

# West Africa Report

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## Is Côte d'Ivoire facing religious radicalism?

### Summary

Religious radicalism in Côte d'Ivoire has not, for the moment, reached the scale seen elsewhere in the region. However, the country is not immune to the phenomenon. One example is the influence that Pentecostals had on the hardline posture adopted by the former regime of Laurent Gbagbo during the 2010-11 post-electoral crisis. The existence of a Wahhabi Islam current in the country, together with the adhesion of the great majority of Lebanese living in Côte d'Ivoire to the Hezbollah movement in the Middle East, further underline the need to be increasingly vigilant on this issue.

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THE PAST DECADE in Côte d'Ivoire has been characterised by an increasingly visible religiosity. This dynamic has entered into a regional and international context marked by the emergence of different forms of radicalism and violent extremism. Naturally, this has led to the possibility that such phenomena may affect the various religions practised in the country.

Therefore, it should be noted that the dynamism that characterises certain currents in the evangelical movement – including close links established with the political sphere – influenced the troubled period that affected Côte d'Ivoire up to the post-election crisis of 2010-11. Some pentecostalist figures exerted significant influence over the former leadership, including feeding its determination to remain in power.

The crisis in neighbouring Mali, which has highlighted the existence of a jihadist terrorist threat, as well as the Boko Haram insurgency in north-eastern Nigeria illustrate the problem of radicalism that currently affects Islam. This context highlights the relevance of investigating the existence of trends, sources or risks of development of certain types of fundamentalism and violent extremism within the Islam practised in Côte d'Ivoire.

On another level, alleged links between Lebanese Shiite communities in West Africa, particularly those living in Côte d'Ivoire, and Hezbollah – the politico-military movement, driven by an Islamist ideology, which many western countries consider a terrorist organisation – raise questions about their nature and the existence of possible support for its armed actions.

It is under these circumstances that a study on the trends within the Ivorian religious field, including those which translate to a degree or a risk of radicalisation, was conducted in 2014. Produced by Ivorian researchers, it looked at trends relating to Pentecostal Christian movements, Islam and the alleged links between the Lebanese Shiite community in Côte d'Ivoire and Hezbollah. This report summarises<sup>1</sup> the main findings of field surveys conducted in the economic capital Abidjan and in other parts of the country – Bouaké, Man and Yamoussoukro – and interviews with actors from all three communities. It also offers an assessment of the Côte d'Ivoire's vulnerability to the threat of religious radicalism<sup>2</sup> and provides recommendations.

### 2000-10: when Pentecostalism took over the Republic

The decade from 2000 to 2010 was significant in many ways for Côte d'Ivoire. In addition to the country having been through one of the most serious political crises of its history, it also showed how relations between the political and the religious could appear complex.

#### The intrusion of Pentecostalism into the political arena

The implantation of Pentecostal movements in politics dates back to the early 2000s through pastors and 'prophets' who increased their presence in the entourage of former president Laurent Gbagbo and his wife Simone Gbagbo. This was the case with Kacou Sévérin<sup>3</sup> who relied on personal relationships he had built with Laurent Gbagbo when he was in the opposition and who prophesied his presidential destiny.

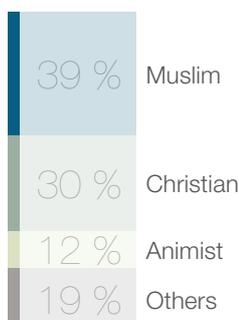
Sévérin's reputation rested on having made three prophecies: the first in 1999 forecast social and political unrest and turmoil in Côte d'Ivoire in the following years. In 2000, he predicted a better future in Côte d'Ivoire in the coming decades. Before the October 2000 elections, he saw the victory of Gbagbo against the former head of the military junta, Robert Guei.

The election of Gbagbo as president was therefore regarded as the manifestation of the word and divine power.<sup>4</sup> This event increased Gbagbo's interest in spirituality and the search for the sacred as a 'mobilizable resource, essential for the legitimacy of his political power.' It also prompted the presidential couple, until then Catholics, to lend 'religious allegiance' and open the doors to power to Pentecostalist pastors. This went as far as involving spiritual advisors in political management and even state security.

#### The gospel as an instrument to legitimise a political and military struggle

The outbreak of the rebellion on 19 September 2002 led to the occupation of the north of the country, partitioning it into two distinct zones, with the south presented as 'Christian' and the north as 'Muslim'. Although this representation did not reflect the religious demographics of the country, it helped to introduce a discourse within the Pentecostalist movement, calling for the defeat of the 'devil' and his 'henchmen', referring to the attackers or the rebels. They in turn unleashed a war of the 'forces of good' against the 'forces of evil', with all of the Manichean implications inherent in an understanding of the conflict.

