

9 THE MEDIA COVERAGE OF POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS RELATIONS IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE: AN ANALYSIS IN LIGHT OF THE ROLE OF THE GLAË MASK AMONG THE WÊ PEOPLE

Célestin Gnonzion¹

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the interactions between politicians and religious leaders in Côte d'Ivoire. These constitute one of the aspects of the bipolarisation of public space in this country since the return to multiparty politics in 1990. It has to do with the reality of a duality observable, first of all, at the political level, between the former Party, the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire – the African Democratic Rally (PDCI-RDA) and the parties that originated there, and then the opposition party, the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) and the political groups that identify with it or that are close to it on the ideological level. This political duality influences other social institutions such as the media and religions.

The chapter also establishes a relationship, in the form of a socio-historical heritage, of the interactions between politics and religion in an African traditional society. It is possible to attempt to interpret what is observed in the Côte d'Ivoire on the politico-religious scene in the light of the connection, in the Wê society of the west of Côte d'Ivoire, between the holder of religious power in the form of the mask, or the *glaè*, and those of the political powers in the Assembly of Initiates and the Head of Lineage.

There are, however, notable differences – in the size of populations, territories and media – between the public space in Wê society and the modern public space of politico-religious affairs in Côte d'Ivoire. But several lessons from the management of politics and religion in traditional Wê country can inform the governance of Côte d'Ivoire today. The chapter begins with a discussion of methodological points, then inquires into the context and the problem, leading into an analysis of extracts of the problematic discourses by religious leaders. A final part is devoted to analysis of the place of religion and politics in the traditional society Wê through the specific example of the *glaè* mask.

ELEMENTS OF METHODOLOGY

From a methodological point of view, this chapter analyses a corpus of press articles. These can be divided into two categories. First, there are articles on

1 Université Felix Houphouët Boigny d'Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire UFR, Information, Communication et Arts.

IV. Indigenous Religion and Minority Religions in Africa

the speech of Cardinal Bernard Agré, former Archbishop of Abidjan and a privileged witness to several important moments in the socio-political life of Côte d'Ivoire. This first section of the corpus includes the declaration of the Episcopal Conference of Côte d'Ivoire. Secondly, the corpus includes press reports on the criticism of the intervention of the Cardinal Agré and the declaration of the Ivorian bishops. These criticisms were made by journalists as well as by ordinary citizens. The corpus of articles was then analysed according to Èmile Benveniste's linguistic method of enunciation.²

Regarding the link between religion and politics in Wê society, the writings of historian Angèle Gnonsoa were the main documentary source of the oral tradition Wê.³ Gnonsoa's work is here revisited through observation of the Wê society and the role played by the *glaè*. This inquiry is animated by concern for the cultural, linguistic and ethical issues of public communication in countries.⁴

THE CONTEXT AND THE PROBLEM

Bipolarisation of political public space and its influence on media and religions

Since the year 1990, which marked the return to a multiparty system in Côte d'Ivoire, there has existed a political duality between the former ruling party

2 Benveniste È. 1974. *Problèmes de linguistique générale* [Problems of general linguistics]. Paris: Gallimard, 86. Enunciation, as defined by Benveniste, is "the operation of the language by an individual act of use". This act of enunciation has characteristics and properties. Among these, one can retain the referential and modal dimensions and the parameters of the situation of enunciation.

- The referential dimension (the *dictum*)

The referential dimension or mechanism of reference or referential universe brings back to the fact that when one speaks, one speaks of something. We are referring to something when we speak. Anaphoric contextual repeats can be used in the referential dimension.

- The modal dimension (the *modus*)

If, when one speaks, one speaks of something and one refers to some, one also expresses his position in the act of speaking. So we have a way and a way of referring to something. This is the modal dimension of the act of enunciation. There is thus in the utterance, the *dictum* (what is said) + the *modus* (attitude of the speaker in relation to what he says).

- The parameters of the situation of enunciation

In addition to its two characteristics of the act of enunciation, we also have parameters of the enunciation situation, namely: time (context), place (place of enunciation), actors (the speaker(s) and the person(s) they are addressing).

3 The work of the historian Angèle Gnonsoa, herself Wê, is authoritative on the problem of the *glaè* in Wê country. She spent many years, almost all her career as a researcher, in understanding the society Wê from the political and religious point of view and the role played by the *glaè*.

4 The present author is a member of the Monitoring Committee of the Council of Traditional Chiefs and Communities.

and the political parties allied to the political group Assembly of Houphouëtists for Democracy (RHDP) and the opposition parties gathered around Laurent Gbagbo's Ivorian Popular Front (FPI), known as the Presidential Majority (LMP) during the 2010 presidential elections.

