2016. In many cases, students arriving in Turkey through other organizations or their own initiative managed to get support from religious institutions, such as Ufuk Derneği and Ilim Yayma, to cover their school fees and housing.

Despite the religious character of these institutions, the assistance they gave students did not necessarily privilege religious teaching, in contrast to the long tradition of educational policies in Arab Muslim countries for young Africans.[32] This arrangement, characteristic of Turkish soft power, enabled Hassane Maiga, after studying at the Hadikat Dimiya Madrasa in Abidjan and at Uluslararası İmam Hatip Lisesi, an Islamic preparatory school, to enrol in Haci Bayram Veli University in Ankara, where he studied business administration. Yacoub Koné, a student with the same profile, studied international relations in Konya. Marc Ivan Kouassi, a Christian who converted to Islam while attending the Uluslararası Fatih Sultan Mehmet Lisesi, preferred to alternate between doing odd jobs as a broker for trading companies and studying business administration at Sabahattin Zaim University in Istanbul.[33]

In short, the Ivorian–Turkish cooperation in education gave a boost to the career paths of students from public schools or madrasas, which had long remained on the fringes of the state educational system in Côte d'Ivoire. Although recent, it has already enabled these students to continue their education in Côte d'Ivoire or Turkey in the disciplines of their choice and allowed them to enter the job market. This transnational undertaking, which has expanded to other spheres of public interest, has opened the Muslim community to new actors in search of social visibility.

31 Ahmadou 2019; Binaté 2020.

32 Galilou 2003; Binaté, Ouédraogo and Audet-Gosselin 2019.

33 Interview with Marc Ivan Kouassi, July 31, 2019, at Bilgi University, Istanbul.

Turkish Soft Power versus Local Ambitions: Between Appropriation and Opportunism

Turkey's diplomatic offensive in Africa has involved an array of activities affecting the daily lives of the continent's populations. Having been successfully implemented in Central Asia during the 1990s, this policy was directed towards disadvantaged social strata.[34] It has been mostly the work of the country's social entrepreneurs organized in civil organizations, such as Hizmet, Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation, Hasene, Kimse Yok Mu, Timetohelp, and Cansuyu, rather than the state represented by Diyanet Foundation or TIKA. These latter two used institutional channels, specifically the Turkish embassy opened in Abidjan in 2009, while the civil organizations acted through personal contacts, especially Muslims. Mamadou Dembélé, one of these liaisons, explained how he became a partner of Hasene in Côte d'Ivoire:

> Our collaboration with Hasene began through an acquaintance in Burkina Faso, where the organisation worked. He was a classmate of Abdoulah Koné, the president of our NGO Basma [based in Abobo, Abidjan]. Hasene members asked him if he had contacts in Côte d'Ivoire with whom they could work. He replied that he had a friend. That's how they contacted Abdoulah Koné. I had experience working with Cansuyu [another Turkish organisation], so he wanted me to help him in this way in order for the collaboration with Hasene to go well.[35]

Entering this community space through personal contacts was part of a tradition that characterized relations between pan-Islamic institutions and Ivorian Muslims. Côte d'Ivoire has not always maintained cordial relations with Arab Muslim countries, which have long been in conflict with Israel and are centres for the spread of radical Islam. This mistrust has made the country less open to investment by Islamic organizations, limiting it to the construction of mosques, Islamic faith-based schools, and the like. Some of these projects – notably the support from the World Islamic League for constructing mosques in the towns of Agboville, Attécoubé, and Boundiali, and the assistance from Kuwait for building a madrasa in Danané in 1983 – were carried out through local Islamic entities under state control.[36] But numerous activities rested on individual initiatives pursued by Arabisant elites, such as Dr Yacoub Moustapha Sy. He received his

34 Balcı 2003; Balcı and Motika 2007.
35 Interview with Mamadou Dembélé, September 26, 2016, in Abidjan.
36 Miran 2006, 236.

degree from the Islamic University of Medina in Saudi Arabia in 1986 and received funds from King Faisal to expand his madrasa in Daloa in midwestern Côte d'Ivoire in the late 1970s. In the absence of a framework for university cooperation, he and the school served as intermediaries when numerous Ivorian students transferred to Saudi Arabian universities. In July 1994, he was appointed Head of the national section of the Association de la renaissance du patrimoine islamique du Koweït–Côte d'Ivoire (ARPIK-CI, the Kuwait-Côte d'Ivoire Association for the Renewal of Islamic Heritage). In this role, he succeeded in mobilizing financial resources for building hundreds of mosques and wells and for assistance to orphans.[37]Although Moustapha Sy later became a major player in the Muslim community as Vice-President of the Conseil supérieur islamique (CSI, Supreme Islamic Council) during the 1990s, his social assistance projects as well as his status as a partner of Arab donors represented significant contributions.[38] In the early 2000s, his godson Dr Moussa Farouk Fadiga, also a graduate of a Saudi university, followed suit by creating the NGO Maktab Ta Awoun to assist the Association des musulmans sunnites de Côte d'Ivoire (AMSCI, Association of Sunni Muslims of Côte d'Ivoire). This step, occurring when the movement was being reorganized, influenced the choice of Moussa Farouk as the president of AMSCI in 2007.[39]