Côte d'Ivoire  
15,4 MILLIONS INHABITANTS



Source: General Census of Population and Housing 1998

In the minds of evangelical pastors and prophets, Côte d'Ivoire was the 'second home of Christ' after Israel, and it was out of the question that 'Satan', in this case the rebels, should thrive on abuses against soldiers, the police and supporters of Gbagbo in the areas of the Centre, North and West that they occupied.

The post-election crisis further accentuated this situation. Thus, having campaigned for the 'Christian president' against the 'president of the foreigners and the Muslims', many pastors of evangelical churches organised vigils and prayers on behalf of their candidate and for a happy outcome to crisis. Resolutely putting their faith in the 'Lord of hosts', based on prophecies, dreams and visions, which prompted speeches from their supporters, Gbagbo and his political allies favoured a military solution.

The most well-known of the prophets who reported receiving clear visions of the country's political future in this troubled period were Moïse Koré, Sébastien Zahiri, Paul Ayo, Jean-Marie Domoraud, and Mamadou Koné, also known as Malachie. Of all the prophecies, those of the prophet Koné Malachie, who was close to Simone Gbagbo, fuelled the post-election crisis for four months. They had a psychological impact, galvanising the courage of the presidential couple and their supporters, and raising hopes of a favourable resolution, even if the outcome was to be military.

The sixth of the seven stages of Malachie's prophecy,<sup>5</sup> concerning the implementation of the divine plan for Gbagbo, stated that 'Gbagbo is God's choice for a new Côte d'Ivoire. He is the President of the entire Côte d'Ivoire for the happiness of Ivorians and for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.' The plan, circulated in areas with loyal Gbagbo supporters, had 'seven decrees',<sup>6</sup> which according to its promoter, Malachie, were 'signed and ordered from heaven.'

This prophecy forged the beliefs of many Young Patriots, soldiers, militiamen and hardline activists of the *Ligue des Mouvements pour le Progrès* (LMP) – a political coalition that included Gbagbo's *Front Populaire Ivoirien* (FPI) and other parties – during the 'Abidjan military battle', which lasted from 31 March to 11 April 2011. This confrontation was notable for prayer sessions and fasting that several pastors and prophets led and initiated while the bombs rained down on the head of state's residence.

### **'God has not given his final word' or belief in a future divine intervention**

Despite the unfavourable outcome of the 2010-11 post-election crisis for Gbagbo, many leaders and followers of the Pentecostalist movement displayed a calm and unwavering

faith in the face of events. This was based on the belief that 'God has not given his final word' and that 'it is not yet finished'.

The imprisonment of the former president in The Hague has failed to undermine the conviction that persists among evangelicals that 'Gbagbo will return'. His release and his return remain at the heart of prayers and pleas to God. Beyond 'divine intervention' for the hoped saviour, faith in a 'future revolution' remains firm for some of the faithful. They firmly believe that 'God will sow confusion in the enemy camp' and that 'danger will come from where we least expect it', as the prophet Malachie predicted in 2010.

His imprisonment in The Hague has failed to undermine the conviction among evangelicals that 'Gbagbo will return'

There was also talk of Malachie in 2013, from his place of exile in Ghana, prophesying a new 'war', a 'great wind of destruction' and 'catastrophe' in the first week of August 2013, as a prelude to Gbagbo's release. He firmly rebuked the new regime and renewed his faith in the 'future redemption' of Côte d'Ivoire: 'The great Côte d'Ivoire is governed by a puppet regime. However, the mission for which God has called Laurent Gbagbo is not yet complete, that is why he was captured and taken to the North, then transferred to the International Criminal Court, to finally return triumphantly as president, according to God's plan. It is this hope that must reinvigorate the faith and morale of all Ivorians who have already lost. Because what God says, he does. It is in this that he is God.'

Beyond faith in divine intervention restoring Gbagbo to power, it should be emphasised that this hope is shared in some circles and among some individuals of the evangelical movement. Their capacity, although reduced, to maintain a desire for revenge and a latent state of belligerence – at least in their minds – is real. This hampers reconciliation efforts that are so necessary for Côte d'Ivoire, a process that – despite various initiatives of the current regime – does not seem to have yielded convincing results since the end of the crisis.

### **Côte d'Ivoire, a melting pot for a pluralistic Islam**

Islam in Côte d'Ivoire is characterised by its diversity. This is evident from the Islamic branches in the country and the associations that structure them.