This bipolarisation can be seen first of all at the level of the media, especially the written press. Indeed, as Aghi Bahi⁵ shows so well, we have blue papers, which are close from an editorial point of view to the parties gathered around the FPI, and green papers, which are close to the parties that comprise the RHDP.⁶ The production of newspapers and their mode of processing information are negatively influenced by the ideologies of the parties to which they are close. In Côte d'Ivoire, we are witnessing a partisan press, xenophobic writings and incitement to hatred and violence. This situation has been amply described by Samba Koné,⁷ Zio Moussa,⁸ and in previous research by the present author.⁹

Newspapers tend to appropriate politicians' quarrels by treating the political opponents of their bosses with negative names and qualifiers. Francis Nyamnjoh has raised this problem with regard to the press in Cameroon. In his view, between 1990 and 1993, the media were highly politicised in Cameroon and polarised between two diametrically opposed camps. Each camp pretends to know and to represent the interests of the society and the people. According to Nyamnjoh, "For each camp, the God, the angels and the saints on the other side are nothing but Lucifer and demons."¹⁰

Beyond this great politicisation of the press, there is processing of non-professional information. The rules of journalistic writing, namely the separation of genres, the balance in the processing of information, are trampled underfoot. Yet the journalistic ethics outlined in the various codes of ethics and duties of journalists in Côte d'Ivoire recommends in some of these articles independence in journalistic work.

5 Bahi AA and Theroux-Benoni LA. 2013 "À propos du rôle des médias dans le conflit ivoirien" [Concerning the role of the media in the Ivorian conflict], in Ouedraogo JB and Sall E (eds). *Frontières de la citoyenneté et political violence in Côte d'Ivoire* [Frontiers of citizenship and political violence in the Ivory Coast]. Dakar: CODESRIA, 199-217.

6 Bahi and Theroux-Benoni, "À propos du rôle des médias dans le conflit ivoirien".

7 Koné S. 2015. *Information & Désinformation* [Information & Disinformation]. Abidjan: Samgraphic. See also Tiesse C. 2005. "Une presse injurieuse et anti-confraternelle", *Fraternité Matin*, 26 September.

8 Zio M. 2012 "The Media and the Political Crisis in the Ivory Coast". Legon: Media Foundation for West Africa.

9 Gnonzion C. 2008. *Les facteurs de décisions éthiques et de construction de l'identité des journalistes ivoiriens* [The factors of ethical decisions and the construction of the identity of Ivorian journalists], PhD Diss, Gregorian University of Rome.

10 Nyamnjoh FB. 2000. "West Africa: Unprofessional and unethical journalism", in Kunczik M. 2000. *Ethics in journalism: a reader on their perception in the Third World*. Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung/FES Library, 31-77.

IV. Indigenous Religion and Minority Religions in Africa

The bipolarisation of public life with respect to religions has manifested itself in a different way. It was felt that every head of state had a type of religious guide who enjoyed the graces of the palace and whose councils were the most credible of those of the others. Researchers such as Bony Guiblehon¹¹ have already noted this phenomenon. For example, during the reign of Presidents Houphouët-Boigny (before the appearance of then Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara) and Henri Konan Bédié, the Catholic Church and the bishops received greater attention than Protestant churches and Muslims. Large Catholic buildings were built, including Saint Paul's Cathedral in Abidjan Plateau, the Basilica of Our Lady of Peace in Yamoussoukro, which is a replica of St. Peter's in Rome, and mosques were also built, such as the Mosque of the Plateau.

During the reign of Laurent Gbagbo, it was the pastors of the Protestant churches who were the religious guides of the palace and whose counsels and prayers had more meaning for the regime than those of the other religious leaders, even if some Catholic leaders were welcomed for various reasons. Laurent Gbagbo is a former seminarian, and the nationalist ideas or national sovereignty he defended were taken up by some priests and bishops in their public speeches, both mediated and not. Under the regime of President Ouattara, it is the Muslim leaders who have defended the regime in place and prayed for its longevity in their sermons.¹²

It is in this context of bipolarisation that the presidential elections of 2010 were held, and the challenge of their results by the main protagonists will lead to a post-election crisis.¹³ The media staging of Catholic leaders during the 2010 post-electoral crisis in Côte d'Ivoire is the tip of the iceberg of interactions between religious leaders and politicians since the country's independence in 1960. This media staging was the manifestation of a two-dimensional secularism: the secularism of "collaboration" and the secularism "separatist" type that Rubin Pohor¹⁴ explains well:

In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, particularly, as elsewhere in several African countries, two aspects of these types of secularism coexist in varying degrees. This is the secularity of "collaboration" and secularism of the "separatist" type. Thus, some have a perception of secularism tending

11 Guiblehon B. 2011. *Le pouvoir-faire: religion, politique, ethnicité et guérison en Côte d'Ivoire* [The power-to-do: religion, politics, ethnicity and healing in the Ivory Coast]. Paris: L'Harmattan, 150.