His rise on the religious scene, built from networks connecting him to the Arab Muslim world, would be emulated in the era of cooperation with Turkey, albeit in the ranks of people less involved in promoting the Wahhabi Islam. In fact, Turkish Islam is dominated by Hanafism, a form of Sunni jurisprudence not at odds with Sufi practices Almost all of the initiatives of the Turkish social entrepreneurs in Côte d'Ivoire were supported by moral authorities in Sufi orders. Kimse Yok Mu, a branch of Hizmet, follows the teachings of the preacher Fethullah Gülen, while the NGO AIDE follows those of Sheikh Osman Nuri Topbaş, the leader of the Sufi community of Erenköy Cemaati.[40] Abdoul Aziz Sarba, a Tidjani sheikh who settled in Abobo, Abidjan, served as the bridge between AIDE and Côte d'Ivoire. He is the son of Issa Sarba, one of the *moqqadem* (administrative assistants) of Sheikh Hamahullah in Nioro, Mali. Based in Abobo, Abidjan, he runs the Issa Sarba Institute (formerly called the Hadikat Dimiya Madrasa) as well

37 Binaté 2016, 52.

38 CSI was created in 1979 by the Ivorian state, Islamic authorities, and the Muslim World League. Its purpose was to serve as an interlocutor for Muslims when dealing with government authorities and pan-Islamic institutions.

39 Madore 2016.

40 Osman Nuri Topbaş, born in Istanbul in 1942, is a Sufi sheikh and guide for the Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation.

as the tariqa (brotherhood) of the Eleven-Bead Tidjaniya since his father's death in 2012. Along with Ladji Tirera, based in Bouaké, and Yacouba Sylla, who died in Gagnoa in 1988, Issa Sarba had been the custodian of the spiritual heritage of this religious current in Côte d'Ivoire. Originally from Burkina Faso, he was also the mentor of many of his compatriots who migrated to work in Abidjan and forest areas. He helped them set up second homes and sparked their interest in the Tidjaniya Hamawiya, one of the main Sufi orders.[41] While the success of his religious enterprise was based on his *baraka* (blessing power) and prestige of being close to the family of the founder of this order, his son and successor Abdul Aziz Sarba went on to build his own authority on his connections to pan-Islamic organizations and Turkey.

Abdoul Aziz Sarba was born in Abidjan in 1968.[42] He pursued Islamic studies in the family madrasa in Côte d'Ivoire and then, starting in 1995, in Arab Muslim institutes. During his stay in Syria and other countries in the region, he was introduced to the Naqshbandi brotherhood, which he frequented for five years, and succeeded in establishing contacts with donors in these countries.[43] Upon his return to Côte d'Ivoire, he used this network to advance his NGO, the Association soulaitine pour les actions de bienfaisance (ASSAB, Soulaitine Association for Charitable Activities), headquartered in Ouagadougou and active in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.[44] At the same time, he served as a representative of the foundation Qatar Charity for these countries as well as Mali. These responsibilities and his studies in the Middle East also led him to meet Sheikh Osman Nuri Topbaş, as he explained:

> At our first meeting, he gave me the equivalent of 40 million [CFA francs] to help with my hospitalisation expenses.[45] Then he gave me support for the construction of my Islamic institute, PK18, in Abobo.

However, the most significant support Abdoul Aziz Sarba received came when the NGO AIDE was created. In this project, which required its sponsorship, he expanded his networking from the religious domain to other arenas. In 2012, three of

41 Traoré 1983; Savadogo 1998.

42 Interview with Abdoul Aziz Sarba, September 24, 2016, in Abobo, Abidjan.

43 The Naqshbandiya is an Islamic Sufi order that emerged from the teachings of Baha-ud-Din Naqshband Bukhari (1319–1389), a native of Uzbekistan.

44 Due to the sociopolitical crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, the NGO ASSAB located its headquarters in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

45 Abdoul Aziz suffered from a leg ailment that prevented him from moving around for several years.

the seven students sent to Kayseri to attend the Mustafa Germirli Anadolu İmam Hatip Lisesi were from his madrasa, Hadikat Dimiya. Students I met in Turkey, such as Issa Soura, who lives in Istanbul doing odd jobs, told me they came to the country through his mediation.[46] In the humanitarian field, Abdoul Aziz, through his NGO ASSAB, has also proven to be a valuable partner of the Diyanet Foundation, TIKA, and IHH.[47] Their partnership involves collecting donations from these organizations for the benefit of populations facing difficulties on certain occasions, such as Islamic holidays and the beginning of the school year. While ceremonial food donations are known to be an expression of solidarity by public authorities with Muslims during Eid celebrations, Turkey has a unique form known as Kurban Bayramı (meaning offering, sacrifice), a mass distribution of beef to households on the day of *Eid al-Adha*. In October 2014, ASSAB collaborated with the Diyanet Foundation and IHH to donate 120 cattle to Muslims in seven townships in Abidjan, Bouaké, and Taabo.[48] In January 2015, TIKA and ASSAB cooperated in providing a generator, two freezers, and two thousand school kits to the Nouri Islamic Lyceum in Abobo PK18, Abidjan.[49] Since then, hardly a year goes by without Abdoul Aziz Sarba leading Turkish delegations to provide social assistance, such as during the Ramadan fast of 2019, when he worked with Diyanet Foundation to distribute food packages to residents of Abobo.[50]

These activities have taken place at a time when some of the population has been in difficult straits despite the country's good economic performance.[51] Abdoul Aziz Sarba has tried to take these opportunities to make a place for himself in the Muslim community. Already regularly invited to meetings on Islam

46 Interview with Issa Soura, August 3, 2019, in Aksaray Yenikapı, Istanbul.

47 Until 2018, TIKA did not have an office in Côte d'Ivoire. However, through the Turkish Embassy, it supported activities pursued by public and private institutions. In March 2016, it provided the Institut national ivoirien pour la promotion des aveugles (INIPA, Ivorian National Institute for the Advancement of the Blind) with a kindergarten and playground in Abidjan. The following year, it donated computer equipment worth an estimated 13,450,000 CFA francs (equivalent to 20,534 euros) to the African Muslim University in Abidjan.

