# *Imaniya* and Young Muslim Women in Côte d'Ivoire

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**Abstract:** In the 1990s, Muslims in Côte d'Ivoire redefined the boundaries of their identity, as well as the structure of their community. While young men have been at the forefront of this movement of religious revitalization as leaders and erudites, the life trajectories of young Muslim women have been deeply altered by these changes. This article explores how, through renewed acts of faith and displays of orthodoxy, Western-style educated and financially self-sufficient young women are negotiating their participation into marriage markets. Their relatively new social roles, defined by Western-style education and salaried employment, exclude them from locally sanctioned notions of "proper womanhood." Whilst their lifeworld inscribes them within a locally defined space of modernity and self-realization, they are not fully actualized as Muslim women due to their exclusion from marriage markets and, by extension, legitimate motherhood. Through their overt display of Islamic practice and their participation into newly created Islamic youth associations, they position themselves as "marriageable women" in light of marriage practices that generally favour younger and less formally educated women. The locally articulated Arabized version of Islam is at the core of their inclusion into local and transnational matrimonial markets.

**Keywords:** Islam, Côte d'Ivoire, youth, women, conversion

**Résumé:** Dans les années 1990, le fait d'«être musulman» dans le contexte social ivoirien a acquis une toute nouvelle signification. De fait, les musulmans ont redéfini tant les limites de leur identité que la structure de leur communauté. La pratique de l'islam en fut dynamisée sur les bases d'une logique arabisante. Afin d'explorer les enjeux propres à ce renouveau religieux, nous nous attachons à décrire dans cet article le rôle des jeunes femmes hautement scolarisées et financièrement indépendantes. Tandis que les jeunes hommes sont au centre de ces transformations, en tant que dirigeants religieux, l'expérience religieuse et la quotidienneté de ces jeunes musulmanes en sont profondément modifiées. En raison de leur milieu de vie, inscrit dans la modernité et la quête de la réalisation du soi, ces jeunes femmes sont exclues des marchés matrimoniaux, qui favorisent les femmes plus jeunes et beaucoup moins scolarisées. Par l'entremise d'actes de foi, de la mise en publique de leur religiosité et de leur participation à des associations islamiques, ces jeunes femmes se positionnent en tant qu'épouse potentielle et ré-intègrent divers marchés matrimoniaux.

**Mots-clés:** islam, Côte d'Ivoire, jeunes, femmes, conversion

## Introduction: Religious Transformation and Conversion

This article examines the role of African women in Islamic revivalism. More specifically, I will address the relationship between community conversion and individual experience in the 1990s in Côte d'Ivoire. I explore how, through *imaniya* or acts of faith, French-speaking, Western-style educated and financially self-sufficient young women[1] are negotiating their participation into local, and at times international, marriage markets. By means of the public display of orthodoxy and their participation into newly created Islamic associations, they position themselves as "marriageable" in light of marriage practices that generally favour younger and less formally educated women.

In relation to contemporary postcolonial African societies, a number of authors have highlighted the social, political and economic dimensions of recent religious revivalisms (see Bayart 1993; Constantin and Coulon 1997; Gifford 1995; Miles 2004; among others). As such, religion has been one of the sites of social change in processes of political decentralization starting in the 1980s with the end of the Cold War. Political and economic liberalization have loosened the possibilities of creating new social structures. In a number of cases, political claims have been framed in terms of religious identities; Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria are two significant examples of such processes in West Africa. Recent religious transformations have also been understood as a sociological critique of the project of modernization embodied in notions of the state and citizenship (see for instance Hefner 1998 and Nagata 2001).

While the sociopolitical aspects of recent religious changes in African societies have been extensively discussed in the literature, very little has been said about its experiential dimension, namely the experience of awakening to one's religious consciousness, be it individual or community-based. Among Muslims in Côte d'Ivoire, as

well as other Muslims in West Africa, it is commonly antic- ipated that one's religious practice will change through- out one's life course. With age, one is expected to adhere more closely to the locally prescribed orthodoxy. As one male informant explained, "when you are young, you need to try things out. You are not always a good Muslim. But with age, with responsibility, you need to become a good Muslim."

Clearly, here, the notion of spiritual growth is embed- ded in a synchronicity between religiosity and the life course (LeBlanc 2003a; Soares 2004a, 2004b). Historically, some religious rituals have marked the transition towards adherence of a Muslim way of life. The *hajj* (yearly pil- grimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia) is a significant marker in this passage. After attending the pilgrimage, Muslims are expected to follow a strict observance of religious pre- scriptions; their religious experience is accompanied by the outward display of Islamic markers, such as special head-dresses, as well as the adoption of a set of gestures and social attitudes (see LeBlanc 2005).

In spite of the expectation of spiritual growth throughout one's life course, the experience of imaniya described by young women in the 1990s marks actual changes in religious practice. Among Muslims in Côte d'Ivoire, imaniya refers to the experience of faith. Liter- ally, it means "to have faith" in the Dioula language. In the context of recent religious transformations among Muslims in Côte d'Ivoire,[2] imaniya highlights the experi- ence by Muslims "of assuming one's faith." One could also say: "*Ka seguiko I ka dinala,*" to come back to one's faith, religion or belief. As such, imaniya is associated with the notions of humility and modesty,[3] *nimissa* or remorse[4] as well as *djenebaya* or purification (I will come back to these three elements later in the discussion).

The assertion of one's faith by young Muslims in the 1990s implies a radical transformation of one's lifestyle and worldview that fits the Pauline model of conversion, namely a sudden and dramatic change accompanied by the reversal of beliefs and allegiances (see Rambo 2003). To borrow from John L. and Jean Comaroff's discussion of conversion and missionary work in South Africa, the experience of imaniya reshapes sociality and personhood in everyday practices, extending beyond purely religious matters (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). This means that the recognition of one's faith reaches out beyond the asser- tion of religious identity into the realms of social relations.