### **An Islam characterised by various trends...**

The Islam that the vast majority of people in Côte d'Ivoire

practise is Sunni inspired, with the Qur'an and the Prophet's tradition (Sunnah) as references. It revolves mainly around two ideological branches that claim to be Sunni: the 'traditionalist' Maliki branch, rooted in the culture of the country and to which the majority of Ivorian Muslims adhere, and Wahhabism, which advocates a brand of Islam that is purist, fundamentalist, anti-brotherhood, anti-Sufi, attached to dogma and free of cultural references, making the Islam traditionally practised a kind of African or 'black Islam.'

The Wahhabi current, also referred to as *Salafi*, introduced a number of changes into Ivorian Islam. They focused in particular on the modernising education, with the establishment of Islamic schools known as *medersa* or *madrasas*, the naming of mosques, introduction of the veil for women, praying with arms crossed, etc.

### The establishment of a 'Wahhabi Islam' sparked tensions with 'traditionalist Islam' in the 1950s and 1970s

As Wahhabi Islam gradually took root in the Ivorian religious landscape from 1945-46, tensions emerged around its coexistence with traditionalist Islam. In fact, with the aim of affirming their identity, from the 1950s the disciples of Wahhabi Islam have progressively worked to dissociate itself themselves from the members of the community who followed traditionalist Islam. This 'divorce' was illustrated by the desire of followers of Ivorian Wahhabism to establish separate mosques where it was possible to pray in the manner considered most appropriate to their religious approach. This was a source of tension, leading to sporadic verbal abuse and brawls<sup>7</sup> throughout the 1950s, with the 'crossed arms' conflict. New incidents were reported in the 1970s in several parts of the country.<sup>8</sup>

Since then, no major incidents reflecting tensions between the two main branches of Muslims have been reported. However competition for leadership within the Ivorian Muslim community persists.

Although Wahhabism is one of the Muslim branches, which has generally – but not exclusively – provided fertile ground for the emergence of some forms of radicality, the type practised in Côte d'Ivoire has so far been largely spared from such developments. Thus, any imposition by adherents and organizations of their vision of Islam and its practice it is mainly through the force of arguments rather than violence.

The two dominant branches of Islam in Côte d'Ivoire are structured around two main bodies: the National

Islamic Council (CNI),<sup>9</sup> and in particular the High Council of Imams (COSIM),<sup>10</sup> which aspire to be the repository of all Islamic trends in the country; and the Association of Sunni Muslims of Côte d'Ivoire (AMSCI), which represents Wahhabi Muslims.

These national Islamic institutions are not the only framework by which the branches and ideologies that characterise the Ivorian Islamic landscape make themselves known. Other dynamics are also at work outside of these organisations. Recent events<sup>11</sup> have highlighted the existence of a possible disconnect between the various representative bodies of Ivorian Islam and the rest of the country's Muslim community – their positions do not necessarily reflect all the tendencies found within this community. Consequently, frameworks for discussion and mobilisation – even to form opinions – are increasingly emerging that are unsupervised and animated by individuals whose religious background and legitimacy can be questioned. This is particularly the case for *grins*<sup>12</sup> and social networks.

### ...and open to influences from regional and international contexts

Islam in Côte d'Ivoire is evolving in a regional and international context that influences Islamic practices found in the country. Several transnational movements that are bearers of very different Islamic practices see Côte d'Ivoire as a haven for the free exercise of their activities. Among are, principally, *Ahmadiyya* movement, *Tabligh Jama'at*, and associations from the sub-region that are Sufi or close to Sufism.<sup>13</sup>

These associations primarily involve themselves in social and cultural activities and proselytising. Some also provide a framework for solidarity for immigrants from the same country. If their activities are not in general a current subject of major concern, the ideology and social and religious values that some among them adhere to, as well as their modes of action arouse suspicion. This is particularly the case for the movement *Tabligh Jama'at*, where there are doubts as to the true nature of its agenda, its religious message and whether it is really harmless. These questions, which are fuelled by the relatively negative view of the group's activities by public authorities in other countries in the sub-region, emphasise the need to maintain continuous vigilance.

The proselytising some of these movements undertake falls under expression of religious freedom. Equally, however, it may also pose a threat to social cohesion, depending on the values that it conveys and the degree of tolerance towards the target populations' beliefs the environment in which they live and the people conducting it.

## Connections between the Lebanese Shiite community and Hezbollah?

The Lebanese diaspora is often the subject of suspicions about the level of support it gives to Hezbollah. The existence of links between the Lebanese community in Côte d'Ivoire<sup>14</sup> and the movement, their nature and the threat they could pose are some of the questions raised by this distrust.