48 A. Amirat Sanogo, 2014, "Tabaski 2014. Opération de solidarité aux nécessiteux: l'ONG *Diyanet Vakfı* arrache le sourire aux musulmans de Côte d'Ivoire." *Islam Info*, no. 463, 11; A. Amirat Sanogo, 2014, "Tabaski 2014. Opération de générosité: l'ONG IHH offre 30 bœufs aux musulmans de Côte d'Ivoire." *Islam Info*, no. 463, 13.

49 Koriane Camara, 2014, "Cérémonie de don de kits scolaires. La TIKA fait plus de 2000 heureux." *Islam Info*, no.479, 12.

50 Facebook page of the Turkish Embassy in Côte d'Ivoire. https://www.facebook.com/abidjan.buyukelciligi, accessed May 17, 2019.

51 Côte d'Ivoire posted an average economic growth rate of about 8 per cent between 2012 and 2019.

abroad, he has begun to multiply his *ziara* (pious visits) to *zawiya*s (Sufi religious spaces) under the supervision of his religious brotherhood in Abidjan and other locations across the country. In a context where the Tidjaniya, since the death of Ibrahim Sonta in 1990, was struggling to find a leader, Abdoul Aziz Sarba was brought in as the spiritual guide of l'Association islamique de la Tidjaniya en Côte d'Ivoire (AITCI, Islamic Association of the Tidjaniya in Côte d'Ivoire).[52] In an era notable for the rise of social media, he turned to this type of digital tool in his search for a base of support. Facebook, which had more than three million users in Côte d'Ivoire in 2017, was an important means of communication for him.[53] His public profile, under the name Madjiliss Cheick Sarba, had over 5,500 subscribers in 2019.[54] On this page are videos of his preaching activities (sermons, prayers, etc.) and his speeches at international conferences. One of his recent videos of a ceremonial *tafsir* (commentary) on the Quran received 1,294 views and 63 shares within ten days after it was uploaded on October 12, 2019.[55] On January 7–16, 2020, he was part of Sheikh Boikary Fofana's delegation on a tour to promote peace that was organized by COSIM in the western part of the country.

Abdoul Aziz Sarba shares this interest in digital media with other young religious figures, members of the same Turkish network, who are seeking visibility. Another one is Almamy Diaby, an Ivorian freelance translator for the Ministère des affaires étrangères (Ministry of Foreign Affairs). While working with the NGO AIDE, he took advantage of the chance to make contacts with its other members.[56] Born in Samatiguila, Côte d'Ivoire, in 1976, Diaby studied at Al Azhar University in Egypt and earned a degree in Islamic law. He began his religious activities at COSIM as a private secretary to Sheikh Boikary Fofana upon returning to his country in 2006. But this position did not last long. He moved to SICOGI 2, a neighbourhood in Koumassi, Abidjan, where, starting in 2008, he built the Al-Farouq Community around his mosque. Initially intended for daily prayers, this mosque became a place for the youth in the neighbourhood to socialize through sports programmes, scouting and the like. Religious activities, the other part of the programme, were limited to sessions for *dhikr* (Sufi prayers) on Thursday evenings and to debate groups on Islam and current events held at *grin*s on Saturday

52 Since the death of Sheikh Ibrahim Sonta, the Twelve-Bead Tidjaniya members have been divided between Malick Konaté and Moustapha Sonta, each of whom claims leadership of the order.

53 Binaté 2017, 55.

54 https://www.facebook.com/CheickAbdoulAzizSarba/?fref=ts, accessed October 22, 2019.

55 https://www.facebook.com/CheickAbdoulAzizSarba/videos/393320641345830/, accessed October 22, 2019.

56 Interview with Almamy Diaby, September 22, 2016, in Koumassi, Abidjan.

afternoons.[57] But after he returned from a seminar on Sufism in Turkey in 2016, Diaby, who had come in contact with AIDE in 2015, made a change to the training programme by integrating teachings on Wednesday nights from *Rasaïl Nur* written by the Ottoman thinker Saïd Nursî (1878–1960).

Fig. 1: A screenshot of the Al-Farouq Community page on Facebook, inviting the public to one of its events.

This focus on the activities of the Al-Farouq Community, publicized through Facebook, further opened its access to the network of Turkish organizations. In Abobo PK18, where the community had a plot of land, AIDE contributed financial support for the construction of its mosque. Moreover, during *Eid al-Adha* celebrations, the community of Koumassi receives ample food assistance from its partners, which now include other pan-Islamic structures. In August 2018, twenty-five cattle were donated to the residents by NGOs from the United Arab Emirates, including Dubai Charity and the Dar el-Bir Society.[58]

Turkish organizations conducted similar types of periodic activities in Port Bouët, a township near Koumassi, through the mediation of the Şafak International School Group as well as through a godson of Sheikh Abdoul Aziz Sarba

57 A *grin* is a place for young people to meet and socialize. These gatherings are usually held to drink tea together outside of work hours in a private or public space (a storefront, mosque, family compound, etc.). See Kieffer 2006.