12 2015. "Côte d'Ivoire: Carton rouge à l'imam Ousmane Diakité de la mosquée du Mont Arafat à Cocody", *ConnectionIvoirienne.net*, 18 July.

13 The results of the presidential elections of 2010, according to the institution that proclaims them, would be challenged by either side. The results of these presidential elections proclaimed by the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), which gave Ouattara the victory, would be challenged by the Gbagbo camp. And those of the constitutional council which invalidated the results of the CIS and gave Gbagbo victory would be contested by the Ouattara camp.

14 Pohor R. 2013. "Points de tensions, laïcité et cohésion sociale". [Points of tension, secularism and social cohesion], *Revue théologie Africaine, Église et Société* 3:77-105.

to emphasize the independence of the State from religions or the autonomy of the region from politics. Separatist secularism, although less obvious, is often mentioned when there is a collision between religion and politics.

The bipolarisation of the public political-religious space was the first problem. The second problem (and the starting point of this chapter) is the public disavowal of the Catholic religious leaders.

Public disavowal of Catholic leaders

The media coverage of the interactions between politicians and Catholic leaders was the occasion to observe a sort of discredit and public disavowal of the latter by ordinary citizens, journalists and even other religious. This media coverage has thus exposed certain limits inherent to the human being: fragility in the face of adversity and a tendency to make partisan judgments and to give unbalanced information. But these supposed limits of men consecrated or anointed by the power of the people through popular, democratic or diplomatic choices raises in varying degrees the question of the credibility of the religious and political leader in Ivorian public space. In the collective social imagination of some citizens, for example, politicians are tainted with certain adverse or derogatory qualifications. Some are even identified as “thieves”, “liars” and “demagogue”, who promise mounts and wonders, just to be elected and remain in power. And that does not move anyone – or at least not many people.

On the other hand, the case of the religious leader is different. The latter is perceived as a model of truth, justice and love – in short, a man of God – therefore a credible and reassuring man.

In his context of life and the exercise of his spiritual and divine activities, the religious leader is seen as caring for things that bear meaning to the heavens. He is “in the world but not of the world”. This is one of the foundations of his teachings to the faithful, whether the latter are Christians or Muslims.

The religious man is perceived in the national community as a credible man, because he is a member and representative of a credible institution – namely, the Church. His word embodies a word of authority borrowed from justice and truth, because it is supposed to be influenced and inspired by the teaching of the Good News of the Gospel. One of the foundations of the credibility of the Catholic leader is the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom he is the representative and in whose name he derives all his legitimacy and announces the Good News. In other words, this Jesus incarnates and identifies himself with the message (the good news) that he announces to the people of God. The encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, is explicit in this regard:

Jesus himself is the “Good News”, as he declares at the very beginning of his mission in the synagogue at Nazareth, when he applies to himself the words of Isaiah about the Anointed One sent by the Spirit of the Lord

IV. Indigenous Religion and Minority Religions in Africa

(cf. Luke 4:14-21). Since the “Good News” is Christ, there is an identity between the message and the messenger, between saying, doing and being. His power, the secret of the effectiveness of his actions, lies in his total identification with the message he announces; he proclaims the “Good News” not just by what he says or does, but by what he is.¹⁵

Catholic leaders, bishops and cardinals, as the constituents of Christ, also have the mission of continuing this work of announcing the Good News as written by Pope John Paul II:

My brother bishops are directly responsible, together with me, for the evangelization of the world ... In this regard the Council states: “The charge of announcing the Gospel throughout the world belongs to the body of shepherds, to all of whom in common Christ gave the command.”¹⁶

Clearly, for bishops, as for Christ, it is this intrinsic bond, “the identity between the messenger and the message, between saying, acting and being”, which for us is the important element in which is based on the legitimacy and credibility of the men of God and of the Catholic leaders in Côte d’Ivoire. This is what Marshal McLuhan was referring to when he said “The medium is the message.”¹⁷ But this identity link is not something fixed. It is a link that is created, develops and consolidates in time and across social contexts. It strengthens the faith and credibility of faithful and observers to Catholic leaders.