Through the account of individual experiences of imaniya, this article illustrates how young Muslim women in Côte d'Ivoire are negotiating their participation in often conflicting social spaces defined by Islam, traditional cul- tural practices and Ivorian bourgeois modernity. The expe- rience of faith structures the sense of selfhood and pro- vides a lifeworld to believers. I will argue that an Ara- bized version of Islam (see LeBlanc 1999, for a detailed description of this version of Islam) is at the core of the inclusion of highly educated French-speaking women within local and transnational marriage markets. In order to understand the experience of imaniya, as well as its implications for images of womanhood (bodily images as well as social roles), this article analyzes individual reli- gious trajectories using life course analysis.

The discussion is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the cities of Bouaké and Abidjan among young Muslims between 1992 and 1995, in 1998 and in 2000. During these stays, I collected 50 individual life tra- jectories (25 women and 25 men, aged 14 to 42)[5] through formal interviews (life histories and semi-directed inter- views), and I recorded (in writing) over 300 hours of con- versations in informal settings. The 25 narratives col- lected among women are coupled with observations about daily life gathered through sharing everyday life moments with them, as well as through discussions of these women's lives with other members of their family (their mothers, sisters, brothers and aunts). This information was re- organized as chronological narratives so as to analyze them in light of life course analysis.

Before I launch into the description and analysis of imaniya, I will discuss the analytical perspective proposed by life course analysis and the use I make of it. The notion of life course allows me to step beyond the idiosyncratic and anecdotal dimensions of personal narratives because it articulates them with socially defined and regulated biological functions, life stages and historical moments. In order to account for elements of historical contingen- cies, I will describe the historical context in Côte d'Ivoire in the 1990s with a focus on social and political dynamics specific to the Muslim community. I will then analyze the issue of women and religion in the context of an Arabized Islam and the question of women and marriage. To con- clude, I will address the question of faith and intentionality.

## Beyond Agency and Social Constraints

The issue of social change is at the core of the discussion of women's experience of imaniya, both in terms of the sociological phenomenon of religious revivalism and in terms of the individual experience of selfhood transfor- mation. As such imaniya raises the issue of the relation- ship between agency and structural constraints—that is the interplay between individual choices and actions, and historical contingencies. Life course analysis (see Bertaux 1982; Elder 1978; Hareven 1978, 1991; Rosenmayr 1982) provides a way to highlight the interplay between human

agency and elements of social constraints in idiosyncratic religious trajectories. By articulating dimensions of social time, moments of life transitions, individual religious trajectories and biological time, life course analysis, rather than assessing whether individual choice determines social change or structural conditions determine individual choices, asks under which conditions individuals are capable or prevented from actualizing their individual life projects.

The notion of life transition highlights the fact that individual's life trajectories are punctuated by events marking changes in an individual's social status, such as birth, marriage, motherhood, retirement or death; each stage comprises different social roles, identities and statuses. For instance, in the case of Muslims in Côte d'Ivoire, it is socially sanctioned that younger Muslims may adopt a looser attitude towards the practice of Islam. These life transitions are culturally and historically constructed. This implies that transition moments may fluctuate across time and place, and may also be altered in a particular time and place as a result of social change. Individuals' entry into and exit from such roles and the resulting collective changes are subjected to biological timetables as well as to changing social and economic conditions.

Among Muslims in contemporary Côte d'Ivoire, the life course is generally divided according to the stages and social rituals presented in Figure 1.

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**Female**: birth -> *denuli* (naming ceremony), *kene* (excision) ->weaning -> schooling (medersa-style or Western-style) -> marriage -> motherhood -> menopause -> death

**Male**: birth -> *denuli, kene* (circumcision) -> weaning -> schooling (medersa-style or Western-style) -> employment (economic autonomy) -> marriage -> fatherhood -> end of economic activity -> death

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Figure 1: Stages and rituals of the life course

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These stages correspond to a specific terminology in the Dioula language (see Figure 2). These categories relate to biological age, social roles and economic status. For example, a 55-year-old man who has become prosperous has retired and stays home most of the time to rest, to read the Qu'ran and to entertain visitors may be referred to as *kekoroni*.

In gerontocratic societies, such as is the case with Ivorian Muslims, the social category of youth is equivalent to a relative degree of powerlessness. It is thus desirable to move from the status of youth to the status of adult.[6] In the economic context of the late 1980s and 1990s, this process has been lengthened significantly. Youth is loosely

| Dioula/Banmanan term | English equivalent |
|---|---|
| *den* | child, general, and female, 0-12 |
| *denmissen* | small child, general, male and female, 0-5 |
| *deninani* | infant and baby, male and female, 0-2 |
| *denfitini* | child, male and female, until puberty, 0-12 |
| *sunguroni* | unmarried pubescent female, 12-18 |
| *borotigini* | young married female, until first child, 15-20 |
| *bilakoroni* | pubescent male, not yet circumcised, 12-16 |
| *kembeleni* | unmarried young circumcised male, 15-35 |
| *balimamusso* | adult woman, as a family member, 30-50 |
| *balimake* | adult man, as a family member, 30-50 |
| *mussokoroba* | old female, post-menopause age |
| *kekoroba* | old male, no longer economically active |
| *mussokoroni* | very old female, 70 years old and over |
| *kekoroni* | very old male, 70 years old and over |

Figure 2: Terminology of age categories

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defined by a number of specific behaviours or outward markers, ranging from the types of outings (going to bars, to the cinema, visiting friends), specific associative behaviours (dance association, *grin*[7]), music and dancing to Western, Caribbean and popular African-styles music (*zouk, zouglou, soukous*), clothing which is often modelled on ideals of European or American fashion, and socio-economic status (not employed, students). Culturally, the passage from youth to adulthood is signalled by marriage and the capacity to establish an independent household. As a consequence, what is at stake for young urban men and women today is employment and marriage. Entry into adulthood translates into the capacity to make decisions for oneself and for others. In the majority of cases, for men, "becoming an adult" translates into economic autonomy and marriage, whereas for women, it corresponds to marriage and motherhood. Amhed, a male informant, 22 years of age, noted that:

> Today, it is harder. The older men have the money to marry but us we have to wait too long. You go to school for years. You get training. You hope to work as an accountant, as a lawyer, as a businessman but you cannot get work. Our older brothers, they got work as soon as they got out of university. Not us. We have to wait, hope to work and wait to marry. [Author's translation from French, Bouaké, 1998]