58 B. Elisée, 2018. "Tabaski 2018: 25 bœufs offerts à 1000 familles défavorisées dans la commune de Koumassi." *Abidjan Net*, August 22, 2018. https://news.abidjan.net/articles/643381/tabaski-2018-25-boeufs-offerts-a-1000-familles-defavorisees-dans-la-commune-de-koumassi, accessed August 31, 2018.

named Abdoulaye Bandé. His involvement was, in fact, short-lived, since he was dismissed for diverting its resources, earmarked for religious projects, to political purposes. Having earned a degree in Arabic language and literature from the Islamic University of Say in Niger, Abdoulaye Bandé became the head of the Direction nationale de l'enseignement confessionnel islamique (DINECI, National Directorate of Islamic Faith-Based Education). He told me he had been involved with the NGO AIDE from the beginning:

> I came up with the idea of AIDE, along with its first representative in Côte d'Ivoire. We thought up the name "AIDE" together; we wrote up the statutes and internal regulations together. We created AIDE from scratch. Then we looked for a space for the premises. (...) Experts were sent repeatedly to come and assess the Ivorian setting until it dispatched a certain person who became the local representative of the organisation in Côte d'Ivoire. This was Mehmet Targan, the organisation's first president. He was the one with whom I discussed the name and other aspects of the organisation.[59]

As a result of his role in getting AIDE established in Côte d'Ivoire, Abdoulaye Bandé was appointed to be its administrative director. His familiarity with the milieu of Islamic associations and his contacts were put to the service of this new NGO. With his collaboration, AIDE quickly succeeded in becoming partners with the circle of Muslim youth associations (through AEEMCI) and imams (through COSIM), granting funds to the former for the organizing of *Sohoba* meetings and to the latter for organizing seminars.[60] In the field of humanitarian and development work, AIDE carried out projects to drill wells for access to drinking water. By 2018, about fifty wells had been drilled, of which eighteen were in the community of Port Bouët alone, where Abdoulaye Bandé aspired to be a candidate in the 2016 legislative elections.[61] His political strategy was built around his status as a native of the local township, his network of acquaintances in the Islamic world, and the achievements of the NGO AIDE. On his Facebook page, "Karamoko Abdoulaye Bandé", which became his digital campaign space, he regularly shared posts with followers about his personal activities and those of the NGO.[62] He even created a Facebook page for the ''Fondation Karamoko Abdoulaye Bandé'' (Karamoko Abdoulaye Bandé Foundation), until he was admonished and told to delete it by Mehmet Targal, AIDE's president, who disapproved of this collusion with

59 Interview with Abdoulaye Bandé, September 19, 2016, at II Plateaux, Abidjan.

60 *Sohoba* is derived from the Arabic *souhouba* (lit., "companionship"), a monthly meeting for discussing themes of public interest.

61 Binaté 2019, 224.

62 https://www.facebook.com/abdallah.bande, accessed April 17, 2017.

politics.[63] In the end, Abdoulaye Bandé lost the election and was dismissed from his position with AIDE on January 31, 2018, after several months of negotiations.

A similar mobilization of religious resources for political activities occurred in the city of Divo, located in the region of Loh Djiboua, two hundred miles from Abidjan. There, Famoussa Coulibaly, a teacher in the Law and Administration department of Felix Houphouet Boigny University, was running for mayor of the township, having succeeded in his bid for the 2016 legislative elections, when he had obtained over five thousand more votes than his opponents. As a former president of the Communauté des élèves et étudiants musulmans de Côte d'Ivoire (CEEMUCI, Community of Muslim Pupils and Students in Côte d'Ivoire), he enjoyed the support of a network of friends who were sometimes political activists and whom he was able to bring to Divo for the campaign and the election.[64] Thanks to the presence of Turks working in the field of social welfare, Famoussa received support from the NGO Cansuyu, which he used to his advantage.[65] He posted the following message in his Facebook profile under a video of a water-pump inauguration:

> No more long-distance journeys for our brave populations of Grobiassoumé, Daboré, Kouassikro, Dagrom, Kpakossou, Brabodoukou, Cefi-baroko, Madame-Chirac, and Layetourédougou. On Thursday, January 18, 2018, with the help of our Turkish partners from the NGO Source of Life [Cansuyu], we provided ten village water pumps worth ten million to the brave populations of DIVO. #For_our_population_We_commit_ourselves_TO_SERVE_them_and_not_ourselves #Because_DIVO_deserves_Better[66]

On the day this was posted, January 30, 2018, it was followed by over 11,000 subscribers.[67]

Even though at the end of this campaign, Famoussa Coulibaly was unable to repeat the electoral success of 2016, he still emerged as a rising political figure in the Loh Djiboua region. This path, which led him to Côte d'Ivoire's parliament and other spheres of power, was largely based on a strategy of mobilizing reli-

63 Interview with Ibrahim Bakayoko, March 15, 2018, at II Plateaux, Abidjan.

64 CEEMUCI was created on March 8, 2003, out of a rupture among the students in AEEMCI. It represents students who are close to the Sunni Muslims belonging to AMSCI.