### An established diaspora in its host country...

Côte d'Ivoire has for decades been home to a large Lebanese population that fled the horrors of conflict and political crises in Lebanon. They were drawn to the country by the status it has held since at least independence as the economic powerhouse of West Africa.

There are no precise statistics on the current numbers of people who make up this community. It is, however, likely to be well over 80 000<sup>15</sup> people, possibly 100 000. This would make Côte d'Ivoire the main seat of the Lebanese diaspora in Africa and fourth in the world after Brazil, Canada and Colombia.<sup>16</sup> This community is heterogeneous, composed of Shiites, Sunnis, Christians and Druze. In Côte d'Ivoire, Shiites are the largest group, accounting for over 80% of the community.

The Shiites are mostly from southern Lebanon, a region with low levels of economic development, which brought Hezbollah to the fore in 1982 to oppose the invasion by the Israeli army.

With almost 100 000 people, Côte d'Ivoire is the main seat of the Lebanese diaspora in Africa

An important feature of the Lebanese community in Côte d'Ivoire is its hold on all economic sectors in the country. It is known to control over 50% of the economy,<sup>17</sup> through almost 4 000<sup>18</sup> companies that employ over 300 000 people. The fiscal contribution of these companies amounts to about 350 billion CFA francs, or 15% of Côte d'Ivoire's tax revenues.<sup>19</sup> If one takes into account the contributions that escape the tax authorities – which are inherently difficult to estimate – it gives an idea of the financial potential of this community. This information has not escaped the notice of Lebanese forces and political movements, which have close links with fellow citizens living in Côte d'Ivoire.

### ...but also in tune with the social and political life in its country of origin

Despite having settled far from home, the Lebanese diaspora – with some 12 million people worldwide, nearly three times the population of Lebanon living in Lebanon itself – continues to take an interest in the political and geopolitical turmoil that Lebanon is facing. The Lebanese in Côte d'Ivoire are no different.

The importance of this diaspora is therefore of political importance for the political and social forces from Lebanon, illustrated by the creation in host countries of organisations and associations that serve as representatives or interfaces. Thus, many Lebanese associations, including the 10 or more that exist in Côte d'Ivoire, beyond the socio-cultural nature that they claim to have – and which may indeed be ascribed to some of their activities – prove to be official or



unofficial 'shop fronts' for active political groups in Lebanon. This is particularly the case of the associations *Al-Barr Wal Ta3awon*, which represents the Lebanese parliamentary Speaker Nabih Berri's Amal movement, and *Al-Hoda*, the movement of highly revered religious leader Sayyed Mohammad Hussein Fadallah, who died in 2010.

Hezbollah, which is also an official political movement in Lebanon and has representatives in parliament and in the government, is no exception to this logic. However, conscious of the terrorist label attached to it,<sup>20</sup> few leaders of Lebanese associations in Côte d'Ivoire are willing to openly admit any affiliation with the party. That being the case, the *Al-Ghadir* association is generally seen as Hezbollah's representative in Côte d'Ivoire, even though its leaders deny it.<sup>21</sup> It is presented, rather, as an instrument that aims to strengthen solidarity not only among members of the Lebanese community, but between them and Ivorians. It is the largest Lebanese association in Côte d'Ivoire and, according to estimates, over 93% of its members are Shiite.<sup>22</sup>

### Questions over the links between the Lebanese in Côte d'Ivoire and Hezbollah

Beyond the existence of at least one association that may or may not be a front for Hezbollah in Côte d'Ivoire, the 2014 study highlighted relations between the Lebanese Shiites living in Côte d'Ivoire and Hezbollah. These links are primarily emotional and distinguish themselves through a commitment to the movement's struggles, particularly its fight against Israel. The majority of Lebanese consider the struggle that Hezbollah is conducting – which is also an armed one – as fair and legitimate, and see Hezbollah as a national resistance movement, not a terrorist group.

### The majority of Lebanese consider Hezbollah a national resistance movement, not a terrorist group

This raises questions over how adherence to and broad support for Hezbollah and its social and humanitarian actions manifest themselves. Two paths can be identified: financial support for Lebanese associations in Côte d'Ivoire (which could benefit Hezbollah); and the availability of some members of the community to respond to a possible appeal from the movement to join its ranks.

The Lebanese living in Côte d'Ivoire are a prime target in Hezbollah's efforts to collect additional financial resources on top of the assistance that it has historically received from Iran. These efforts stem from the will of the movement to fully involve the Lebanese diaspora in mobilising resources that will allow it to achieve its objectives. This support is all the more strategic because Iran, which is subject to international economic and financial sanctions because of its nuclear programme, is faced with financial difficulties.

