

STUDY OF THE COMMUNICATION OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS IN COTE D'IVOIRE

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Abstract

This article provides an understanding of the role of communication in the management of Islamic organizations in Cote d'Ivoire. According to P. F. Drucker (2005), the mission of these groups embody is, on the one hand, to transform the individual and society and, on the other hand, to achieve this non-profit goal through the appropriation of management and communication by the religious leaders. In Côte d'Ivoire, their "Reformist" leaders began a process of restructuring the Ivorian Muslim community in the 1970s while it was organically disempowered. In this present day, this organizational and communicational revolution has allowed this religious community to regain a glowing image, and to serve as a model for countries in the West African sub-region. While using a managerial and communicational approach, this study thus deals with showing the stakes of the reforms of the Islamic religious enterprises and the Muslim community in Cote d'Ivoire. Additionally, it has to do with drawing the deriving perspectives for the development of these associations. The mode of organization and the system of communication are linked to the type of the group, which has its own life style and behavior. However, modernism has impacted on the cultural and communicational specificity of Islamic organizations and the Muslim community as well in Cote d'Ivoire. The communicational approach is observed here in the interaction of the organization with its environment. It consists in communicating the identity, the missions, the rules and the needs of the Muslim institution.

Keywords: Islamic organizations, Communication, Management, Modernism, Cote d'Ivoire

1. Introduction

The present study on the management of nonprofit organizations, in general, and Ivorian Islamic religious enterprises, in particular, stems from the growing interest that researchers and professionals show to the study of these types of organizations that (P. F. Drucker, 2005; S. R. Covey, 2013; J. Garry, 2017). They are also a subject of choice for policymakers thanks to the role they are expected to play in the development of States. For P. F. Drucker (2005, p.3), “the nonprofit organization exists to bring about a change in the individuals and in society”.

In order to turn this dream as true, meaning to carry out the mission underlying their creation, this author presents Management as a reliable tool that these organizations must inevitably appropriate (P. F. Drucker, 2005, *ibid.*). It becomes then, interesting to highlight how this statement is worked out in the Islamic religious enterprises in Cote d’Ivoire, insofar as they are active there and act as “social” sentries and a “moral entrepreneurs” (G. Holder and J.P. Dozon, 2018, p.22).

The present research is conducted on three pioneer organizations of the Ivorian Muslim community, which are AEEMCI¹, COSIM² and AFMCI³. The reasons for choosing these three (3) organizations are related to their representativeness and the leading role they play in strongly influencing the development of the Ivorian Muslim community. It is therefore necessary to take into account the managerial and communication paradigms of these religious groups. Hence the following main question: what are the paradigms and perspectives of the communication of reformist Islamic religious enterprises in Cote d’Ivoire? This question implies specific questions, namely: how does communication appear in the management of the Islamic organizations in Cote d’Ivoire? What are the communicational stakes of the reforms undertaken by the Reformists of the Muslim community in Cote d’Ivoire?

¹ AEEMCI is the Ivorian Muslim Pupils and Students Organization. It was created in 1972 to bring Muslim pupils and students from primary and grammar schools, colleges and universities together as one and help them practice their Islamic faith in these educational institutions.

² COSIM is the Ivorian Council of Mosques, Imams and Islamic Community. It plays the role of the Ivorian Muslim community leadership. It was officially created in 1991.

³ AFMCI is the Ivorian Muslim Women Association. It was created in 1998 for defending Ivorian women rights and help them actively participate in the development of the Muslim community and the Ivorian Society.

The objectives concerning such a study are obvious. It is in particular to study the stakes and the perspectives of the communication of the Islamic reformist religious enterprises in Cote d'Ivoire. Specifically, it aims to unravelling the role of communication in the management of Ivorian Islamic organizations; to determining the communicational stakes in the perspectives of a dynamic management of Ivorian Islamic organizations. In fact, this research is an investigation of the communication of certain religious entrepreneurs who, at the head of Islamic organizations, have undertaken some reforms that have brought Islam in Cote d'Ivoire to the public sphere and changed the perception that Muslims and non-Muslims had of this religion.

1.1 Theory and methodology of the study of organizational communication

This study takes into account the theory of media functionalism, coined by Lasswell in 1948, which is a model of communication based on five (5) questions, namely “Who”? says “what?” “through what channel?” “to whom?” “with what effect?” The use of the functionalist conception makes it possible to shed considerable lights on the methods and effects of the communication of Islamic religious organizations in Côte d'Ivoire. In other words, it consists of making the analysis of:

- the sender: In this study, Reformist leaders are the senders of messages. This analysis will depict the power they embody and their personalities in the act of communication;
- the content: the corpus of analysis will be made up of written, audio and visual messages conveyed by these leaders of the Islamic religious enterprises in their management;
- the media: here, all the communication channels of the Reformists will be reviewed in order to assess their impact;
- the audience or target: to analyze the extent to which the co-utterer catches the message;
- the effects: the effects intended by the senders of the message are traceable by the feedback of the audience. This analysis questions the different effects produced by the message. In addition, it will give details about the activity or passivity of the targets to the messages of the Islamic religious organizations in Cote d'Ivoire.