65 Binaté 2017, 67.

66 https://www.facebook.com/DrFamoussa/videos/1545731425462274/, accessed January 30, 2018.

67 https://www.facebook.com/DrFamoussa/videos?ref=page_internal, accessed January 30, 2018. A few days earlier, the national television station RTI1 had broadcast the video during the midday news programme.

gious resources. However, the efforts by Abdoul Aziz Sarba, Almamy Diaby, and many others to position themselves in the public arena through mission-driven projects did not always serve the cause of entrepreneurs and Islam from Turkey.

Turkish Soft Power in the Muslim Communities: Toward a Religious Influence under Construction

Islam was introduced into Côte d'Ivoire by actors with various profiles: merchants and marabouts in the north and Senegalese colonial soldiers in the south. Initially, the religion was dominated by brotherhoods, Qadiriya in particular, until it was affected by the wave of reforms introduced by Wahhabism in the 1940s. Often underpinning this movement was the goal of Arabising the religion with the advent of madrasas, the use of the veil by women and beards by men, and so on. This provoked a division in the Muslim landscape between followers of the Maliki rites and those of Wahhabism.[68] This configuration, which had become institutionalized in Islam, persisted until the early 2000s, although the Tidjaniya and other Sufi orders also gained significant ground in the religious sphere.

The opening of this sphere to Turkey favoured the camp of Muslims following Maliki rites, which are close to the country's Islamic traditions. But the desire to give international visibility to the country under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has taken precedence over genuine Islamic proselytizing. Indeed, this project to position itself began with donations from the NGO Cansuyu for constructing hydraulic pumps in 2005.[69] When social entrepreneurs then created the Şafak International School Group and AIDE, activities to express solidarity with the underprivileged became institutionalized and opened the way to other NGOs. Although the donors' national origin and their chosen times to carry out activities – Islamic holidays – have made them appear in the Ivorian collective consciousness to be organizations working only on behalf of Muslims, they have remained committed to the principles of nonsectarianism to make a stronger mark on the national stage. Their approach to spreading the Islamic message is more pragmatic, less textual, and less propagandistic than that of the Arab missionaries who came decades before them. The comments of Mamadou Gnénéfoli Ouattara, in charge of CIFEJ, reflect this idea:

68 Marty 1922; Kaba 1974; Triaud 1979; Miran 2006.

69 Mamadou Dembélé estimated that, from 2005 to 2018, Cansuyu built 110 water pumps in Côte d'Ivoire.

> Turks do not impose their ideologies. In any case, those we work with do not impose their ideologies. A teacher from Turkey's Ministry of Education was sent to work with us here as an educational assistant [in the Turkish language].[70]

On the ground, their activities testify to this orientation. Mosque compounds, sports complexes, and ordinary spaces that host their activities are always decorated with the flags of both Côte d'Ivoire and Turkey and the logos of donor organizations. The vests and T-shirts made for these occasions also use the colours of the two countries. When government officials, such as ministers and ambassadors, attend the ceremonies, the event is preceded by their national anthems, followed by the performance of songs and poems in Turkish. At the Şafak School Group, where such practices were common, only the picture of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Turkish "father of the nation", was displayed on the office walls of the director of studies. The allusion to Islam was subtle, grasped only by the staff familiar with the values of this religion. Through their behaviour – the avoidance of drinking and smoking, the display of diligence in work, and the like – staff members were supposed to serve as a role model for others, including students. The study programme included the Turkish language, gateway to the civilization and culture of Turkey. In the absence of diplomatic representation in Côte d'Ivoire between 2006 and 2009, the school served as a meeting place for Turks who wanted to invest the country. During the Kurban Bayramı sacrifices conducted by its partners (including the NGOs Kimse Yok Mu, Timetohelp, and Bosphorus), some of the meat donations were allocated to government officials, both public and private (non-Muslim), who were potentially interested in the Turkish market. It was thus no coincidence that one of these beneficiaries, Assoumou Kablan, working in the Ministry of National Education at the time, came up with the idea of creating the NGO Action in 2014 to promote Turkey as a business destination.[71]

At CIFEJ, the approach was somewhat different in form, since the students were eligible for courses in religion and Turkish. But the purpose of this project, which had provisions for scholarships for the best graduates to study in Turkish universities, was guided by the same aim of spreading Turkey's influence. Through the subtlety of its pedagogical approach – the teachers of the religious classes being local Muslims – this aim reduced the likelihood that students would join Erenköy Cemaati, the community of Sheikh Osman Nuri Topbaş.

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70 Interview with Mamadou Gnénéfoli Ouattara, April 4, 2015, in Cocody, Abidjan.