In light of the above, we are able to ask ourselves a series of questions arising from the entry into the electronic media and their use by religious leaders in Côte d’Ivoire during the period of the post-election crisis of 2010. How religious leaders expose themselves to the media? Why and for what purpose? What message and what speech was it conveyed in the media? What is the context of this presence in the media? What are these media and what were their perceptions of religious discourses and representations of religious leaders in their productions? Finally, what answers did the discourses and messages of religious leaders generate in the media? The following should help to answer to all these questions.

15 Pope John Paul II. 1990. *Redemptoris Missio* [On the permanent validity of the Church’s missionary mandate] 7 December, para 13.

16 Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, para 63.

17 From the title of the book of McLuhan M. 1967. *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects*. London: Penguin.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM, HERITAGE AND
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

THE MEDIA COVERAGE OF SPEECHES OF
RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND THEIR CRITICS

The televised intervention of Cardinal Bernard Agré

Table 9.1: The referential dimension and parameters of the enunciation of the cardinal’s discourse

ACTORS	TIME (CONTEXT)	PLACE	WHAT THE CARDINAL SAID (<i>DICTUM</i>)
• Cardinal Agré • National community • International community	The programme was broadcast on 23 December 2010 at one of the highlights of the post-election crisis.	Cardinal Agré was interviewed on the first channel of Ivorian television, the RTI. He was the guest of the programme “Raison d’état”.	• “For me, the right has been said, and has given a victor, it is necessary to stick to that.” • “In all countries of the world, the Constitutional Council is the body responsible for resolving electoral disputes and proclaiming final results.” • “... the international community, accused of ‘wanting to put the fire’ on the Ivory Coast.” • “I ask President Laurent Gbagbo and Mr Ouattara to meet somewhere to hear.”

The choice of the RTI, more than three weeks after the outbreak of the post-election crisis, cannot seem fortuitous. The RTI has always been under the control of the political regime in place. It proved it even more clearly at the beginning of the post-election crisis, especially with its “Raison d’état” broadcast, which sought to legitimise the victory of the camp and candidate Laurent Gbagbo. Accepting to participate in this media broadcast can be seen as political support brought by the cardinal to one of the camps in conflict. Through his speech, Cardinal Agré takes a clear position in supporting the verdict of the constitutional council which recognises Laurent Gbagbo as winner.

IV. Indigenous Religion and Minority Religions in Africa

Critical reactions to Cardinal Agré's speech

Table 9.2: The first reaction

ACTORS	TIME (CONTEXT)	PLACE	MANNER OF CRITICISING THE CARDINAL'S DISCOURSE (MODUS)
• An Ivorian citizen • Cardinal Agré • National community • International community	A few days after the interview with Cardinal Agré	In the lines of the daily <i>Patriot</i>	• "The international community's affair is heartless: the questionable positions of Cardinal Agré" (title of the article) • "He should have been the Ivorian Desmond Tutu. Bernard Cardinal Agré, former Archbishop of Abidjan, would have had, in the crisis that shook the Ivory Coast, statements from the Anglican Archbishop of South Africa that the country would not be where it is today." • "In the name of truth and clerical priesthood, the prelate should have simply asked Laurent Gbagbo to leave power." • "Bernard Cardinal Agré appears and defends the one who hires mercenaries to kill his compatriots. Worse, Monseigneur Agré uses the ultra-nationalist theses of Laurent Gbagbo and his supporters who treat this international community as people who do not think about tomorrow."

To support his criticisms, this citizen recalls the example of South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who played a positive and constructive role in his country. He regrets that Cardinal Agré did not follow the same path. He also stresses the duty of truth of a man of God and ends by recalling that, according to him, the cardinal supports a personality who "hires mercenaries to kill his compatriots". These criticisms were published in the daily *Patriot*, which close to one of the parties, namely, camp Ouattara.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM, HERITAGE AND
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