Otherwise, Harold Lasswell's media functionalism will help understand the paradigms and stakes of communication of Reformist leaders in the management of their religious organizations. Firstly, the corpus of the present study is made up of data collected from the

documentary study (books, articles, archives of the religious organizations and public documents as well), especially for the period from 1970 until the co-management of the Ivorian Muslim national leadership by COSIM and CODIS⁴. Secondly, it takes into account information collected through direct observation relating to the changing organizational and communication landscape of the Muslim community in Cote d'Ivoire. Direct observation consisted in searching for news around these entities, through media (press and digital social networks) and non-media activities. Finally, the (transcribed) interviews conducted with members of the study population make up the last component.

The data collected was analyzed, using a qualitative approach. The reason underscoring this choice is that the different studied facts do not require the collection of numerical or quantitative data (figures, percentages, statistics...). Indeed, it deals with explaining “how?” and “why” the Islamic religious enterprises and the Muslim community in Cote d'Ivoire have been reformed, as well as the emerging perspectives from this evolution.

2. Diagnosis of the communication of Islamic religious organizations

In terms of communication, there were two major problems. The Muslim community did not have its own mass communication media and the *da'wa* (proselytizing) methods of religious leaders were outdated.

2.1- Inexistence of Islamic mass communication media

Here, the Ivorian Muslim community seemed to be inactive until 1972. At that time, it did not have any mass communication media to convey its information either at the intra-community level or at the national and international levels too. Information was extremely limited and this affected its proper functioning. For example, the celebrations of Muslim feast on several different days within the same community are, in part, an evidence of the limited nature of information, as Djiguiba Cissé⁵ asserts. He lets know, “the information was so fragmented

⁴ CODIS is the Ivorian High Council of Orthodox Imams. It was created in 2005 and is not aligned with COSIM in terms of ideology. Orthodox Imams want an Islam free from the innovation (modernity) whereas COSIM claims an Islamic religion that applies the ruling texts (Koran and hadith) and at the same time, takes into account the social context and realities.

⁵ Djiguiba Cissé is a reformist Muslim leader and the present-day President Managing Director of the Group Albayane. The Group Albayane comprises a radio station and a television station and is in charge of communication issues inside the Muslim community under the supervision of COSIM. The interview with him was done at the head office of the radio *Albayane* on 03/18/2020.

that one could hear that Bouaké celebrated an Islamic event such a day (like Ramadan feast), Bondoukou celebrated the same event another day and Samatiguila celebrated it such a day”⁶.

This lack of communication infrastructure was a major weakness for the Ivorian Muslim community, so much so that it was used as a means of “blackmail” against it, if one wants to give credence to the words of the reformist journalist Ladjî Sidibé. In addition to this “lack of respect,” they complained about the late hour at which the *Allahou Akbar* television show was broadcast and the quality of the guests on the show from the 1980s onward. Prior to the *Allahou Akbar* television show, religious denominations (Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim) were given a weekly slot on the Ivorian national radio station (*Radio Cote d’Ivoire*) for their preach. Ibrahim Doumbia, a former member of the editorial staff of the newspaper *Plume Libre* and Djiguiba Cissé underline it. Doumbia states that:

Media communication began without perhaps, a long-term strategy by the national radio where it existed the *Allahou Akbar* television show, which was hosted by someone known as Cissé from Gagnoa⁷. He passed away. There was also a convert. Overall, there were three. These three men were on the *Allahou Akbar* television show on the national radio station that was broadcast on Thursday nights. However, it was only for the radio. This communication was rather focused on the religious message. The entire topics were religion-centered. Nevertheless, it was not well organized because those hosts were old-fashioned imams who did not have a schedule⁸.

It is clear that apart from this channel of communication offered by the State, the national radio, the Ivorian Muslim leadership did not have a radio, a print media, a television, a mass media of its own, in a word. As a result, the Ivorian Muslim community strove hard to widely disseminate its information. Accordingly, its national unity was weakened. This communicational gap urged the reformist leaders to raise the Muslim community awareness, because one of their major objectives was to remedy the internal conflicts of this community. In this regard, Ousmane Doukouré⁹ reports, “Ustaz Fofana¹⁰ will arrive and say that we must get organized, especially so that Muslims talk to each other. He wanted the community to

⁶Bouaké, Bondoukou and Samatiguila are the names of three towns in Cote d’Ivoire respectively located in the center, east and north of the country.

⁷ Gagnoa is the name of one town of the Cote d’Ivoire located in the south of the country.

⁸ Doumbia Ibrahim was interviewed at Cocody, Vallon at the head office of ONAC-CI, on 06/17/2020.

⁹ Ousmane Doukouré is the General Manager of the Islamic newspaper *Islam-Info* and is part of the Ivorian Muslim Reformist team. He was interviewed in Plateau, SCIAM’s floor, on 06/30/2020.

¹⁰ Aboubacar Fofana was the figurehead of the Ivorian Muslim reformist team. He ruled the Ivorian Muslim community from 2006 to 2020.

come together as one. Then, he wanted to widespread these messages of organization to face the concerns of the community”. Overall, having the clear awareness that it will be a tough task to do so without a good independent communication strategy, these reformist leaders will take some steps in order to equip themselves with mass communication means. In addition to the need to have their own means of mass communication, it turned out that the front-line communication strategies of the traditionalist leaders were out of step with modern times.