71 Assoumou Kablan was the cabinet director for the Minister of National Education, Bleu Lainé (2007–2010).

Turkey's religious diplomacy was also interested in building Islamic schools and places of worship. In 2019, Turkish NGOs built three mosques: one at the naval base (in the Yopougon township), financed by Cansuyu, and those of Paillet (in Adjamé) and the Al-Fourqane Community (in Abobo), both supported by AIDE.[72] Investments in religious education are still limited to two projects supported by AIDE, located in Abobo and Korékipra. The former consisted of support from Osman Nuri Topbaş to Abdoul Aziz Sarba for constructing an Islamic institution in Abobo. The latter involved building a three-room school in the village of Korékipra, located in the administrative district of Issia in the southwest of the country. However, this trend of building places of worship and Islamic training faced some difficulties, due to divergences in the actors' religious affiliations and the conditions set by these organizations. In Abobo, the religious collaboration between Sheikh Osman Nuri, who belonged to the Naqshbandi brotherhood and planned to expand his community of Erenköy Cemaati, and Abdoul Aziz, a member of the Tidjaniya brotherhood, concerning the school project became impossible.[73] Their collaboration has been limited to the financing of the Islamic school which bore the donors' name: Lycée islamique Nouri [Osman Nuri Topbaş] (Nouri Islamic Secondary School). In Korékipra, religious differences between donors and beneficiaries resurfaced, but this time they concerned the goals for the school. The donors were advocates of an Islamic education project following a purely Sufi tradition, with pupils sitting on the floor in classrooms. The beneficiaries, however, wanted an education that was both Islamic and secular, following the model of faith-based schools recognized by the state.

Following these experiences with collaborative work, some NGOs (including Cansuyu) reviewed their approach and made their involvement conditional on acquiring the land title for a project site before making any commitment.[74] During Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit to Abidjan in 2016, COSIM obtained his promise to construct an Islamic complex that would house its headquarters. While waiting for this project to get underway, the condition of acquiring land titles led Turkish private entrepreneurs to limit their activities to the religious training of youth and women. This training was organized in a few mosques in Abidjan. Courses have been taught by imams and young local preachers who are recruited and

72 This place of worship, known as the Mosquée feu el hadj Abdou Moumine Traoré (Mosque of the Late El Hadj Abdou Moumine Traoré), is managed by the Association Zou-Nouraine pour l'éducation et les œuvres de bienfaisance (AZEOB, the Zou-Nouraine Association for Education and Charitable Works).

73 Guner 2021.

74 Interview with Mamadou Dembélé, March 13, 2018, in Abobo, Abidjan.

financed by AIDE. The classes are held three times a week (Wednesday and Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings) and focus on Quranic readings, *Aqida*, and Islamic law. The students are divided into different groups, from beginner to advanced levels, and work with teaching manuals produced in Turkey by Erkam, the publishing arm of the Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation. This NGO also makes arrangements for students who want to study theology in affiliated institutions in Turkey. One destination is the Fasl-ı Bahar Kız Kur'an Kursu girls' school in Istanbul, which has been hosting cohorts of female students from Côte d'Ivoire and elsewhere since 2013. Nevertheless, students who have returned from this school, as well as those who have been educated in Turkish institutions in Abidjan, remain little affected by the religious influence of Turkey. Furthermore, they do not claim to be part of the Erenköy Cemaati community behind this programme (let alone the Gülen movement, considered a terrorist organization by officials in Ankara). Even the membership of the Naqshbandiya of Moctar Traoré, imam of the Paillet mosque,[75] and the participation of Orhan Pehlıvan, the wife of AIDE's president, in teaching classes at the former mosque is yet to change significantly this situation.

Overall, even if Islam has served as a gateway for Turkey to enter the Ivorian public sphere, this domain is still not deeply marked by Turkish religious influence. This conclusion, although perhaps too early to draw for such a recent undertaking, is based on observations of the ambiguous policy of instilling Turkish Islam in Côte d'Ivoire. Indeed, the policy of transferring religious practices has been discreet (compared to investments in the business world) and carried out without clear guidelines, due to the diversity of actors. Although Islam has a bureaucratic configuration in Côte d'Ivoire, it does not yet benefit from a form of centralized management around an umbrella organization. The absence of a core clergy offers a multitude of gateways to the Muslim religious sphere, which is profitable for Turkish social entrepreneurs. Thus, while the Turkish state has used institutional channels (the Ministry of National Education, Islamic organizations, and public educational institutions), the actors of its civil society and diaspora, organized in NGOs and religious foundations, have established relationships with local religious proponents for implementing socioeducational projects. Nonetheless, these efforts have not yet succeeded in firmly establishing a dialogue of culture and Islamic tradition between the two countries.

75 Now this mosque houses the CIFEJ renamed Collège confessionnel islamique Cheikh Aïma Boikary Fofana et Mehmet Aydin (Islamic Confessional College Cheikh Aïma Boikary Fofana and Mehmet Aydin).

Conclusion

The Turkish presence in Muslim circles of Côte d'Ivoire is recent. It is still far from having delivered on all its promises, but the impetus it has begun to give Islam there is significant. First, it has expanded the range of traditional partners for Muslims and provided some communities with religious and educational facilities. By sharing its expertise, Turkey has opened up the possibility for Ivorian Islamic schools to offer their students a choice of new study paths. The pilot school CIFEJ has served as an experimental framework for this programme, enabling students from madrasas to go on to higher education in public universities.

Apart from Almamy Diaby, whose mosque serves as a teaching ground for Turkish sheikhs, and Islamic training initiatives in some Abidjan mosques, the core Turkish partners in Côte d'Ivoire have built their authority on religious resources they make available for community activities. This redirection of project aims has relegated the promotion of Turkish Islam to the background. It is limited to a marginal sphere compared to the hegemony of Saudi Arabia and the recent incursion of Morocco, notable for its training of cohorts of Muslim preachers at the Mohamed VI Institute in Rabat since 2014 and constructing a tall, eponymous mosque at the entrance to the administrative township of Plateau in Abidjan. In sum, within the current reconfiguring religious sphere, marked by the internationalization of Islamism and the renewed vitality of Sufi orders, Turkey's religious soft power, which was intended to highlight the country's offer of religious cooperation, has run up against obstacles linked to the needs of certain local actors to position themselves on the Islamic public scene.