Table 9.3: The second reaction

ACTORS	TIME (CONTEXT)	PLACE	MANNER OF CRITIQUING THE CARDINAL'S DISCOURSE (<i>MODUS</i>)
• The journal <i>Venance Konan</i> • Cardinal Agré • National community • International community	29 Dec. 2010, about a week after the televised interview with the Cardinal	• A forum in the French newspaper <i>Libération</i> • The information portal Abidjan.net • The article was reprinted by the Ivorian dailies	• "Your Eminence, should I remind you that one of the cardinal values of Christian doctrine is Truth? This doctrine says that God sent his son Jesus to earth to tell the Truth to the Men. And it was not by chance that Jesus punctuated all his sermons with these words: 'Verily I say unto you.' It is written in the sacred book of Christians, John 14, 'And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; And we have beheld his glory, a glory as the glory of the only begotten of the Father.'" • "The accession of Laurent Gbagbo to power in 2000 resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people. To this day I have not heard you condemn these massacres. It was in the basement of your cathedral that Robert Guei took refuge on September 19, 2002, and it was there that Laurent Gbagbo's soldiers went to fetch him as a dog on the Corniche of Cocody, without it being known to this day who had informed them of his presence in your premises. I have not yet heard you condemn this assassination." • "You ask that you pray for all these victims, but you do not condemn the perpetrators you know well. " • "What kind of pastor are you, Cardinal Bernard Agré?" • "Your Eminence, if you were a man of truth, a man who loves his country, you would use your authority to make Laurent Gbagbo understand that he is driving the Ivory Coast to chaos by wanting to cling to a power that The Ivorians refused him by the votes of the urns. We who fall under the bullets of the Gbagbo killers while men like you are silent, have no choice but to call for help from this international community that you seem to hate."

IV. Indigenous Religion and Minority Religions in Africa

The author grounds himself in the biblical texts, and in notions of truth and justice to criticise the intervention of Cardinal Agré. He recalls a biblical passage and accuses the silence of Cardinal Agré in the face of several facts in the history of the country, which he cites in his testimony. These are the facts of massacres and the death of a man. In so doing, he accuses the Cardinal of being a partisan and not a judge and an impartial man of God. He wonders ironically about the type of pastor that Cardinal Agré is.

Table 9.4: The declaration of the bishops of Côte d'Ivoire

ACTORS	TIME (CONTEXT)	PLACE	WHAT THE IVORIAN BISHOPS SAID (DICTUM)
• Bishops of the Côte d'Ivoire • National community • International community	On 3 Jan. 2011, about a month after the onset of the post-election crisis	The Ivorian dailies	"We Bishops of Côte d'Ivoire recommend the following: - That the two candidates undertake to find through the means of dialogue a peaceful settlement of the dispute so as not to endanger the lives of the people. - That they accept to meet to dialogue in spite of their resentment; it would be an act of courage, humility and love for our country. - That they call their militants firmly to calm and restraint. - That the United Nations comply with the fundamental principles which govern it and which are respectful of the rights of man. That it makes use of the peaceful means of settlement of the dispute with a view to contributing to the resolution of the crisis and strictly to the maintenance of peace. We urge him to respect the sovereignty of our country. - That our brothers, the Africans of the AU and ECOWAS, recall the principle of African solidarity which means that when the neighbor's hut burns, it is helped to extinguish the fire. We would therefore like to respectfully draw attention to the incalculable consequences of military intervention for the country and the West African subregion. We say no to such an intervention. We are all embarked in the same ship and no one has any interest in seeing it sink into the formidable waters of violence and civil war."

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM, HERITAGE AND
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

Two essential points have been criticised in this statement by the bishops of Côte d'Ivoire. First, it comes a little late, almost a month after the outbreak of the post-election crisis. Second The bishops urge the UN to respect the sovereignty of Côte d'Ivoire. In the context of the post-election crisis, this request was seen, rightly or wrongly, as a stand in favor of the Laurent Gbagbo camp. Thus, they were treated of bishops close to the party of the latter.

Table 9.5: Critics of the Bishops' Declaration

ACTORS	TIME (CONTEXT)	PLACE	MANNER OF CRITIQUING THE DISCOURSE OF THE CARDINAL (MODUS)
• The daily <i>North-South</i> • Bishops of the Côte d'Ivoire • National community • International community	8 Jan. 2011	The columns of the daily <i>North-South</i> , close to the Ouattara camp	"Episcopal Conference of Ivory Coast - All Bishops Are Not Pro-Gbagbo" (title of article)
• The daily <i>Patriot</i> • Bishops of the Côte d'Ivoire • National community • International community	11 Jan. 2011, one week after the declaration of the bishops	An edition of the daily newspaper <i>Patriot</i> , close to the Ouattara camp	"Electoral coup d'etat – These political bishops who deceive Gbagbo" (title of the article)
• Ivorian citizen • Bishops of the Côte d'Ivoire • National community • International community	11 Jan. 2011	The columns of the daily newspaper <i>Le Nouveau Réveil</i> , close to the Ouattara camp	"After the declaration of the pro-Gbagbo bishops / Pr. Koné Abu Bakary denounces the seductive and dangerous speech of the bishops of Côte d'Ivoire" (title of the article)
• An Ivorian citizen • Bishops of the Côte d'Ivoire • National community • International community	13 Jan. 2011	The columns of the daily newspaper <i>Le Nouveau Réveil</i> , close to the Ouattara camp	"After the declaration of the pro-Gbagbo bishops / A citizen asks: 'Why are you blind?'" (title of article)

The statement of the Ivorian bishops was strongly criticised in the national press. The dailies that published these criticisms are those close to the Ouattara camp. These criticisms emanate from journalists as well as ordinary citizens.