2.2- Mismatch between the Traditionalists’ methods of proselytizing and modernity

The traditionalist leaders had set up a communication system in which the language of transmission of the message was mainly *Dioula*¹¹. Whether it was during preach in mosques, teaching in Koranic schools, Islamic national feasts or multi-faith meetings, to name but a few, the language with which they were most comfortable was not French. Aboubacar Konaté, the president of the OEECI¹², speaking of the language of education favored in Koranic schools before the arrival of *medersas*¹³ and French and Arabic schools, evokes the fact that this period “was not a time when people necessarily needed someone who spoke French. Even with the *Dioula* language, he (the Koranic master) did the training”.

To say true, these Koranic teachers and traditional leaders did not speak French. Marie Miran (2006, p. 212) relates this difficulty that Koranic masters had in speaking French when they were asked by AEEMCI to train Muslim pupils and students in 1982. The communication of the traditionalist leaders was *Dioula*-centered. Moreover, Djiguiba Cissé (op.cit) affirms that before his arrival in Cote d’Ivoire in 1981-1982, the preach of the *Allahou Akbar* broadcast on the national Ivorian radio was done only in *Dioula*. Furthermore, regarding the topics addressed in this weekly program, Ibrahim Doumbia¹⁴ affirms that they were purely religious, meaning that some topics like “Islam and philosophy”, “Islam and personal development” were not on the agenda. He add, “I remember once, there was a minister who passed away. There was a host who came and spent the whole program reading *Ya Sin*¹⁵”.

¹¹ Dioula is an Ivorian local language mostly spoken by people from the north of the country.

¹² Aboubacar Konaté is the president of OEECI, which is the Ivorian Muslim Denominational School Organisation. He was interviewed in Abidjan, Treichville, Biafra on 6/30/2020.

¹³ *Medersas* are refined forms of Koranic schools.

¹⁴ Ibrahim Doumbia is one the reformist Muslim journalist and the General Manager of the digital Newspaper *Plume Libre*. He was interviewed in Cocody, Vallon, at the head office of ONAC-CI, on 6/17/2020.

¹⁵ *Ya Sin* is the 36th chapter of the Noble Koran. It is recommended to read it when somebody passes away for the sake of calling the blessing of God upon the late person.

The fact that this preacher takes all the time allotted for this information and religious education program with the complete reading of a chapter of the Koran could raise the question of the planning or the approach to the dissemination of the messages that these traditionalists were planning to convey. Speaking about the linguistic skills of all the supreme guides (Sheikhs) who led the Ivorian Muslim community before Sheikh Boikary Fofana, Sékou Sylla specifies, “the former Sheikhs were of a certain age, did not have our present-day organizational culture, and especially were not bilingual. The bilingual Sheikh began with Fofana”¹⁶. The concept “bilingual” here refers to *Dioula* and French. In other words, they did not speak the official language in Côte d’Ivoire, which is French. It can be noticed that the channel and approach to disseminating the Traditionalists’ proselytizing messages was a major gap in the area of communication of the Ivorian Muslim community.

In general, the internal and external communication of Ivorian Islamic religious enterprises and the communication of their leaders were outdated. They are limited due to the non-existent community means of mass communication. This is the reason why, they will undertake some reforms to change the situation.

3. Communication stakes of Islamic organizations in Cote d’Ivoire

The actions undertaken by the Reformists in terms of communication had two stakes: political and geostrategic. Firstly, these leaders sought to give themselves the means to give more echoes and visibilities to their actions on the Ivorian public sphere. Then, they aimed to publicizing their model of organization and practice of Islam in the West Africa sub-region and internationally.

3.1- Positioning Islam in the Ivorian public space

In order to bring the Muslim community out of its lethargy, the reformist leaders were aware that they had to get organized to be more visible on the Ivorian public space as the motto of a local media company states, “we cannot not see you”.

Thus, the Islamic religious enterprises had to play their part of responsibility in the transformation of the Ivorian civil society. To do so, communication is a means of

¹⁶ Sékou Sylla is an Ivorian reformist imam. He is the deputy executive secretary of COSIM. He was interviewed at the Mosque *An Nour* in Cocody, Riviera 2, on 6/12/2020. This English version of his statement is our translation.

transparency and externalization of missions, visions, actions and values. Otherwise, the Muslim community would be a hermetically “sealed” group living on the edge of the Ivorian society as it had been before the 1970s.

Therefore, to remedy this situation, the Reformists initiated actions related to communication, one of which is the strengthening of community means of communication.

3.2- Empowering the Muslim community in terms of means of communication

“One cannot not communicate”, this magic formula of the invisible circle or the Palo Alto school of thought seems to be a timeless truth. In other words, communication is inescapable for everyone. Thus, natural and juridical persons do not escape it. This is why, G. Amado and A. Guittet (1975) quoted by K. Goa (2018, p.147) reveals the omnipresence of communication by indicating that it exists “whenever any person, and a natural person in particular, can affect another person (human or non-human) by modifying it or modifying its action thanks to the transmission of information”. In a word, everything is communication without our wanting it to be. Therefore, for-profit organizations use it to achieve their different objectives of selling products, acquiring reputation, settling competitive counteracting actions, etc.