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List of Contributors

Mohammed Kasim Ameen is an assistant lecturer at the Islamic University College, Ghana, and a doctoral candidate in the Department for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana. He is researching ecumenism in Islam, particularly the role of Muslim doctrinal groups in promoting peaceful coexistence in Ghana. His upcoming work explores religious movements in Ghanian universities, Sunni perception of Shi'ah schools, and experiences of Muslim students at a girls' high school.

Issouf Binaté is a senior lecturer in the Department of History at Université Alassane Ouattara in Côte d'Ivoire and a fellow of the Pilot African Postgraduate Academy in Mali and the Goethe University in Germany. He conducted research through the project Islam in Africa in Global Context at the University of Florida. His research interests include Arab-Islamic education, the revival of Sufi Islam, and Islamic faith-based NGOs in Côte d'Ivoire.

André Chappatte is an assistant professor at the Global Studies Institute of the University of Geneva, having earned his PhD in social anthropology from SOAS, University of London. He has conducted fieldwork in Mali, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea for diverse research projects, all predicated on the moral future of human experience in West African Muslim societies. His publications include *In Search of 'Tunga': Prosperity, Almighty God, and Lives in Motion in a Malian Provincial Town* (University of Michigan Press, 2022) and articles on African cross-border migration, public Islam, sociosensory aspects of urbanity and night life, and the consumption of Chinese products. His analyses are influenced by social thought, human geography and phenomenology.

Bourahima Diomandé holds a PhD in Contemporary History from the Université Alassane Ouattara. His research interests focus on the dynamics of mosques in West Africa, especially in Bouake, Côte d'Ivoire. He is an associate member of the Institute of Sociological Research at the University of Geneva. He is currently conducting research at the university's Global Studies Institute as part of the project "The Contemporary Expansion of Corporate Islam in Rural West Africa".

Francis A. Fogue Kuate is a faculty member in the Department of History and African Civilizations at the University of Buea-Cameroon. He is also the scientific coordinator of the Community Research and Development Centre (COREDEC) and a member of the Cameroon History Society. He holds a PhD from the University of Utrecht (The Netherlands) and has authored various scientific papers drawing from his research on media, politics, and religion and on Christian-Muslim interactions and identities.

Ulrike Freitag is the director of Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) and a professor at Freie Universität Berlin. Prior to this, she earned her PhD from Freiburg University and was a lecturer at SOAS, University of London. Her recent publications include *A History of Jeddah: The Gate to Mecca in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (CUP, 2020), and two coedited books on Muslims in the Arab region.

Fulera Issaka-Toure is a lecturer in the Department for the Study of Religions in the College of Humanities at the University of Ghana, Legon. Her research interests concern issues of gender rights, legal pluralism, and Islam in Africa.

Koudbi Kaboré is a historian at Joseph Ki-Zerbo University in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. His research focuses on religious dynamics, secularism, and security. He is also a specialist in facilitating interfaith dialogue. He has conducted research in the Sahel region and published articles on religious pluralism, social cohesion, identity conflicts, and security reform in Burkina Faso.

Medinat Malefakis is a junior fellow at the Collegium Helveticum, ETH Zurich. Prior to this, she was a research and information analyst at the Norwegian Refugee Council, a postdoctoral researcher at the Berlin Social Science Centre, research fellow with the United States Institute of Peace, and junior researcher at the Max Planck Institute in Halle, Germany. Her research interests are conflict, terrorism, humanitarian displacement, peacebuilding, and their intersection with digital technologies.

Djiby Ndiaye graduated in political science from the Gaston Berger University in Saint Louis, Senegal. He is a member of the Laboratoire d'analyse des sociétés et pouvoirs/Afrique-diasporas (LASPAD). His academic work focuses on new forms of expression of religious minorities, political mobilisation on the internet, violence and the vaccine issue. His latest publication is 'Yàlla-Yàlla ou la Mouridiyya "minoritaire" en France', *Cahiers d'études du religieux: Recherches interdisciplinaires* (2020).

Abdoulaye Sounaye leads the research unit "Contested Religion: Between Religiosity, Morality, and Intellectual Culture" at the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin. He is the author of *Muslim Critics of Secularism: Ulama and Democratization in Niger* (Lambert 2010) and *Islam et modernité: Contribution à l'analyse de la ré-islamisation au Niger* (l'Harmattan 2016). His research and publications have so far focused on the complex State, Religion and Society, dealing particularly with urban dynamics, media practices, Islamic reform, West Africans in Germany, preaching, and religiosity on university campuses in West Africa.

Liste des contributeurs

Mohammed Kasim Ameen est enseignant-chercheur à l'Islamic University College, au Ghana, et doctorant au département d'étude des religions de l'université du Ghana. Ses recherches portent sur l'œcuménisme en l'islam, en particulier sur le rôle des courants musulmans dans la promotion de la coexistence pacifique au Ghana. Ses travaux à venir portent sur l'éveil religieux dans les universités ghanéennes, la perception sunnite des écoles chiites au Ghana, et les expériences des étudiants musulmans dans un lycée de filles.