IV. Indigenous Religion and Minority Religions in Africa

THE PLACE OF RELIGION AND POLITICS IN TRADITIONAL SOCIETY WÊ: THE EXAMPLE OF THE GLAÈ MASK

Who are the Wê?

The Wê are an Ivorian people living in the mountainous west of the country. They are distinguished by their different dialect between the Wê of the south, called *gueré* by the government and the Wê of the north, who are called *wobe*. But these different dialects do not greatly influence inter-comprehension within the Wê country.

From the point of view of organisation, Wê society is not governed by a central power, of the monarchical type, as among certain Akan peoples, for example. But as Gnonsoa notes, three important points can be taken into account in the social organisation of the Wê:

1. Lineages as small political units culminating in federated clan lineages (*tche*);
2. Autonomy of the village cell; and
3. Submission of the life of lineage members to sacred institutions (*kwi, dji, glaè*, according to clan).

And among the sacred institutions present in Wê country, the one we are interested in in this chapter is the mask that the Wê call *glaè*. But who is this *glaè*, and what is its religious and political place?

What is the glaè mask of the Wê?

The term mask can refer commonly to an object of any form whatsoever which serves to hide the face. It is in this context, moreover, that this term is used in the expression masked ball. But among the Wê people, the mask does not refer to this.

Here it is not a vulgar object, whose sole function is to conceal something, the human face. Instead, the Wê people use the term of *glaè*¹⁸ to refer to the person who wears the mask. This *glaè* in Wê society and civilisation represents a “living reality”, an institution of the order of the sacred which incarnates religious and political powers. Christophe Wondji better explains the reality of the institution of the mask when he writes:

The universe of the Wê masks ... a mysterious world with appearances and scenic manifestations that are often confusing for the profane: mysteries of forms and colors, mysteries of songs and lyrics, mysteries of gestures and acrobatics whose decoding introduces us to one of the most symbolic civilizations of Black Africa. Indeed, this approach to masks and their role in society aims, in a way, to highlight the structures and functioning of a traditional civilization marked by the permanent

18 The reader of this chapter has to consider that the use of the term “mask” refers to the wearer of the *glaè* mask as an important figure in the Wê society.

search for harmony between man and the divinity, between nature and culture, between society and the cosmos. It is not a question here of opposing man to nature and divinity, but of harmonizing his relations with entities in order to integrate him into the world system. For if Greek Prometheus has taken fire from the gods to ensure the mastery of men on earth, the ancestors have used masks to establish the reign of the gods over men.¹⁹

To speak of a Wê mask is to touch on a leading institution for this people. As Angèle Gnonsoa writes, "Omnipresent in the life of Wê, the masks fulfilled various functions. They had the upper hand on religion, politics, economics, knowledge and art."²⁰

But from the religious point of view, the power of the *glaè* is based on the fact that it serves as an intermediary between God and men.

The religious power of the glaè as an intermediary between God and men

The Wê believe in the existence of a single God and creator of heaven, earth and all living beings, visible and invisible. For them, this God is the beginning of all things, for being the most ancient and pre-existent before all. The name used in Wê to designate God shows it easily. Indeed, in different dialects, God is designated by "Gnonsoa", that is to say "ancient", in the Wê of the north, or by "Guela", that is to say "old" in the Wê of the south. But as Gnonsoa the historian observes,

The Wê invoke God only in the last instance, when all remedies have been exhausted. That is why they only come into contact with Gnonsoa through intermediaries such as the *glaè* to whom a collective and popular cult is dedicated.²¹

Indeed, Gnonsoa further notes,

The Wê addresses the supernatural powers to ask them to keep the cosmic and social balance. Worship serves to render these powers favorable. The Wê wants to obtain from God, through his mediators, what can make his life pleasant and as long as possible.²²

It is also important to note, as Gnonsoa points out, that for the Wê, "religion here is not contemplative; it is always the communion of men among themselves, it is communion between men, ancestors and supernatural forces. It is essentially aimed at satisfying the needs here below: food, health, wealth, fertility, power,

19 Gnonsoa A. 2007. *Le masque au cœur de la société wê*. [The mask at the heart of Wê society]. Abidjan: FratMat Editions, 73.