Religious organizations in Cote d’Ivoire, for their part, are not on the edge of this process. K. Goa (Ibidem, p.147) recalls, “the religious organizations and “shepherds” of Cote d’Ivoire make use of the various media to communicate. They use several forms of communication to convey messages to their members and to the Ivorian population, in order to exert an influence on these various targets”. We notice in this statement that the use of the media is not foreign to these groups of “men of God” in their mission. Concerning the Ivorian Islamic religious enterprises, the appropriation of communication as a management tool is a recent fact but not new. Already in 1977, the Ivorian Muslim community was using the national Ivorian television (RTI) on a weekly basis “for the propagation and promotion of the Muslim religion” through the program *Allahou Akbar* (A. Bamba, 2018, p.129). Djiguiba Cissé (op. cit.) underlines that this program has been an unprecedented success:

It was a successful program, a resounding success because it was the first in Cote d’Ivoire that a program dealing with Islamic issues with hosts where they were asked all kinds of questions, an interactive program with a journalist who has a thread. He has his guests and asks them all the questions. These guests are *Oustaz* Aboubacar Fofana, Tidjane Ba and Mohamed Lamine Kaba. It started one

month of Ramadan in 1977-1978. It was a program, which mostly got stuck not only all the Muslims of Cote d'Ivoire, but also people watched it everywhere. Islam and education, training, science, development, women's issues, education of children, marriage, drugs, inheritance. In fact, the topics were diverse.

These first three Ivorian Muslim Reformists, Tidjane Ba, Mohamed Lamine Kaba and Aboubacar Fofana, as well as the host of this program, Souleymane Doumbia, then a journalist at RTI, were members of the Williamsville "think tank". In the same year, this community used a lunar calendar until 1984, invented by the academic Alpha Cissé in 1977. In addition, in 1979, the first press organ (all mass media combined) belonging to the Ivorian Muslim community appeared through a magazine that kept the name of the television program *Allahou Akbar*. Djiguiba Cissé bears witness of the creation of this print media by the Reformists. Indeed, the first issue of this monthly Islamic magazine was published in the month of Ramadan of the year 1399 Hegira (August 1979) under the aegis of the Islamic Culture Center of Williamsville. After three issues addressed, the publication had to be stopped for lack of financial means as explained by Ladjji Sidibé¹⁷, the Director of the publication of the magazine. After a few months of stoppage, the magazine was refined and changed to a quarterly newsletter, the first issue of which was published on April 1981 by the CMR¹⁸ ("think tank" of Cocody).

In addition, in 1991, AEEMCI acquired a print media outlet called *Plume Libre* (M. Miran, 2006, op.cit., p. 340). Despite this progress that these Islamic religious enterprises made by acquiring some media, they remained less visible in the Ivorian public space than other religious communities until the end of the 1990s. With this delay in terms of visibility and due to the harshness of the competition both internally and externally for the expansion of different faiths and ideologies, they will invest more in the media field by putting on air the first Ivorian Islamic reformist, radio *Albayane* in 2001.

According to a study by Médiamétrie published in 2017, this Islamic radio is the most listened to Ivorian radios (I. Binaté, 2017, p.58). The High Authority for Communication and Media landscape (HACA) confirms this leading position of radio *Albayane*. This regulatory authority

¹⁷Ladjji Sidibé is a Muslim reformist Ivorian journalist. He was interviewed in Cocody, Bonoumin, on 6/29/2020.

¹⁸ CMR means the Muslim Community of Riviera and is the third meeting center located in Cocody where Reformists moved to in 1982. This place played the same role as the former centers ("think tank").

asserted it in a report made public on March 18, 2019 entitled “the audience and image of religious radio stations in Cote d’Ivoire” conducted by the Ivorian Service of Studies and Surveys (SIVES) that the radio *Albayane* holds 46.5% of the audience of religious radio stations in Cote d’Ivoire (HACA, 2019, p.16). To date, the radio *Albayane* broadcasts in twenty-six (26) localities in Cote d’Ivoire and in twenty-six (26) national and foreign languages.

Moreover, speaking of publicizing Islamic preach in Cote d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso, M. Sawadogo and M. Gommez-Perez (2011, p.3) mention that:

The emergence of these radios is the result of a triple context. On the one hand, it is a reaction to the marginalization of Islam in the public space when compared to Christian communities that are in a dominant position and Pentecostal Christians who are very influential on the political scene in both countries. On the other hand, it is the effect of the recent return of Muslim elites, Arab speakers and graduates in the Arab countries. Finally, it is also the result of an Islamic dynamic carried by young French-speaking Muslims.

It appears from their comments that the awareness of these organizations to communicate more is also influenced by leaders. In spite of this fact, it is still true that the starting point of this awakening is the competition in proselytizing. F. Madore (2016, p. 155-156), studying the presence of Muslims in Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso on the web (social networks and websites), reveals this competition existing on the one hand, between Muslims and Muslims, and on the other hand, between Muslims and Christians in the conquest of their different public and virtual spaces. This digital visibility is worked out by the creation of websites by COSIM in early 2000 and CNI¹⁹ in 2009, and Facebook pages by AEEMCI and AJMCI²⁰ respectively in 2007 and 2009 (F. Madore, *ibidem*, p. 156-157).

In 2005, the reformists took action to increase their presence by creating a print media outlet called *Islam-Info*. This weekly newspaper, initially in print format, is now published online from its website. Recently, other mass media belonging to the Reformists have been put on the air. This is the case of *Al Fayda* and *Al Hikmah* radios, which started broadcasting in 2018 and *Albayane* television in 2020. Increasingly, the digitalization of proselytizing occupies a

¹⁹ CNI means the Islamic National Council. It was the former organization playing the role of the Ivorian Muslim community leadership while at that time COSIM was in charge of religious matters inside the same community.