Although members of the Lebanese community in Côte d'Ivoire are more than likely to support the movement financially, the study was only able to specifically highlight the existence of financial contributions by way of religious obligations as a gesture of solidarity for the needy. This is particularly the case with *zakat*<sup>23</sup> and *khoms*.<sup>24</sup>

Once these contributions have been made available to associations, there is no way of telling how or for what purpose they are actually used. We do at least know that *Al-Ghadir* Association receives over 90% of its donations from members of the

#### Key dates

**1956:** disputes between Wahhabis and traditionalists in Gagnoa (western Côte d'Ivoire)

**1958:** disputes between Wahhabis and traditionalists in Treichville (Abidjan)

**9 January 1993:** creation of the National Islamic Council (CNI)

**13 April 2001:** death of Pentecostalist prophet Kacou Sévérin

**August 2009:** arrest and deportation of imam Abdul Menhem Kobeissi from Côte d'Ivoire

Lebanese community in Côte d'Ivoire. The imposing mosque it built in the Marcory district, which houses its services, attests to this.

Herein lies the difficulty in highlighting the channels used to provide financial assistance to Hezbollah – which, one must remember, is known in Lebanon for its social and humanitarian activities – and more importantly, how the funds the movement collects are distributed between its social activities and its political and military ones. Yet, for many within the Lebanese community living in Côte d'Ivoire, the prospect of their contributions finding their way into the hands of Hezbollah is not a cause for disapproval; in fact, quite the contrary.

### What is the threat to Côte d'Ivoire and beyond?

The broad support of Lebanese Shiites living in Côte d'Ivoire for the fight led by Hezbollah raises questions about the danger it could pose to the country's national security. Given this concern, it is already possible to suggest that at present no direct threat exists to the security and stability of Côte d'Ivoire.

For the majority of the Lebanese community, particularly those who receive support from Hezbollah's legitimate activities, Côte d'Ivoire is not a land of jihad. Moreover, Côte d'Ivoire is in no way concerned with the struggle pitting Hezbollah against Israel or, to some extent, against those seen as its supporters, namely certain Western countries.

Rather, many Lebanese consider themselves fully Ivorian, and many of them have held citizenship for several generations, and could not consider engaging in activities that would threaten the security of Côte d'Ivoire. In short, for them it would be as if they were turning on their own country, even if adopted – a country that has offered them, and their parents before them, refuge as well as the opportunity to rebuild their lives; a perspective that seems overwhelmingly excluded.

However, Côte d'Ivoire is home to foreign interests including Westerners that cannot be completely excluded. Despite the negative impact it would have on the community as a whole, depending on circumstances, some Hezbollah supporters may be tempted to carry out isolated actions there.

It is also not impossible that Côte d'Ivoire might serve as the departure point for Lebanese who wished to return to their country of origin to take an active part in the resistance against anything that could be perceived as an enemy of Lebanon. In this regard, the study revealed the willingness of members of Lebanese community, especially unmarried young men, to physically engage with Hezbollah, in particular to fight the Israeli army. Several have gone to theatres of war in Lebanon, and some have died.

### Is Côte d'Ivoire safe from religious radicalism?

Religious radicalism in Côte d'Ivoire has not, for the moment, reached the scale observed in other countries in the region. However, it is not immune to or sheltered from this phenomenon. Risk factors indeed exist. They are political, administrative and regulatory, socio-economic, religious and geopolitical in nature.

Politically, Côte d'Ivoire's recent politico-military history, combined with a number of structural problems linked to governance, presents certain risk factors for religious radicalisation. Thus, the decade of political and military crisis from which the country is emerging has significantly reduced the state's presence in some regions and contributed to a weakening of governance structures in meeting certain basic needs (health, education, justice and security), particularly in the west and north of the country, helping to create a vacuum that religious entrepreneurs could try to fill. The laborious process of national reconciliation and political dialogue, the proximity of the trials of Gbagbo and former leader of the Young Patriots Charles Blé Goudé and, more broadly, the pre-electoral context in which the country is moving could help to revive the 'faith' of supporters of the former regime.

For the majority of the Lebanese community, Côte d'Ivoire is not a land of jihad

The activities of associations are regulated in Côte d'Ivoire by Law No. 60-315 of 21 September 1960. In addition, the management of religions is the responsibility of the Department of Religious Affairs within the Ministry of the Interior and Security. However, the emergence of a number of issues that did not exist 50 years ago highlights the ineffectiveness, inefficiency and, to a large extent, incompatibility of the existing regulatory framework to deal with current events. This context is a challenge, given the need to better control the creation, operation (including financing) and activities of religious associations (in particular, proselytising, preaching and teaching). This situation is likely to increase the risk of radical ideologies spreading.