20 Gnonsoa. *Le masque au cœur de la société wê*, 73.

21 Gnonsoa, *Le masque au cœur de la société wê*, 77.

22 Gnonsoa, *Le masque au cœur de la société wê*, 77.

IV. Indigenous Religion and Minority Religions in Africa

peace.”²³ In addition to religious power, the *glaè* is also a preponderant holder of political power.

The glaè as predominant holder and co-holder of political power

One of the distinctive features of the political and religious system of the Wê is that the same institution can embody two types of powers – namely, religious power and political power. This is the case with the *glaè*, which, as a sacred institution, holds exclusively religious power, but at the same time is at the top of the list and a preponderant means among the holders of political power. Indeed, among the Wê, political power is divided hierarchically between, initially, the *glaè*, then the Assembly of Initiates²⁴ and finally the Head of Lineage.

The *glaè* is the preponderant holder of political power because, as Gnonsoa explains, he is “well placed to know the rules that govern society, since he is himself a legislator. His antiquity and immortality make him an inexhaustible source of experience and wisdom. In addition, he is a spirit and therefore not inhabited by the human feelings which make most of the arbitrators biased in their judgment.”²⁵

We note, therefore, that from the point of view of protocol and politics, the *glaè*, the Assembly of Initiates and the Head of Lineage. But this preponderance does not make the *glaè* a dictator or an autocrat. Gnonsoa teaches us that he is a spokesman accepted by all the people, starting with the Assembly of the Initiates. But in reality, the person who exercises power on a daily basis is the Head of Lineage, because the mask is still not in the village.²⁶ There is therefore an interdependence between the *glaè*, the Head of Lineage and the Assembly of the Initiated.

On the other hand, one of the foundations of credibility in the *glaè* lies in the particularity of the political units in Wê country, which are governed by the blood relationship and not on the basis of an ideology. The *glaè* to better ensure its role of social control, benefits from its attribute of representative of ancestors and of God. As Gnonsoa observes,

To disobey him is to enter into dissent with the cosmic order, it is to consign himself to death, social and even physical. Only the initiates are capable of discernment in order not to submit blindly. Other

23 Gnonsoa, *Le masque au cœur de la société wê*, 77.

24 The Assembly of Initiates is composed of all the men adults and some women who serve the *glaè*. The young men can be part of this Assembly if they are 18 or 19 years old and have undergone the rite of circumcision.

25 Gnonsoa, *Le masque au cœur de la société wê*, 88.

26 A *glaè* represents the person and his full costume (mask and raphia robe). The *glaè* lives in some sort of camp near the village, or in the village but apart from the rest of the inhabitants of the village. The *glaè* comes to the village when necessary. The Head of Lineage or a member the Assembly of the Initiated can call him. The *glaè* can also come to the village in case of some problems.

members of the lineage, especially women and youth, must accept without discussion.²⁷

Discrediting Ivorian Catholic leaders during the post-election crisis: Lessons to be learned from the legacy of the glaè mask tradition

As we have shown during this chapter, Catholic leaders were sharply criticised and disavowed following their positions during the post-electoral crisis of 2010 in Côte d'Ivoire. They were accused of having taken sides for one of the camps in conflict, namely that of the outgoing president, Laurent Gbagbo, and in disfavour of the other camp, that of the then opposition candidate and now current president, Alassane Ouattara. For that reason, citizens bestowed hostile statements upon the men of God, hitherto respected by all.

But in the light of the example of the relations between religion and politics of the Wê, we can note certain points worthy of interest, which bring politics and religion together for the same interests of the community, but at different levels. At a time when certain societies have made the choice of separation between religious and political power, the Wê have found it necessary to link these two powers in a certain way. Some aspects of the management of religious and political power, in particular through the institution of the *glaè*, can be noted here. At the religious level, for example, it can be said that the basis of faith in the *glaè*, the importance for this institution of the questions of justice and equity, as well of social cohesion and peace.

Foundations of faith in the glaè at religious level

There are two bases for faith in the *glaè* in Wê society considerations for: (1) justice and equity; and (2) social cohesion and peace. They are reviewed in order here.