²⁰ AJMCI is another reformist Islamic group standing for the Ivorian Muslim Youth Association. It mainly targets the Muslim youth that no longer go to schools in terms of proselytizing.

place of choice in Ivorian Islamic organizations. Indeed, AEEMCI and COSIM have created Web TVs (AEEMCI TV, COSIM TV and Hadj CI TV) which are constantly hosted.

To these, we must add the websites of AEEMCI and COSIM. Through these different media, Reformists convey their ideology through several activities such as Friday prayer preach, public conferences, the celebration of the feasts of *Ramadan* and *Tabaski*, *Mahouloud*²¹, *Laylatul Qadr*²², seminars and national or regional tours. During the renewal of governing bodies such as the designation of the new Supreme Guide of the Muslim community, the choice of the new president of AEEMCI or the new president of AFMCI, the media are used to make the events public. Besides, the management of intra-community or national crises engages these enterprises to make media releases as was the case of the health crisis of Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Indeed, due to the decision to close places of worship and ban gatherings in Cote d'Ivoire, Ivorian imams and preachers used social media such as WhatsApp and Facebook to communicate with the virtual Muslim community. Nowadays, the virtual Ivorian Muslim community is very active on social networks. Virtual platforms of discussion of women's associations, corporate groups, charities, in a word, multiform socio-cultural groups are everywhere. Apart from these media channels, the non-media is also favored by the Ivorian Islamic organizations. Indeed, conferences, tours in the regional and inner land memberships, office meetings, visits to the members of the different organizations, preach-reminders, (extra)ordinary general assemblies, restitution sessions of training sessions, tea-debates, "*Alloco party*"²³, etc. are organized there. Nevertheless, one clarification is important concerning these non-media channels. Even if the mass media are not always invited to hold them, they are generally relayed through the Internet.

In short, the use of the media by the Ivorian Islamic enterprises only aimed at spreading their good image, identifying new members, developing the loyalty of the old members, promoting religious activities and opposing to ideological groups.

²¹ *Mahouloud* is the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing upon him).

²² *Laylatul Qadr* is the symbolic celebration of the night of fate by Muslims at the 26th night of Ramadan of each hegira year.

²³ *Alloco party* is a favored activity in Islamic organizations, but particularly in AEEMCI. It consists in organizing a debate about an Islamic issue during which participants will eat fried plantain as lunch or dinner depending on the meeting time. This fried plantain is known as *Alloco* in the Ivorian jargon.

3.3- Giving a voice to the Muslim community in Cote d'Ivoire

Communication reform was also intended to provide a voice for the Ivorian Muslim community. Thus, Cote d'Ivoire's adoption of democracy as a political regime in the 1990s had a positive impact on the national press sector. One of the most significant impacts was the liberalization of the sector. Since that year, a multitude of press organs, both generalist and specialized, have emerged. Accordingly, the Ivorian Islamic religious enterprises, deep in their restructuring process, did not put themselves aside from this new dynamic. Therefore, they will create mass communication channels such as *Plume Libre*, *Alif*, *Al Azan*, radio *Albayane*, *Islam-Info*, *Al Minbar*, radio *Al Hikmah*, radio *Al Fayda* and *Albayane TV*. Ibrahim Doumbia (op.cit.) explains the reason for the creation of *Plume Libre*. He says, "this newspaper was created from the initiative of Yacouba Sylla and me. We assumed that we needed a newspaper for the Muslim community. However, it was linked to the dynamics of the spring of the Ivorian press in 1990".

There were three basic reasons for the Reformists' determination to acquire modern means of communication. First, there was the limited access of Ivorian Muslims to public and private mass media. Second, the media enterprises of these days did not carry their voices as they wished. Finally, the Reformists wanted to improve the way the former leaders conveyed the message of Islam. Regarding the second reason, Ibrahim Doumbia (op.cit.) reports that the objective of the print format of *Plume Libre* was political, i.e., to defend the rights of Muslims and to exhibit the "true face" of Islam.

The defense of the rights of Muslims was done through a so-called political writing (e.g., *Plume Libre*, May 1994, N° 27, p.6) and the exposure of the "true face" or promotion of Islam through the religious writing (e.g., *Plume Libre*, April 1993, N° 14, p.3).

These press articles are some writings of the newspaper *Plume Libre*, which are in line with the political and religious objectives it has set for itself as Ibrahim Doumbia mentioned above, i.e. to set itself up as an advocate for Islam and Muslims. Beyond the satirical approach of the political facts in Cote d'Ivoire, the newspaper also tried to convey the message of Islam through the religious writing.

The *zakat* or legal alms is the fourth pillar of Islam. It is one of the basic rights of the needy over the wealthy. Therefore, giving it to the needy and other destitute people is an obligation for Muslims who fulfill the conditions to do so. Thus, *Plume Libre*, in the above-mentioned

article, commands Muslims to give this right of the poor. In addition, it puts the activities of the community on the public scene in Côte d'Ivoire. The information that the newspaper makes available to its readers in the section *Info Plume* is dedicated to the organization of the Ivorian Muslim community in terms of national leadership and Islamic education (*Plume Libre*, March, 1992, N° 6, p.11).