Levels of autonomy are different for men and for women. Due to rules of *purdha* (Islamic rules regarding the seclusion of women), respected at different degrees, it is generally harder for women to acquire full financial autonomy. During a group discussion, Aminata, a young woman pointed out that:

It is harder for women to be financially independent. You know. Good women do not wander out of the compound just like that. I mean...when you are a university student, as a woman, people always wonder about you. They talk about you. They suggest that maybe you are not a virgin, that you have had too many men...As soon as you are not just at home, helping your mother, your aunts, people always think that you do wrong things. The more you are in a public place the more your decency is questioned. It is very hard. [Author's translation from Dioula, Bouaké, 1995]

Not all women experience life transition moments at the same pace and, in some cases, their life trajectories may deviate from this generalized life course pattern. French-speaking, highly Western-style schooled women stray from the culturally prescribed pattern to the extent that the timing of their entry into motherhood and matrimony is pushed back five to 15 years. This transformation of individual life courses takes place in the context of significant changes affecting access to formal schooling in postcolonial Côte d'Ivoire. At the time of independence, the democratization of schooling was seen by the newly formed national elite as the desired course to modernization and the construction of national allegiances based on citizenship (Bakery 1993). According to UNICEF, the percentage of primary school registration between 1996 and 2004 was 58% and the level of adult literacy between 2000 and 2004 was 48%. Despite the fact that young boys tend to be privileged in terms of schooling (Appleton 1990), a generation of relatively highly educated women also came out of governmental efforts to encourage the development of a national schooling system (Tansel 1997; Yai 1986). In 2004, the levels of literacy for adults were 60.1% for males and 38.2% for females; whereas for youths, they were 69.5% for males and 51.5% for females (UNESCO 2005). It is in the 1980s that highly educated women became visible in the national landscape, especially in white collar-type employment.

## Being Muslims in Côte d'Ivoire in the 1990s

In this section, I examine the sociopolitical conditions under which young Muslim women shift their religious practice towards an Arabized version of Islam. These sociopolitical conditions cannot, in themselves, account for the experience of imaniya lived by these women. Nonetheless, they provide a sociological context for the powerful attraction of an Arabized version of Islam among French-speaking intellectual women. The transformation of the Muslim community in the 1990s took place both at the national and the grassroot levels

(LeBlanc 1998). For this reason, I address both national dynamics and changes pertaining to popular associative movements in this section.

### Political Instability in the 1990s

Since Côte d'Ivoire's transition to multiparty elections in 1990, the process of so-called democratization has opened a Pandora's box of ethnic, religious and class conflicts. After 30 years of Félix Houphouët-Boigny's strong-armed leadership based on a carefully crafted ethnic balancing act, the 1990 election opened the road for politicians to compete for ethnic loyalties, power and authority, disturbing fragile alliances among the urban middle class. Political instability in the country was enhanced by the death of Houphouët-Boigny in 1993 (he had been president since independence in 1960); the conflict over his succession between Henri Konan Bédié (prominent member of the Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire or PDCI, Houphouët-Boigny's political party) and Alassane Dramane Ouattara (who was prime minister at the time); and, the ensuing debates regarding the definition of Ivorian citizenship. The conflict over Houphouët-Boigny's succession was framed as a question of national identity, leading to the exclusion of Ouattara as a presidential candidate on grounds of *Ivoirité*. The question of Ivoirité, evoked first by Bédié in 1995 (for a detailed discussion of Ivoirité, see the special issue of Politique Africaine edited by Losch (2000) entitled "Côte d'Ivoire, la tentation ethnonationaliste"), resulted in the political exclusion of groups of residents in Côte d'Ivoire, mainly originating from northern regions, and in waves of violence against foreigners—an estimated 30% of the population of Côte d'Ivoire is made up of immigrants, primarily from Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria and Niger. Despite the long-standing history of ethnic and religious diversity in the Ivorian territory, in the context of political instability in the 1990s, claims of autochtony have come to be central to national dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. A number of laws and political decisions have increasingly defined certain groups of individuals as citizens while systematically excluding others, namely the northern, not exclusively but often Islamized, population.

The waves of political violence that started in 1999 shattered the country's hopes of rapidly regaining its status as one of West Africa's economic powerhouses and regional beacon of stability. Between December 1999 and September 2002, Côte d'Ivoire underwent a number of coups d'état that increased its political instability, enhanced economic hardship and fed the growing segmentation of the population along ethnic and religious lines. Following the national elections and the takeover

of the presidency by Laurent Gbagbo, the October 2000 discovery of the bullet ridden bodies of 57 young Muslim men on the outskirts of Abidjan (known as the *Charnier de Yopougon* (mass grave of Yopougon)) became one of the icons of ethno-religious violence. In January 2001, an attempted coup against President Gbagbo's government once again set off a frenzy of attacks against foreigners when the president implicated foreign nationals from Burkina Faso in the failed coup. Following harassment, attacks and extortion both by vigilante groups and by members of the state security forces, tens of thousands of foreigners, mostly from Burkina Faso, fled Côte d'Ivoire. Since 2000, several mosques have been attacked and burned by mobs of *Jeunes Patriotes* (young men supporting the president Gbagbo's politics of exclusion in Abidjan), while others have been the object of police and *gendarme* round-up operations. Muslims were often targeted for detention and in some cases extra-judicially executed on account of their religion. For instance, the Aicha Niangon-Sud mosque in Yopougon was completely destroyed in October 2001. The police called in to protect the mosque arrested Muslims who had remained inside and then stood by while the mosque was ransacked and burned. A few churches also came under attack by opposition-supporting mobs, resulting in destruction and loss of property.

In order to understand the roots of the political crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, one must examine the effect of the ethnicization of politics against the background of economic decline. From 1960 to 1974, the economic performance of Côte d'Ivoire has been dubbed the "Ivorian miracle." Formerly a leading producer of coffee and cocoa, the collapse of the world price of the country's main export (cocoa) in 1980 signaled the beginning of the steady decline of the country's economy. The 1980s was marked by the decline of the national GDP, of deteriorating standards of living and externally imposed structural adjustment programs.