From a socio-economic perspective, the marginalisation that characterises some populations and resulting frustrations, may increase their vulnerability to radicalisation. In fact, on these issues, the post-election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire – itself the culmination of a decade of political and military crisis – with its socio-economic consequences, faces a number of challenges, despite strong economic growth driven by public investments. This is particularly true given the poverty in which a significant part of the population lives.<sup>25</sup>

To this situation, one must add the problems of governance and corruption that undermine citizens' confidence in public institutions. Without doubt, it is within this framework that one might include the death of Madiara Ouattara in May 2014, following an attempted self-immolation at the entrance of the presidential palace over unpaid bills for services rendered to the president's office between 2007 and 2010.<sup>26</sup>

The many neighbourhoods of Abidjan – as in some of those located in the municipalities of Abobo, Adjame and Yopougon – or other parts of the country where many disadvantaged classes assemble, make these areas places where associations or individuals making anti-establishment speeches or advocating a certain interpretation of Islam in the guise of proselytism could strike a chord. These environments could also be the preferred areas for self-proclaimed prophets.

Religious radicalism in Côte d'Ivoire has not, for the moment, reached the scale observed in other countries in the region

On the religious level, a misunderstanding of the texts and true values that Islam advocates are likely to increase the vulnerability of some individuals to 'preachers' who extol a reading of Islam that is marked by intolerance or fanaticism. Such trends generally thrive in anonymity, away from places of prayer or on their fringes or outside of the established representative organisations. In fact, the limited control of preachers in places of prayer – whose total number is currently unknown to either the government or Islamic institutions – is a reminder of the risk of radical interpretations of Islam developing.

On the geopolitical level, Côte d'Ivoire is situated in a regional context facing the persistent threat of violent extremism and jihadist terrorism. The danger of spreading radical trends is real given the freedom of movement and settlement of people from the region. Côte d'Ivoire's involvement in solving the crisis in Mali is an additional risk factor. Thus, during the occupation of northern Mali, some jihadist groups<sup>27</sup> threatened reprisals against countries that were planning to intervene militarily. In that regard, it is worth recalling that Côte d'Ivoire, which shares a border with Mali, played a key diplomatic role in establishing a regional and international intervention. Finally, jihadist ideology, which has fuelled security crises in the Sahel, northern Nigeria and the Middle East (Syria and Iraq), and the wide publicity received by the actions of such groups can be a rallying call to some.

## Conclusion

Religion, taking into account the meaning that it gives to the lives of millions, in its different modes of expression and its interactions with other aspects (political life, economic activities, social relations, etc.) is a challenge for Côte d'Ivoire. Unregulated, the way that individuals define and experience it can jeopardise co-existence, social cohesion and national security. This challenge is of even greater importance for Côte d'Ivoire, which remains fragile because of political, military, socio-economic and identity crises from which it is still struggling to fully recover. It thus seems essential to take adequate steps so that the risks linked to religious radicalism, or any temptation to exploit a particular belief, do not further weaken the country.

## Recommendations

**1** To reduce the risk of radicalisation, particularly within the Wahhabi movement, the Ivorian authorities should increase their vigilance over ideological developments that could occur in the country. This could happen, in collaboration with representatives of the movement by improving the training of imams and establishing an improved framework for setting up places of worship and the sermons given in them.

**2** To prevent the danger of imported ideologies and practices that in other contexts have paved the way for radical interpretations of Islam, the relevant public security services should intensify surveillance of the activities of certain transnational Islamic movements and preachers on national territory.

**3** The ease with which evangelical churches are established makes it necessary – without undermining the freedom of religion and belief – for the government to tighten or revise the conditions under which these churches are established and operate, in consultation with their representatives. In addition to issues of access to places of worship and organisation of their religion, the public authorities should initiate a dialogue with these movements on the labelling and appointment of ‘pastors’, ‘prophets’ and ‘evangelists’.

**4** Given the specificity of the problems linked to religious radicality, it seems necessary to fully implement the legal framework governing the operation of associations (Law No. 60-315 of 21 September 1960) and adapt it to religious associations to better encompass them. This could also be achieved through capacity building of relevant government departments responsible for controlling religious associations – including their finances.