It was a question for these leaders not only to convey the authentic message of Islam but also to defend the interests of Muslims living in Cote d'Ivoire as Ladji Sidibé (op.c.it.) says, "As far as I am concerned, I understood that it was necessary to express to Muslims what Islam really is. For that, the image of Islam, which media show, must be corrected. It was necessary to move from a dark vision to clarity. An Islam stripped of all gaps and "cultural gangs"". To achieve these goals, it was mandatory to have the means of communication set up by Muslims for Muslims. This quest for a voice for Islam is also described by the mottos of the mass media created by the Reformists.

All the mottos revolve around Islam and show the determination of these leaders to "brand" the Islamic matter. This objective of creating a new image of Islam within the Muslim and non-Muslim community is notified in the first issue of the monthly magazine *Alif* published in March (1992, p.2). In another publication, they criticized a truncated image of Islam, which is revealed through a comic strip in a generalist newspaper of the Ivorian national press (*Alif*, January 1994, N° 14, p. 12.).

Like this newspaper, all the media outlets mentioned above have followed the same rationale. In this regard, the weekly newspaper *Islam-Info*, the magazine *Allahou Akbar* and the house organ *Al Minbar* are examples among many others. *Islam-Info*, for example, has put attacks on mosques perpetrated in 2006 on the Ivorian public square (*Islam-Info*, N° 15, from Monday, February 6 to Sunday, February 12, 2006, p.4).

The magazine *Allahou Akbar* invites Muslims to the good practice of Islam (*Allahou Akbar*, April-May-June 1981, N° 1, p.16). *Al Minbar*, the house organ of COSIM, reports on one of the activities carried out by the Supreme Guide of the Ivorian Muslim community in 2012 (*Al Minbar*, May 2012, N° 12, p.4). Otherwise, from 1979, a media boom occurred within the Ivorian Muslim community giving birth to a new way of conveying the message of Islam and denouncing the martyrdom from which Muslims suffered.

4. Creation of communication departments in the reformist Islamic religious enterprises surveyed

One of the consequences of the modernization of the management of the Ivorian Islamic religious enterprises is the creation of a department in charge of communication in order to manage their internal and external communication. In this respect, the communication department of COSIM has set up a house organ, *Al Minbar*, published on a monthly basis.

In addition, the CNI, then the highest governing body of the Ivorian Muslim community, did not depart from this rule. It had a department headed by Ladji Sidibé (op.cit.), a journalist at *Fraternité Matin*, who was responsible for its communication. Telling the circumstances of the creation of the national Islamic radio *Al Bayane*, he reveals the task devoted to the communication department of the CNI in this process. He informs, “when we had the decree bearing the name of Djiguiba Cissé, the president Koudouss mandated the communication department that before Ramadan (2001), he must hear the sound of the radio *Albayane*”. As for AEEMCI, it was one of the pioneering structures to rationalize the dissemination of its messages, in a word to organize its way of communication.

The observation emerging from these different measures taken by Reformists in terms of communication is that it is no longer spontaneous but rather planned. From now on, this task is entrusted to people who have knowledge of this field and who think about communication policies, plans and strategies for their different organizations. This arrangement is in line with the first question of Lasswell’s functionalist approach to communication, which seeks to reveal the sender of the message. Accordingly, the communication managers of the above-mentioned Islamic religious enterprises (AEEMCI, COSIM, AFMCI, CNI, AJMCI...) have communication backgrounds, precisely, they are journalists and communication professionals.

Now, both internal and external communication in these Islamic religious enterprises is structured and in addition to traditional channels such as telephone and meetings, uses modern means such as social media (Facebook and WhatsApp), professional Short Message Service (SMS), Web TV... In addition to the community means of communication given to the Ivorian Muslim community, the Reformists have managed to have time slots in the local municipal radios in the cities of Cote d’Ivoire in which they convey the Islamic message.

In short, these modern ways and means of communication will bring the Ivorian Muslim community out of its silence. In view of the newspapers accessed since 1979 until now, we can see that these modern means of communication mainly play two roles: promoting and defending Islam. Since the Reformists have had their independence in terms of communication, the Ivorian Islamic news of all kinds did not fail to appear in the press organs they created.

5. New communication dynamics from Islamic religious enterprises in the Ivorian public space

The Ivorian Muslim community was living on the edge of the Ivorian society before the 1970s. Thus, one of the major concerns of the reformist Muslim elite was the proper integration of this community into the public space in Cote d'Ivoire. In other words, these leaders wanted the activities of the various Ivorian Islamic religious enterprises to have more echoes and visibilities. In this regard, M. Miran (2017, p.250) reveals that "This new elite was concerned with overcoming ethno-regional, social, generational, and doctrinal differences in Muslim society, to better respond to the challenge of the interface between Islam and modernity and to better integrate Islam into the public sphere". This communicative awakening seems to have had an impact. From the 1970s to the present day, Islamic cultural activities of national scope relating to worship, public utility, clothing fashion and other programs of activities of the said religious enterprises are broadcast on national television channels and in other national media.

5.1- Annual Islamic cultural events: communication tools

Henceforth, several annual Islamic appointments occupy the front of the public scene in Cote d'Ivoire. For example, since 1991, COSIM has not failed to celebrate the symbolic night of fate, which it named *MegaQadr*. The idea of perpetuating this activity started from the first edition in view of the joy it has aroused in the Muslim community as Mokodou Thiam tells it in these terms: "It was in 1991, we organized the *Mega Qadr* at the Sports Palace. There were so many people that we were afraid. This means that Muslims needed this, but the question was how to express this need"²⁴.