*Islamic Renewal in the 1990s*

It is in the context of political turmoil that dynamics of Islamic revivalism unfolded in the 1990s. On the one hand, national debates regarding Ivoirité and waves of violence against foreigners shifted the sociopolitical position of Muslims in Côte d'Ivoire. In light of the debate on Ivoirité in the second-half of the 1990s, Muslims felt progressively excluded from the sites of national decision-making (LeBlanc 2000b, 2005). In the 1990s, the political debate over Ivoirité crystallized already existing ethnic and religious tensions within the country between a so-called Christian South and a Muslim North. The geo-political distinction between the Christian south and the Muslim north was poignantly enhanced with the September 2002 failed coup d'état that brought about the factual division of the country into two separate entities: the territory south of the capital Yamoussoukro under the rule of President Laurent Gbagbo, and the territory north of Yamoussoukro under the control of Guillaume Soro and the *Forces Nouvelles* (also referred to as *les rebels*). In the context of this temporary schism, Northern rebels have been branded by the Ivoirian and foreign press as Muslim activists, and Laurent Gbagbo claimed, in December 2002, the mission of saving Christianity in Côte d'Ivoire.

On the other hand, the first multi-party elections in 1990 allowed for the de-centralization and the multiplication of Islamic associations, the opening up of the media, including Islamic media, and the public re-definition of Muslim identities. Before 1990, only associations sanctioned and controlled by the ruling party (PDCI) were legally allowed to exist. The opening up of associative structures allowed for the creation of a new national association that united the Muslim community (*Conseil National Islamique* or CNI). These changes allowed for the increased involvement of national associations in Islamic schooling and in the organization of the yearly pilgrimage (LeBlanc 1998), as well as the creation of new sites of Islamic training (Miran 2006).

A new Muslim leadership emerged in the context of the re-structuring of the Muslim community (LeBlanc 1998, 2000b, 2005; Miran 2006; Savadogo 2004). These Muslim social actors include both religious erudites (*ulemas*) trained in *medersa* schools in Côte d'Ivoire or abroad, and French-speaking intellectuals schooled in Western-style institutions in Côte d'Ivoire or abroad. The majority of these intellectuals are literate in the Arabic language and are financially independent from the state bureaucracy, in contrast to previous religious leaders (Savadogo 2004). Such a new leadership resulted both from the political situation in the 1990s and from long-term changes affecting Islamic schooling dating from the 1950s, moving away from mnemonic teaching (teaching based on memory) towards standardized schooling in medersa or Franco-Arabic schools[8] (see LeBlanc 1999 for a description of changes affecting Islamic schooling in Côte d'Ivoire). The emergence of this new leadership corresponds to a shift in styles of authority within the Muslim community: moving away from hereditary charisma—kin-based affiliation—towards a style of authority based on the display of formal knowledge in the Arabic language, implying new forms of orthodoxy and legitimacy (LeBlanc 2003b). As has been the case in a number of other West African Muslim communities, recent religious changes concern the adoption of Sunni Islam over the long-stand-

ing Sufi tradition (see, among others, Kane 1997 and Augis 2004 for a description of similar dynamics in Nigeria and Senegal). In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, this shift in authority is accompanied by the articulation of a new version of Islam that I refer to as an "Arabized version" due to its central appeal to literacy in the Arabic language, its material and symbolic links with Saudi Arabia, a strong critique of Western modernity and a rejection of ancestral forms of Islam as tainted with syncretism—meaning confusion between religion and culture (LeBlanc 1998, 1999, 2005).[9]

To sum up, in the 1990s, Muslims in Côte d'Ivoire have increasingly re-defined the boundaries of their identity, as well as the structure of their community. First, "being Muslim" took on a new political meaning in the context of political and armed conflicts over Ivorian citizenship, where Muslims felt increasingly excluded from the centres of state power. The birth of the *dawa* movement, a form of Muslim proselytism presented as a pacifist *jihad* by urban youth in the late 1990s, attests to this shift (Miran 2006). While compromise and negotiation have been the central positions of the new Islamic leadership in Abidjan, a return to Islamic practices and the assertion of religious rights as human rights have been emphasized by both community leaders and practitioners.

## Islamic Youth Associations

It is in the context of these structural transformations that neighbourhood Islamic youth associations multiplied in the early part of the 1990s. For instance, in the city of Bouaké in 1995, there were about 50 such associations. On a neighbourhood basis, Islamic associations have come to replace other forms of youth association in which young Muslim men and women used to participate, especially dance associations (LeBlanc 2006). Islamic youth associations counted between 50 and 200 members each (LeBlanc 1998). Their main activities were oriented towards proselytizing efforts and the management of religious practice.

Neighbourhood Islamic youth associations were a grassroots movement that included young teachers and students in medersa, young traders, as well as students and teachers in secular French-language schools. "Loss" and "decline" are prominent components of the discourse produced by young Muslims in light of which Islamic youth associations have two main objectives: fulfilling an educational role and uniting–proselytizing Muslim youth. Most associations provided literacy classes in the Arabic language dispensed by members who had been trained in medersa schools. The associations also provided the basis for the elaboration of new social networks for their young members, including elders affiliated with national Islamic associations such as the CNI. As nexus of sociality, these associations also encouraged and forged the embodied identity of young men and young women as Muslims. Coaching in clothing codes, discursive practices, body gestures and norms for social interactions was formally and informally dispensed by the religious leaders of these associations. For instance, interaction between male and female members was normalized on the basis of humility and gender segregation.

In the early part of the 1990s, these associations provided a social space where young Muslims advocated an Arabized version of Islam (LeBlanc 1999). This version of Islam provided young men and young women with some form of social legitimacy in the face of the surrounding gerontocratic relations of power through the display of "proper Muslim-ness" (LeBlanc 2003a, 2006). It also became the ground of the discursive re-appropriation of control over marriage processes. Marriage practices detrimental to young men and young women, namely practices that force them into unwanted marriage alliances or that prevented them from entering into desired marriage partnerships at a chosen time, were de-legitimized on the basis of syncretism and on appeal to the *umma* (the universal Islamic community). However, discursive claims of power on the basis of religious orthodoxy did not necessarily translate into actual power over one's life transition path for all young members. To some extent, as I will show in the next section, highly educated young Muslim women were most successful in gaining control over matrimonial practices.