**5** Many countries within the sub-region are exposed to the risk of religious radicalism. The circulation of people, religious ideologies and practices from one country to another highlights the need to enhance regional cooperation – particularly in the context of the Economic Community of West African States – in understanding these issues, in efforts to prevent their spread and in sharing experiences.

## Notes

- 1 This summary is built on the findings of a research undertaken by a team led by three Ivorian researchers. Some researchers would like to remain anonymous; we have chosen not to mention any of them.
- 2 Religious radicalism identifies a particular branch within a religion, generally opposing any compromise over the values that are considered absolute; this branch also shows a degree of intolerance towards other approaches and tends to go to the extreme of the logic of its convictions. The term radicalisation is defined as ‘the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence, as a method of societal change’; cf. CE Allen, Threat of Islamic Radicalization to the Homeland, Testimony before the US Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, 14 March 2007. The term ‘radicality’ to which reference is also made in this report includes any situation that exhibits a degree of radicalism. Radicalisation is generally considered to be a step towards terrorism. It is important to specify that there is no one process of radicalisation. Several trajectories or forms of radicalisation can be observed.
- 3 A charismatic evangelical preacher who embodied the new prototype of evangelical preacher from the end of the 1990s, Kacou Sévérin made a reputation for himself with his inflammatory preaching, his ‘miracles’ and above all his revelations about Laurent Gbagbo. He was the founding president of the Ministry of the Strength of the Evangelist (MPE) and president of the Foursquare Church of Côte d’Ivoire (1997-2001), an American chapel in the country. He died in a road accident in April 2001.
- 4 T. Kouamouo and B. Guibléhon: ‘En Côte d’Ivoire, il y a des connexions entre politiques et religieux’, *Jeune Afrique*, 14 January 2011, [www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20110114130340/](http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20110114130340/).
- 5 1) Strategic abandonment; 2) movements of panic and the sounds of war; 3) the international plot; 4) ‘victory’ of the rebels and of France; 5) Côte d’Ivoire’s deliverance; 6) President Gbagbo’s choice; 7) attack by two other African countries.
- 6 Decree 1: judgement of the rebels and other enemy forces; Decree 2: judgement of the allied political parties; Decree 3: divine judgement against two key African heads of state; Decree 4: judgement of three leaders in the press; Decree 5: heavenly sanction against the French president; Decree 6: repatriation of remaining enemy soldiers; Decree 7: complete reconstruction of Côte d’Ivoire; see *Le Nouveau Réveil, Prières nocturnes à la résidence de l’exchef de l’État/Voici la ridicule prophétie qui dit-on protège Gbagbo*, *Abidjan.net*, 18 March 2011, <http://news.abidjan.net/h/394633.html>.
- 7 M. Miran, *Le Wahhabisme à Abidjan: dynamisme urbain d’un islam réformiste en Côte d’Ivoire contemporaine (v. 1960-1996)*, *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara*, No. 12, December 1998, 5-74.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 10-15.
- 9 Created on 9 January 1993, presenting itself as a federation of Muslim associations whose objective is to increase unity within the Muslim community and to serve as an interlocutor with the public authorities.
- 10 Despite originally being a ‘specialised’ CNI organ, COSIM has steadily become one of the most representative structures of the national *umma*.
- 11 This was particularly the case of the demonstration organised in January 2015 in Abidjan, initiated by Muslims to express their disapproval after the publication of cartoons of the Prophet Mohamed by satirical French newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*; see Kaoci.com, Côte d’Ivoire: des musulmans manifestent contre Charlie Hebdo à Abidjan, 23 January 2015, <http://koaci.com/cote-divoire-musulmans-manifestent-contre-charlie-hebdo-abidjan-98164.html>. This demonstration was not organised by the authorities who used to speak for the national *umma*.
- 12 *Grin* designates a meeting space for debate that offers young people the opportunity to discuss various subjects over tea.
- 13 This is true of the Muslim Communities of Sufis of Côte d’Ivoire (CMSI) and the Malian Association for the Support of Islam (AMSI) or Ançar Dine,

not to be confused with the Islamist group Ansar Eddine, created in 2012 by Iyad Ag Ghaly, present in the north of Mali and establishing links with the jihadist movement in the Sahel.