²⁴Interview with Thiam Mokodou, in Cocody, Deux Plateaux, on 7/11/2020.

Today, the celebration of the *Mega Qadr* is institutionalized within the Ivorian reformist Muslim community. It is celebrated on the night of 26 to 27 *Ramadan* of each hegira year. Despite the corona virus pandemic, COSIM has renewed its tradition of holding this activity in 2020, under the topic: “hardship: Islamic definition and solutions to come over it”. Apart from the *Mega Qadr*, the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet of Islam or *Mahouloud* is another great Islamic event that mobilizes millions of Muslims throughout the Ivorian territory. *Mahouloud* is celebrated on the 12th of *Rabil Awwal* (4th month) of each hegira year. The topic chosen for the celebration of the 2020’s edition is: “Contribution of Islam for peaceful elections”. In addition to the organization of *Mahouloud* on the date of 12 *Rabil Awwal*, which marks unanimously the day of birth of the Prophet of Islam, it is an activity that many Ivorian reformist Sheikhs especially *Tijani, Sufi* and *Qadri* have appropriated.

This appropriation of *Mahouloud* by Sheikhs such as Malick Konaté, Ibrahim Sonta, Cherif Oumar Abdel Aziz, Aboubacar Konaté, Moufti Aboudrame Sogodogo, Sufi Moustapha Sogodogo, Sufi Bilal Konaté, Abdoul Aziz Sarba, Idriss Diallo and others has given another content and created an unprecedented excitement and passion around the event. They celebrate it at any time of the year after the official date and this in almost all the district of Abidjan and the interior of the country. Since 1991, *Mahouloud* and *Mega Qadr* are considered as national Islamic feasts by the Ivorian State in the same way as *Tabaski* and *Ramadan*, which require paid and non-working holidays.

In addition, Muslims seem to have definitively put an end to their complex. The newspaper *Islam-Info* notes this fact by writing that “Today thanks to a deep work through his preach and his actions (those of Boikary Fofana) Muslims are relaxed and assert their faith in all places and at all times” (No. 763 from Wednesday, July 29 to Tuesday, August 04, 2020, p.7). This observation is based on the holding of activities through which women, youth, men, even religious authorities (imams) are increasingly giving themselves voice and visibility. At the level of women, three major events, which would not have been imagined before the 1970s, are constantly organized every year. These activities include the “the Day for the AEEMCI’s female members (JMA)” celebrated since 1987 (M. Miran, 2006, p.339), the International Islamic Fashion Festival (FIMIS), the “Hijab Day” was organized for the first time in 2020 in Côte d’Ivoire, and the International Women’s Day. Madoussou Kaba Koné is the promoter of FIMIS, which is a festival created in 2013 in Cote d’Ivoire to promote Islamic women’s

fashion. It includes a program of activities ranging from fashion show models to the exhibition and sale of beauty products and clothing²⁵.

As for the “the Day for the AEEMCI’s female members”, it is an innovation of the women’s cell of AEEMCI in order to celebrate female pupils and students. In a way, it is a kind of version of the World Women’s Day. It is an opportunity for the female members of AEEMCI to discuss issues concerning the Muslim girl such as “feminism, abstinence from sex before marriage...”

Concerning the “Hijab Day” or the “World Islamic Veil Day”, it fulfills the function of valorization of the Islamic veil. This activity was celebrated for the first time in the United States in 2013 at the initiative of Nazman Khan, an American of Bangladeshi origin. According to the Executive Committee of AEEMCI, it is “an opportunity for promoting and enhancing the veil in the face of the stigmatization of Muslim women. The topic of the celebration of this second edition in Cote d’Ivoire is: “Muslim woman, in a world in digitalization”²⁶.

Additionally, imams and preachers in Cote d’Ivoire have embraced the publication of Islamic information. In fact, the ceremonies commemorating the end of the learning of the reading of the Koran, the competitions of memorization and recitation of the Koran, etc. are widely broadcast in the national and social media²⁷. Also, most imams and preachers who are at the initiative of this new wave of communication, use social networks as a means of preach, intellectual visibility and religious marketing (Binaté (2017a, p.57)). Apart from these actions of promotion of Islam, the Ivorian Islamic religious enterprises have planned in their programs, the execution of action of public utility. Recalling the context of the creation of Ivorian Islamic NGOs, I. Binaté (2017c, p.203) lets know, “Based on the experiences of working with humanitarian structures or from a desire to catch up, Islamic charities were set

²⁵This information is available online, at URL: <https://www.ledebativoirien.net/2015/11/19/mode-islamique-abidjan-abrite-la-3eme-edition-du-festival-international-fimis/> (accessed 02/2021).

²⁶ This information is available in a post by the AEEMCI Executive Committee on its Facebook page on Hijab Day 2021, accessible at: URL: <https://web.facebook.com/622883921070689/photos/a.1753964814629255/5922695917756103/> (accessed 02/2021).

²⁷ Confers the *Allahou Akbar* television show broadcast on Ivorian Radio and Television on Thursday, May 23, 2019, available online on YouTube at URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUvcqo7dimw> (accessed on 11/22/2020) and the Ivorian Press Agency (AIP) publication posted by Abidjan.net on Sunday, July 16, 2017, available online at <https://news.abidjan.net/h/618655.html> (accessed on 11/22/2020).

up. They are active in several areas of competence, including health, education, poverty counteracting, etc. Among them are the Ibrahim Brédji Solidarity Foundation, the *Djigui* Foundation, Great Hope, the NGO *Al Muwassat*, the Network of *Medersas* Schools of Cote d'Ivoire (REMCI), Orphan's Smile, Islam Health Action (ISLAS), the NGO Islamic Center Ashabul Kahaf (CIAK), Islamic Medical Rescue (SEMI), etc. (A. Bamba, 2018, p.137-139 ; I. Binaté, 2017c, p.203-210).