## Muslim Women and Religion in the 1990s

While young men have been at the forefront of the Arabized version of Islam as religious leaders, young women are central to both its definition and its popularity. In the first place, young women made up the majority of the membership of neighbourhood Islamic associations. Young female members were divided into two groups according to type of schooling. While some young women were educated in secular French-language schools, most of the young female members attended medersa schools. Often parents send their daughters to medersa schools wishing for them to become proper Muslims, good wives and good mothers. One of my older female informants, Fatima, qualified this parental educational strategy as such

> With boys, you hope that they will get a good salaried job. This way, they will be able to provide for their wives

and children, and for their parents when we are old. Boys have these responsibilities and education is the best way to get good jobs. For girls, well, it depends. If you can afford to put all your children in school, well they will go as well. If you can't, then, what is important is to make sure that they are good wives and that they bring up good Muslim children. It is important that a girl honour her mother by showing that she has good values and that she is a good Muslim. The best is to send your girl to a medersa, at least until she marries. [Author's translation from Dioula, Bouaké, 1994]

Maïmouna's trajectory exemplifies such parental logic. In 1993 when I met her Maïmouna was 13 years old. She lived in Bouaké. She had several older brothers that attended secular French-language schools. As her younger sister did, she attended one of the local medersas in Bouaké. Maïmouna was particularly successful in her studies. She read and spoke Arabic fairly well, to the point of teaching the rudiments of Arabic to younger female students at her school. In 1994, she finished the equivalent of a high school degree at her medersa school. She was selected to apply for a grant to pursue her studies in Medina, Saudi Arabia. Maïmouna was also very active in one of the best-known and largest neighbourhood associations in Bouaké. She more or less acted as the female religious leader of the association, which allowed her to deliver public sermons to women. Between 1993 and 1995 when I worked closely with Maïmouna, she was mainly motivated by pursuing her studies. At the time in Bouaké, one of the medersa schools employed a female teacher; she was a role model for Maïmouna. However, as is the case for a significant number of female students, both in medersa and in secular schools, her studies were interrupted in order for her to move to the Republic of Central Africa were her future husband lived. Her father married her to his paternal cousin as a third wife. Maïmouna's brothers tried to "buy out" their sister by offering to pay back the bridal price to their father but he refused on the grounds that he would be humiliated.

Young women like Maïmouna make up most of the membership of Islamic youth associations. However, the second group of women schooled in secular French language schools tends to be more active as Arabized Muslims. In fact, French-speaking, highly educated women often instigated the creation of neighbourhood Islamic associations. They may not have formed the associations but they encouraged their brothers to do so. They are usually much more active in them than the first group of women, especially in the Arabic language classes. While the first group of women attends regular weekly meetings and special events, secularly educated women tend

to assume leadership positions in the female sections of the neighbourhood associations. These women are older, aged 25 to 35, as yet unmarried and very highly educated. Minimally, they have a high school diploma, but in the majority of cases, they also have a university degree. Most of them are financially independent but the majority still live with their parents if they reside in the same city. This second group of women is more significant in Abidjan, especially in neighbourhoods like Cocody and Riviera that house the national socioeconomic elite. As the economic capital, Abidjan is home to the majority of multinational and national industries and businesses, as well as governmental and international agencies where French-speaking, university-educated Ivorians tend to be employed in white collar jobs. Moreover, while a branch of the national university was opened in Bouaké in 1993, most university students study at the Abidjan campus.

Besides their activism, women are also central to Islamic revivalism because most behaviours that are targeted for change specifically concern women. In the Arabized version of Islam, women remain at the centre of the religious practice as mothers, educators and exemplars of faith. The remedy for deviations from Islamic ways of life relies on women in their roles as educators. Women as educators must inculcate their children with the principles of Islam and sanctioned cultural values in the domestic sphere. Kady, a 30-year-old secretary, detailed the role of women as upholders of the Islamic faith through their educational vocation in the household, as follows:

Let me start with a proverb: "When women resist at home, children become abandoned and badly brought up." The woman is at the basis of the education of her child. A woman may work outside the home, but it is better that she educates the children. Her husband is at work all day, so he cannot be responsible for bringing up the children. To start with, the child must learn what prayer is in Islam. Any Islamic education must start with this. A child must grow up in a context where the five daily prayers are respected for him to become a good Muslim. If a child is so brought up, he will then do the other things that are expected of a child, like respecting elders. The mother must show her children how to respect people. From a young age, children must learn what is permitted and what is forbidden in Islam. In Islam, it is at the age of seven that a child must begin to pray. But if the child, from babyhood, has seen his mother pray, act as a Muslim and respect his father, he will grow up as a good Muslim...It is not sufficient to tell your child to go pray. The child will go, but he will not know. He needs to be shown, to be taught. Even children who attend French schools can learn the

Qur'an. Their mothers must show them or make sure that they are taught. Children today are spoiled. They have not learned anything because their mothers have not allowed them to be punished when they were wrong...Besides learning the religion, a mother must show the following things to her children. When the child gets home, he must greet his father, his mother, and his older siblings. Then, the child must learn to listen to what his parents tell him to do...This is how a good child learns to be a good Muslim. And with this example, she will be a good wife and she will respect her husband. Of course, if you do not respect your husband, she will not be able to learn the right thing. If a man beats his wife and kills her, if she respected him and did not fight back, even if she had not done anything wrong, she will go to paradise. This is what your daughter has to learn. [Author's translation from Dioula, Bouaké, 1995]

As a consequence, deviations from the norms of Islam are seen as the result of women's behaviours as bad exemplars of faith, as dismal educators and as reluctant wives. Moreover, women are perceived both by men and women as morally and religiously weaker than men. According to female informants, the source of this weakness resides in their lack of formal training in Islam whereas men tend to extrapolate women's "religious weakness" to the realm of social and personality traits. In discourses produced by men, women are described as economically irrational and "too demanding," as well as having a tendency to "look for fights," and to resist men's points of view and attitudes.[10] Drinking Moroccan tea in the afternoon with the young male teachers at the medersa school where I taught English, or "hanging around" with male university students at the Bouaké and the Abidjan campus, the privileged topics of discussion were always the unreasonable behaviour and the requests of young women. One day at the Bouaké university campus, a 25-year-old male student summarized some of these views with:

You know, it is very hard to be a young man these days. Even if you are good looking, fun to be with, it does not mean that you will attract women. Ah! They may be interested at first. But they will not hang for a long time. No, no. If you do not buy them a shawarma [Lebanese-style sandwiches], if you do not take them to popular nightclubs, to the recent movie, if you do not buy them gifts, you will not get their favour. They will always look for a "better partner." And, you never know where they have been, where they come from. [Author's translation from French, Bouaké, 1998]

Cupidity, consumerism and uncertain sexual practices were cited the most often as characteristics of young women, especially *lycée* (high school) and university students. As a consequence, despite their role as educators, women remain in a position of "needing to be taught" the precepts of Islam and to be in a social environment where their behaviour is monitored by men. The ambiguous position of women in Islam is part of an enduring Islamic paradox: while the umma cannot be constructed without women and while Islam, as an idealized form, may not encourage the intervention of women in the public sphere, women remain at the centre of a large number of Islamic debates as mothers and as producers of meaning (Reveyrand-Coulon 1993).

Formal religious training in the Arabic language has come to be regarded as the main guarantee in the reproduction of "good Muslims" among young Ivorian Arabizing Muslims. During an interview, Maïmouna commented on the centrality of formal training for Muslims, and Muslim women in particular:

Not everybody has the same level of education. For this reason, it is important to instruct people and to share our knowledge. If we did not study to know what Islam asked and what Islam proscribes, Muslims would permanently be fighting and be in the wrong because some would say that such and such is good and some would say that it is not. Nobody would be able to judge. For instance, some people say that skin whitening cream is explicitly forbidden in the Qur'an. How can that be? Did this cream exist when the Prophet, may he have benedictions upon him, was alive? Certainly not! But, there are other things in the Qur'an that explain why using such creams is not good and should be proscribed. But if you cannot read the Qur'an, how are you going to know about these things? You will not. And you will perpetuate false ideas about Islam. You will show your children wrong behaviours, or right behaviours but for the wrong reason. It is important that all Muslims be educated in the Qur'an, men and women. If you tell other Muslims, other young women in the neighbourhood for instance, that what they do is against the Qur'an, like wearing hair extensions, they tell you to leave them alone. But if they are encouraged to learn, to read, and to understand the Qur'an, they will know what is wrong from what is right. [Author's translation from Dioula, Bouaké, 1995]

Here, formal training is construed as the cornerstone of the conformity of women to Islam, leading to the religious and social advancement of Islam. Clearly, in the context of Côte d'Ivoire in the 1990s, formal education has been integrated into the "proper" practice of Islam, especially for women. This implies that, on the one hand, medersa–style schooling is encouraged for women. In the case

of women coming from secular, French-language Western-style schools, formal training was encouraged in the context of literacy classes in the Arabic language and attendance to public sermons and Islamic debates.

Besides formal religious training, a further condition is necessary for the maintenance of proper Muslim-ness by women according to the proponents, male and female, of an Arabized Islam, namely an attitude of humility. Such an attitude is composed of moral purity (djenebaya), physical and social modesty, religious humbleness, deference to men and elders (boyin, to respect and to put above oneself), motherhood (denbaya) and the role of domestic educator (lamon). While such a version of humility is based in long-standing cultural practices among a large number of West African Muslims, it is increasingly defined in relation to mass media symbols of American popular culture and consumerism, as well as in relation to Middle Eastern, mostly Saudi, culturally-specific embodied practices. The Hollywood version of sexualized and artificially altered female bodies is rejected, at the same time as Saudi fashion is favoured by young women. Physical reserve for women is expressed through a specific dress code, which includes: full-length dress (jelebas, full-length boubous, or simple complet trois pagnes (typical African dress)), covering shoulders and legs; a head scarf which covers the hair (the hair must be braided, without extensions); and a prayer shawl or the hijab, worn at all times outside of the household or when visitors are present (LeBlanc 2000a). In the context of a focus group with women that I held in Bouaké in 1994, a 20-year-old woman offered the following description of the proper dress code for a Muslim woman and explains why such a style of dress guarantees the propriety of women:

> Women must always wear a prayer shawl covering their head. Women must hide their whole body except for their face and their hands. When a woman wears the praying shawl, men are…shy to talk to her. If one dresses as one should, even when one is on the road, outside, if a man sees you, he will let you go by, because he will not want to approach you. People may laugh at us, telling us that we dress like old ladies. But it is better. You have more respect this way. If you hear that a young woman got raped, go and see who she is… Women who do not respect themselves do not get respected…There is a Hadith of the Prophet, may he have benedictions upon him, which says that the one who knows no shame can do as he wants. But this person will have to pay for her decision. [Author's translation from Dioula, Bouaké 1994).

Thus, physical modesty is perceived as the embodiment of religious piety and purity. The public display of modesty and religiosity extends beyond dress codes into gestures, language, modes of social interaction. For instance, in the 1990s, among young Muslims, greetings in the Arabic language and head postures leaning down signal one's religious affiliation. At the same time, the repetition of worship gestures, such as the daily prayers and ablutions, jolt the kinesthetic memory and the emotional sensitivity of practitioners and contribute to the embodied experience of faith (see Norris 2003 for a similar analysis of religious transformation and embodied culture). In 2000, Aïcha, a 33-year-old women described the articulation between worship gestures, imaniya and embodied faith in the following terms:

> You know the Christians, they describe having some form of revelation. Imanyia is not like that. First, you certainly change your life, you turn it around. You often also start going around with different people. You see yourself differently. But it is not sudden. It is not like a bolt of lighting. You are Muslim. You know, at least, the basics in your religion. But at some point you start practicing. You do your prayers. You do the ablutions. You also sometimes spend your night praying. There are so many prayers that you can do. You do them. You focus on them. You get yourself lost in them. And, you start feeling differently. You see the world differently. It is as if your body no longer has the same rhythm…As you experience your body differently, you also start respecting it. You move differently in your everyday tasks…It takes time and dedication. And, suddenly, you realize that you address people differently, that you act differently with people. You look at yourself and you are not the same person. Of course, you dress and move differently, but your heart is also different and that shows externally. [Author's translation from French, Abidjan, 2000]

## Matrimony and Religion

The above-mentioned descriptions of feminine humility must be read in the context of the dramatic changes in female life courses that have taken place since independence (1960), leading in some cases to delayed marriage and motherhood. As indicated in the discussion on life transitions, these changes are mostly tied to access to formal schooling and to salaried employment in the postcolonial era.