- 14 The vast majority of Lebanese in Côte d'Ivoire are established and live there, some for several generations. They have citizenship in Lebanon and Côte d'Ivoire – many are among those who have been naturalised; some are only citizens of Côte d'Ivoire. Most consider themselves fully Ivoirian. There are also Lebanese who can sporadically travel to Côte d'Ivoire. Expressions used in the report, such as 'Lebanese community living in Côte d'Ivoire' or 'Lebanese living in Côte d'Ivoire' referred to any of these categories of Lebanese and should not be interpreted as a denial of their citizenship.
- 15 Portail officiel du Gouvernement de Côte d'Ivoire, Dîner officiel en l'honneur du président de la République libanaise, S.E.M. Michel Sleiman et son épouse: le discours du président de la République, S.E.M Alassane Ouattara, 14 March 2013, [www.gouv.ci/actualite\\_1.php?recordID=3313](http://www.gouv.ci/actualite_1.php?recordID=3313).
- 16 Agence Ecofin, 'Le président libanais Sleiman veut un renforcement de la coopération avec l'Afrique', 15 March 2013, [www.agenceecofin.com/economie/1503-9563-le-president-libanais-sleiman-veut-un-renforcement-de-la-cooperation-avec-l-afrique](http://www.agenceecofin.com/economie/1503-9563-le-president-libanais-sleiman-veut-un-renforcement-de-la-cooperation-avec-l-afrique).
- 17 The President of the Lebanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Côte d'Ivoire, Joseph Khoury, in May 2011 estimated it to be 35%. He declared that Lebanese held or controlled 99% of major stores, 80% of the fishing and export industry, 60% of the construction sector, 75% of the trade in timber and 70% of the publishing sector; see 'Le Commerce du Levant, Plus de 50% du secteur industriel en Côte d'Ivoire aux mains des Libanais', *Daily Star*, 23 May 2011, [www.lecommercedulevant.com/node/18881](http://www.lecommercedulevant.com/node/18881).
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 Portail officiel du Gouvernement de Côte d'Ivoire, 'Dîner officiel en l'honneur du président de la République libanaise, S.E.M. Michel Sleiman et son épouse: le discours du président de la République, S.E.M Alassane Ouattara', 14 March 2013, [www.gouv.ci/actualite\\_1.php?recordID=3313](http://www.gouv.ci/actualite_1.php?recordID=3313).
- 20 Hezbollah is considered to be a terrorist organisation by the US (since 1997), Canada (since 2001) and Australia (since 2003), the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain (2011), Oman Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. The European Union has placed its armed wing on its terrorist group list in 2013. In 2008, the United Kingdom placed its military branch on a terrorist list.
- 21 This suspicion was the basis for the deportation from Côte d'Ivoire in August 2009 of the president of the association, Imam Abdul Menhem Kobeïssi, who was born and raised in the country. The US accused him of funding Hezbollah and mobilising youth to return to Lebanon to fight Israel; see B Mieu, L'imam libanais lâché par les Ivoiriens, *Jeune Afrique*, 31 August 2009, [www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAJA2536-37p076-077.xml5/](http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAJA2536-37p076-077.xml5/).
- 22 Estimation provided by a responsible of the above association.
- 23 This is a religious obligation which corresponds to 2.5% of all revenue earned by an individual in one year. For the Shiites, this contribution is 5% of their annual wealth. The priority for the sums gathered are for the needy, those asked to collect and distribute them, those whose hearts have to be won, buying the freedom of prisoners, debtors who are unable to pay, the fight on the road to Allah, and travellers; see Abbas Ahmad al-Bostani (trans.), *La Rationalité de l'Islam*, Montréal: Cité du savoir, s.d., [www.bostani.com/livre/la-rationalite-de-l-islam.htm#\\_1\\_62](http://www.bostani.com/livre/la-rationalite-de-l-islam.htm#_1_62).
- 24 It is an Islamic tax consisting in the payment of 20% of one person's annual revenues after the deduction of all expenses. The objective is to cover the needs of communal life and to promote Islam. *Ibid.*
- 25 Jeune Afrique, Pour la Banque mondiale, le niveau de pauvreté en Côte d'Ivoire reste 'inquiétant', 12 November 2014, <http://jeuneafrique.com/regions/afrique-subsaharienne/23499-pour-la-banque-mondiale-le-niveau-de-pauvrete-en-cote-d-ivoire-reste-inquietant.html>.
- 26 Agence africaine de presse, La mort de Madiara Ouattara à la Une des journaux ivoiriens, *StarAfrica*, 28 May 2014, <http://fr.starafrika.com/actualites/la-mort-de-madiara-ouattara-a-la-une-des-journaux-ivoiriens.html>.
- 27 Agence France presse, Aqmi menace tous les pays qui collaboreront avec une force militaire intervenant au Mali, Faso z'infos, 1 July 2012, <https://fasozinfo.wordpress.com/2012/07/01/aqmi-menace-tout-les-pays-qui-collaboreront-avec-une-force-militaire-intervenant-au-mali>.

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