Thus, the Islamic religious enterprises undertake actions of public utility such as blood donations, medical, moral, material and financial support for destitute hospital and non-hospital patients and orphaned children, medical checkup. The NGO Help for All in Côte d'Ivoire (2-ATCI) has three areas of concentration, which are health, education and community development. As for the NGO *Almuwassat*(the consolation) is a charity working in the hospital field and outside for counteracting poverty. It has daily and periodic activities as I. Binaté (2018, p.215-216) mentions it. Similarly, the house organ of Treichville teaching Hospital (CHU), *Les Echos du CHU Treichville*(N^o 6, July-August, p.6) reported on "Ramadan for the Sick" of that year whose official celebration took place in this hospital center on Thursday, June 13, 2018. Also, relating to its daily activity, counteracting poverty, the NGO *Almuwassat* announced in its house organ *Almuwassat-Info* (No. 58, April 2019, p.4) the mobilization of the sum of ten million francs CFA (10,000,000) for the counteracting poverty in hospitals.

Moreover, the public space is really "invaded" by Islamic activities of all kinds (religious, entertainment, charitable, cultural ones...). These activities publicize the current events of the Ivorian Muslim community. There is an unprecedented religious marketing.

5.2- Vehicle stickers and billboards: means of visual communication

The Reformists have diversified their visual communication channels by making use of vehicle stickers and billboards. The activities and rolling machines of Ivorian Islamic religious enterprises no longer go unnoticed in the Ivorian public space. COSIM and AEEMCI have created communication channels that facilitate their identification. Their various mission cars, and headquarters, etc., are marked with their effigies (logo, name, contacts ...). COSIM and AEEMCI are very present and visible in Ivorian society. This presence and visibility are depicted by the intensity of their activities but also by sticking their

movable and immovable property (headquarters, vehicle, clothing, etc.) with information pertaining to these organizations such as the logo, the name, the function of the car, the address, the contact, etc.

In this regard, the communication manager of COSIM, Sindou Bakayoko says that this communication provision is taken each time an activity of such a scale is in sight. He says, “every time there is an activity that we want to broadcast, we have it reported by television. The use of billboards is even planned for large campaigns like the Sheikh Fofana’s tour (January 7-16, 2020), it was scheduled but unfortunately, we were unable to do it”²⁸.

In fact, it is a tradition at COSIM to mobilize the means of mass communication when it comes to major activities such as the national tour of the Supreme Guide of the Ivorian Muslim community. The bi-monthly *Al Minbar* (No. 10, June-July 2009, p.3) reports that Sheikh Boikary Fofana visited the Savanah region on May 11-18, 2009. Overall, the use of billboards and vehicle stickers on their rolling machines by the reformists underscores their desire to reinvent the traditionalist past. All of these actions undertaken by this new Muslim elite had a political stake. It was necessary to rethink their communication policy in order to better disseminate their messages and position themselves in relation to the ideological counter-groups at the national level.

6. Conclusion

The social gap between the Ivorian Muslim community and the other religious communities, especially the Christian ones, was very large. In almost all areas (communication, social organization...), they were ahead of the Muslim community. Their major concern, at this level, was how to balance the balance of power in order to respond effectively to the concerns of the youth, women and Muslim elites.

To do this, the Reformists adapted to the realities of the moment by reproducing the organizational system of these organizations (Christian and “union”) and by putting in place a system of management of community affairs that allowed them to be in phase with the Ivorian social context. Specifically, at the level of youth, women, executives and Islamic education, they have created decentralized management structures (AEEMCI, AJMCI, CMR, AFMCI, OEECI, Hinneh Foundation, etc.) solely dedicated to these different causes. This

²⁸Interview with Sindou Bakayoko, COSIM Communication Manager, Plateau, on 7/29/2021.

specialization by socio-cultural sector has given these organizations the opportunity to focus on their different missions.

This study proves the importance of communication in nonprofit management and supports previous theoretical positions on the issue (K. Blanchard & M. Miller, 2005; P. F. Drucker, 2005, J. Garry, 2017, D. Allen, 2015; K. Goa, 2014, 2016 & 2018). In this regard, reformist leaders have mobilized modern means of communication and management in their process of reforming the Ivorian Muslim community. This has led to the transformation of this society and these religious enterprises, previously managed according to traditionalist approaches. For example, the choice of the supreme guide of the Muslim community was done under the criteria of age and charisma before 1970s. By taking into account contemporary changes and the evolution of modern Ivorian society, reformist leaders have succeeded in establishing a system of organization and choice of leaders regulated by texts. Several sectors such as Islamic education, youth, and executives, pilgrimage to Mecca, communication and women have also benefited from a total renovation. This achievement, which Tidjane Ba describes as a “miracle”, insofar as it is typical of Côte d’Ivoire, has led predominantly Muslim countries such as Mali, Guinea, Senegal and others to copy its Islamic organizational model (M. Kouma, 2000, pp. 77-78).

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