Issouf Binaté est enseignant-chercheur au Département d'histoire de l'Université Alassane Ouattara en Côte d'Ivoire et membre de la Pilot African Postgraduate Academy au Mali et de l'Université Goethe en Allemagne. Il a mené des recherches dans le cadre du projet Islam in Africa in Global Context à l'Université de Floride. Ses recherches portent sur l'éducation arabo-islamique, le renouveau de l'islam soufi et les ONG confessionnelles islamiques en Côte d'Ivoire.

André Chappatte est professeur assistant au Global Studies Institute de l'Université de Genève, ayant obtenu son doctorat en anthropologie sociale à la SOAS, Université de Londres. Il a mené des travaux de terrain au Mali, en Côte d'Ivoire et en Guinée pour divers projets de recherche, tous axés sur l'avenir moral de l'expérience humaine dans les sociétés musulmanes d'Afrique occidentale. Il a notamment publié *In search of 'tunga' : Prosperity, almighty God, and lives in motion in a Malian provincial town* (University of Michigan Press, 2022) et des articles sur la migration transfrontalière en Afrique, l'islam public, les aspects sociosensoriels de l'urbanité et de la vie nocturne, et la consommation de produits chinois. Ses analyses sont influencées par la pensée sociale, la géographie humaine et la phénoménologie.

Bourahima Diomandé est titulaire d'un doctorat en histoire contemporaine de l'Université Alassane Ouattara. Ses recherches portent sur la dynamique des mosquées en Afrique de l'Ouest, notamment à Bouake, Côte d'Ivoire. Il est membre associé de l'Institut de recherche sociologique de l'Université de Genève. Il y mène actuellement des recherches au Global Studies Institute de l'université dans le cadre du projet "The Contemporary Expansion of Corporate Islam in Rural West Africa".

Francis A. Fogue Kuate enseigne au département d'histoire et des civilisations africaines de l'université de Buea-Cameroun. Il est également le coordinateur scientifique du Centre de recherche et de développement communautaire (COREDEC) et membre de la Société d'histoire du Cameroun. Il est titulaire d'un doctorat de l'Université d'Utrecht (Pays-Bas) et a publié plusieurs articles scientifiques tirés de ses recherches sur les médias, la politique et la religion et sur les identités et les interactions entre chrétiens et musulmans.

Ulrike Freitag est directrice du Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) et professeure à la Freie Universität Berlin. Auparavant, elle a obtenu son doctorat à l'Université de Fribourg et a été chargée de cours à la SOAS, Université de Londres. Ses publications récentes comprennent *A History of Jeddah: The Gate to Mecca in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (CUP, 2020), et deux livres coédités sur les musulmans dans le monde arabe.

Fulera Issaka-Toure est enseignante-chercheuse au Department for the Study of Religions, College of Humanities de l'University of Ghana, Legon. Ses recherches portent sur des questions relatives aux droits des femmes, au pluralisme juridique et à l'islam en Afrique.

Koudbi Kaboré est historien à l'Université Joseph Ki-Zerbo de Ouagadougou, au Burkina Faso. Il est également spécialiste de la facilitation du dialogue interreligieux. Ses recherches portent sur les dynamiques religieuses, la laïcité et la sécurité. Il a mené des recherches dans la région du Sahel et publié des articles sur le pluralisme religieux, la cohésion sociale, les conflits identitaires et la réforme de la sécurité au Burkina Faso.

Medinat Malefakis est junior fellow au Collegium Helveticum de l'ETH Zurich. Auparavant, elle a été analyste de recherche et d'information au Conseil norvégien pour les réfugiés, chercheuse post-doctorale au Centre des sciences sociales de Berlin, chargée de recherche à l'Institut de la paix des États-Unis et chercheuse junior à l'Institut Max Planck de Halle, en Allemagne. Ses recherches portent sur les conflits, le terrorisme, les déplacements humanitaires, la consolidation de la paix et leur intersection avec les technologies numériques.

Djiby Ndiaye est diplômé en science politique à l'Université Gaston Berger de Saint Louis, Sénégal. Il est membre du Laboratoire d'analyse des sociétés et pouvoirs/Afrique-diasporas (LASPAD). Ses travaux académiques s'articulent autour des nouvelles formes d'expression des minorités religieuses, les mobilisations politiques sur internet, la violence et la question vaccinale. Sa dernière publication s'intitule 'Yàlla-Yàlla ou la Mouridiyya "minoritaire" en France', *Cahiers d'études du religieux: Recherches interdisciplinaires* (2020).

Abdoulaye Sounaye dirige l'unité de recherche « Contested Religion : Between Religiosity, Morality, and Intellectual Culture » au Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin. Il est l'auteur de *Muslim Critics of Secularism: Ulama and Democratization in Niger* (Lambert 2010) et *Islam et modernité : Contribution à l'analyse de la ré-islamisation au Niger* (l'Harmattan 2016). Ses recherches et publications ont jusqu'ici porté sur le triangle État, religion et société, traitant notamment des dynamiques urbaines, des pratiques médiatiques, de la réforme islamique, des jeunes, des Ouest-Africains en Allemagne, de la prédication et de la religiosité sur les campus universitaires en Afrique de l'Ouest.