In Côte d'Ivoire, French-speaking, Western-style educated, salaried and unmarried Muslim women are confronted with a specific predicament. While their way of life inscribes them within a locally defined space of moder-

nity and self-realization, they are not fully actualized as Muslim women due to their exclusion from marriage markets and, by extension, legitimate motherhood. Their relatively new social roles, defined by Western-style schooling and salaried employment, exclude them from locally sanctioned notions of proper womanhood. Their conditions as not-yet-married and childless challenge locally defined standards of normalcy for the female life trajectory. Especially among Muslims, by the time a woman reaches her mid-twenties, she is expected to be married and to have at least one or two children.

The impact of increased levels of formal schooling on African women's life trajectories is not specific to postcolonial Côte d'Ivoire. In countries such as Senegal or Benin, where Western-style schooling has a long history due to French colonial policies, highly educated women have faced this predicament for a few decades. Nonetheless, in most African societies, the social position of single, motherless intellectual women remains problematic to the point of evoking possibilities of sterility, where the issue of witchcraft looms in the background (see Dolisane-Ebosse 2003). In fact, by the time that a woman reaches her thirties, it is better for her to have a child out of wedlock than to remain without a child; she would have more chances of getting married as a single mother. While a number of strategies regarding late entrance into matrimonial markets by African women, such as becoming the third or fourth wife of a wealthy man or "buying" a younger husband due their financial independence, are well known, the role of religion has remained relatively unexplored.[11]

In Côte d'Ivoire, in the 1990s, entry into the matrimonial market by young Muslim women frequently took place as follows. Except in cases of *balmafuru*[12] (arranged, family marriage in Dioula), contracted at an early age or even before the birth of the bride, for young women that start thinking about matrimony and motherhood (in their early teens), the possibility of "being seen" by potential husbands or in-laws is essential. After a young man has focussed his choice on a potential wife, he approaches the father of the young woman about the possibility of contracting a marriage—this is also often done through intermediaries, such as uncles. Nowadays, young men and young women frequently have contact and decide to get married before they discuss their plans for marriage with their parents. Usually, the young woman has "caught the young man's eye": he will have noticed the potential young bride without her knowing and he will "test her" from afar before approaching her or her parents; he will try to judge her character and behaviour. He will look for the following: that she respects her elders, especially men;

that she is humble in dress and behaviour; that she practices her religion as a good Muslim; and that she has learned to perform domestic chores. In local parlance, a potential wife "should not see in front of her husband"—she should not be more educated, more knowledgeable or more street-wise than her husband. This expression more or less implies that highly schooled and financially independent women are likely to openly confront and resist their elders and their husbands. Mamadou, a young trader at the Bouaké market, explained that he would not

> marry an educated woman. It is too complicated. They always discuss what you say, what you decide. And, if you happen to have more than one wife, then it is a mess. They are never contented. If the educated wife works, the other ones are jealous. If she does not work, she is frustrated. Better a good Muslim wife. [Author's translation from Dioula, Bouaké, 1998]

One's chances of being "spotted" as a potential bride can depend on the presence of older brothers who are likely to introduce their sisters to friends or acquaintances, or on the opportunity of being seen in public. However, the attribute of humility, described in the previous section, is based to some degree on purdha, such that a girl's presence in public spaces may put into doubt her propriety. It is in this context that religion has come to play a significant role for young women, especially intellectual women. The activities of neighbourhood Islamic associations create a public space where piety, humility and faith can be displayed. As such, for young Muslim women, religious transformation and the adoption of an Arabized version of Islam cannot be seen as separate from matrimonial strategies. Participation in public religious activities allows a woman to penetrate new matrimonial markets, to acquire an increased social visibility while maintaining her legitimacy as a potential wife. Religious practice allows her to be publicly seen in a morally healthy environment, hoping to be seen by a potential "good Muslim husband." In the context of a religious sermon, a young Muslim woman explained the context of her experience of imaniya to other participants: "I understood that if I did not follow the ways of Islam, I would never find a proper Muslim husband and I would never be a good Muslim" (author's translation from French, Bouaké, 1995).

Moreover, participation in Islamic youth associations certainly increases the permitted social visibility of young women. Parents and potential husbands can hardly criticize a young woman for attending the activities of Islamic youth associations because such activities promote Islamic behaviours. For so-called intellectual women, who are not very likely to be potential wives to the extent that they are

perceived as "seeing in front of men," participation in Islamic youth associations may elevate access to marriage possibilities which would be otherwise unavailable. This is the case insofar as a Muslim man may be willing to consider a "wife who sees beyond him" if she is a good Muslim. Considering the fact that most members, both male and female, of neighbourhood-based Islamic youth associations are French-speaking and educated in the national secular system, these associations become spaces where highly educated women can meet men with similar levels of training within the framework of propriety. While young men expect that female members will be good Muslim wives, despite their level of schooling, young women also expect that male members will be respectful husbands that will be faithful to them and committed to their nuclear family.

As such, Islam, for Western-style professional women, seems to confer legitimacy in a context where their lifestyle contrasts with locally-sanctioned female social roles as mothers and wives. As the case of Hawa demonstrates, imaniya translates into actual marriages. Of the 25 women interviewed, all the highly educated women married within five years of their religious transformation; some subsequently divorced but they became mothers and retain some form of legitimacy. While Hawa's trajectory is idiosyncratic, it includes a number of experiences that were shared by most of the women interviewed, such as schooling history, experiences abroad within Africa or in Europe, consumption habits, associative practices (both in Islamic and non-Islamic associations), multiple boyfriends and a number of emotional disappointments, anxiety regarding marriage and motherhood, religious experience, including its embodiment, marital success and career re-orientation within Islamic NGOs or charity organizations.