1. *Justice and equity.* The *glaè* as exclusive holder of the religious power in Wê country was the guarantor of justice and equity. The other members of society had faith in the mask because they were convinced that these decisions could not be arbitrary because they are themselves based on the fear of ancestors and God. The organisation of social and political institutions in the country was such that the mask could not be a dictator or impose its ideas, because the society had specific mechanisms of removal or banning the mask from going out publicly. And these mechanisms can be triggered by the assembly of insiders and elders. The fear of social punishment and the ban on escape resulted in the *glaè* being an institution for the promotion of social justice and equity.

The lesson to be learned here is that the exclusive holder of religious power, the intermediary between God and man, had to work for justice and cohesion in the

27 Gnonsoa, *Le masque au cœur de la société wê*, 94.

IV. Indigenous Religion and Minority Religions in Africa

community. If he did not do so, he could be banished by the Assembly of the Initiates and punished by the ancestors. Another lesson is that the Wê believed firmly in the religious power of the *glaè*, convinced that the latter cannot be arbitrary because it is based on the fear of ancestors and God. Social cohesion and peace as the second foundation of credibility and faith in the *glaè*.

2. *Social cohesion and peace.* Another lesson to be learned from the Wê is that the religious power of the *glaè* is also based on the preservation of social cohesion and peace. One of the roles of religion in Wê country is to bring and maintain the balance of man with nature and with God for a better life here below. It is a matter of social cohesion and peace in the community. The cult of the *glaè* serves to ward off wars, conflicts and calamities, to mitigate them or to manage them.

As Angèle Gnonsoa writes, “When a community is experiencing trouble or conflict; When catastrophes such as famine, epidemics or war break down, the cult of the *glaè klaa* (the oldest or the head of the *glaè* in Wê language) serves to distance or mitigate them. The purpose of worship can also be the prevention of evils or thanks for favors received.”²⁸

Foundations of faith in the glaè at the political level

The greatest legacy of the institution of the *glaè* in Wê country lies in the choice of a fusion between politics and religion. This is the mixed management of religious and political power and the fact that the same authorities jointly hold political and religious powers. At the political level, there was a distribution of roles in a hierarchical way that made political power not a single entity, a single institution. The facets of power were shared by different institutions and different social groups. There was therefore a division and a separation of power. Thus, a lesson to learn from the Wê, and of course to discuss at the political level, is that we should not be afraid to institute a mixed politico-religious power between politicians and religious leaders.

CONCLUSION

The media treatment of Cardinal Agré’s speeches and the declaration of the Episcopal Conference of Côte d’Ivoire during the post-election crisis showed that these were disavowed through criticisms reported by the newspapers. The Catholic leaders have been criticised for not sufficiently incarnating the “identity between the message and the messenger, between saying, acting and being”, as recalled in the encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*. Some observers, even if they have chosen media channels close to a political camp, have criticised the great collision between the Catholic leaders and former Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo. In fact, what was reproached in the Catholic

28 Gnonsoa, *Le masque au cœur de la société wê*, 77.

religious leaders is that they did not sufficiently played the role of arbitrator, whose word is authoritative because neutral and impartial.

This media coverage of the interventions of Catholic leaders highlights some of the problems that have plagued public life in Côte d'Ivoire for several decades. Primary among these problems is political bipolarisation, has influenced other institutions, such as the media and religion. The second problem is the reality of an ambiguous and hybrid secularism. These problems, which are problems of power, legitimacy and credibility, also manifest themselves traditional communities, which are of course, smaller in number and in terms of geographical space. But societies like the Wê have found answers to these problems. The solution found by the Wê is that the *glaè*, the exclusive holder of religious power, is also one of the holders of political power.

The main question for Côte d'Ivoire today is whether the religious should be separated from politics in the management of the affairs of the city, or whether, on the contrary, as in the Wê, the two must manage a symbiosis between the populus and the city in a joint fashion. The second important issue is the credibility of religious leaders. How can one explain that Catholic leaders who have benefited from the trust, fear and respect of all members of the community, all confessions combined, have come to be publicly criticised for being contradicted and decried? An early reply may come from lines of the encyclical of Pope John Paul II:

Since the "Good News" is Christ, there is an identity between the message and the messenger, between saying, doing and being. His power, the secret of the effectiveness of his actions, lies in his total identification with the message he announces; he proclaims the "Good News" not just by what he says or does, but by what he is.²⁹

To put it another way, the credibility of the disciple and the apostle of Christ must be inspired by the example of the latter. And the Wê who believed in the Father of Christ founded the credibility of their religious leaders on the fact that the latter, like the *glaè*, could not act in the interest of the community, for they were convinced that the contrary would provoke the anger of the Ancestors and God, the ancestor of their ancestors.

29 Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, para 13.