In 1995, Hawa was 37 years old. She was born and grew up in Bouaké. She left Bouaké for the first time when she went to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, to complete her baccalauréat (high school diploma) when she was 18 years old. From Ouagadougou, she attended university in Abidjan. She pursued graduate studies in Paris, obtaining a PhD in biology and doing a one-year course in business. Her studies were financed by the Ivorian government and her father. After her PhD, she came back to Bouaké for a few months, until she found employment in Abidjan as a university lecturer. Due to poor working and research conditions, Hawa worked only two years at the university. She later found a job with a multinational company in Abidjan, where she was director of scientific research and development. In her everyday life, for a while, she adopted the lifestyle of what she called "an international business woman": She lived alone in a rented apartment in the center of Abidjan; she had a car; she had a servant; she closely followed French fashion through magazines and frequent visits to Paris; she took vacations in Europe or in North Africa; she was a member of an influential Rotary Club; she did charity work through this club; and, she financially supported her mother and some of her siblings.

Despite the fact that she was in her late thirties in 1995, Hawa was not yet married and she did not have children. She had had a few serious boyfriends; the latest was European. In 1992, she asked her mother to find her a respectable and acceptable husband. For her, a respectable and acceptable husband is a man who has been educated Western-style, who is a Muslim, who is financially successful, who is not already married and who is willing to marry a woman with her socio-professional status. Hawa is against the idea of balmafuru, but she considered that, in her case, it was a good way of meeting a potential husband. Such an arrangement guarantees that the man will be under social and family pressure to behave in a proper manner. Her parents arranged for her to marry the son of one of her father's cousins. This man was a lawyer in France. Hawa agreed to marry him, but under the condition that he come to Abidjan and that they spend a few months getting to know each other. The two families celebrated the wolotlan (Dioula for engagement with an exchange of kola nuts). However, months passed and her fiancé never came to Abidjan, so Hawa broke the engagement. This failed attempt at marriage discouraged Hawa.

When I returned to Côte d'Ivoire in 1998, I found a transformed woman. She had experienced imaniya and she had already done the hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca) once. She has done it twice more since and has sent her mother to the hajj.[13] Islam was not new in Hawa's life; she always identified as a Muslim and she respected her prayers and the month of fasting for Ramadan. When I saw her in Abidjan in 1998, she greeted me with Alekoum Salam, rather than bonjour. When I spent time with Hawa in Abidjan, I discovered that she had transformed her household "to make it more Muslim," as she said. All the walls were bare, except for large posters depicting Mecca and smaller ones containing Islamic writings. She had brought back furniture from her trip to Mecca, such as a large wall piece made of gold colored metal and glass in which she displayed her latest electronic acquisitions (TV and video cassette player, sound system) along with an encyclopedia of influential African women and a number of Islamic texts in the Arabic language. She had put prayer mats and large cushions on the floor. She had also changed her dress. At home, she only wore jelebas. When working,

she wore Western-style clothing but, following rules of modesty, she wore a turban at all times and a hijab at times.[14] She wore long-sleeved shirts or dresses, flowing pants with long tunics, or loose dresses. She no longer wore complets trois pagnes, nor the typical local garb worn by Muslims (boubou). More significantly, she had changed a number of elements in her everyday life. She was learning the Arabic language and she attended Qur'anic classes for Muslim professional women. She was also president of the mosque association of her neighbourhood and belonged to *Association des Femmes Musulmanes de Côte d'Ivoire*, as well as the *Communauté musulmane de la Riviera* (CMR)[15]—both associations are made up of the socio-economic elite of the country and the CMR was one of the sites of the re-structuring of the Ivorian Islamic community in the 1990s. After 1997, Hawa's social network had changed notably: she only socialized within Islamic associations; she left the Rotary Club; and, she no longer went out of her villa, except for work and to attend Islamic activities and functions. When I saw Hawa again in 2000, she had recently married. She married an engineer in his late forties who was divorced with two adult sons. In 2000, she had left her salaried job and, with her severance pay, and was looking into setting up an Islamic NGO concerned with health and literacy for children. Eventually, through her participation in the CMR, she became involved with American-based Islamic NGOs and, in 2003 and 2004, travelled to Washington, DC for seminars. In 2004, she gave birth to a son.

At first glance, for Hawa and other young Muslim women with very similar experiences and trajectories, the adoption of a worldview and way of life associated with an Arabized Islam may seem like the endorsement of hierarchical gender roles in which female social functions are confined to the household by the authority of men and elders. Such a Eurocentric perspective would suggest that women are passive receptacles of historical contingencies forcing them out of their agency. On the contrary, as Hawa's participation in Islamic NGOs and associations demonstrate, Arabizing women operate in a tight balance between purdha and the public domain. The public display of religious humility and social modesty sanctions the maintenance of social roles in the public domain established before they experienced imaniya, while redefining the terms of this involvement. Marriage and motherhood absorbs them into the household, while associative participation engages them in a number of social and economic activities.

The story of Assita highlights the accommodation highly educated women make when they experience imaniya and subsequently marry. Assita's trajectory is very similar to Hawa's. She trained as a public relations specialist with experience in radio. She studied in Abidjan and Morocco. She lived alone in Abidjan where she bought a villa in one of the newly developed middle-class neighbourhoods. She worked for a number of international corporations based in France, Switzerland and Germany. She frequently travelled to France for business in the early 1990s. In 1996, Assita was introduced to members of an Islamic neighbourhood association in *Riviera III*. She was particularly impressed by one of the members who was a journalist. He had also recently joined the association. She explained that their faith grew together as they joined the association's activities and regular prayers. They married in 1997. Assita had a grown up son born when she was 16 years old. He had been brought up by her mother and lived abroad in Britain where he studied. Abdraman, her husband, also had two children from a previous marriage. Assita moved out of her villa and went to live with Abdraman, his two children, his mother, one of his younger sisters and two nephews. At the beginning of their marriage, Assita continued to work as a public relation's manager while she got progressively involved in an Islamic NGO that raised funds for psychiatric patients and clinics. She gave birth to a second son and stopped working for a year. When she decided to go back to work her husband objected—with the added pressure of his mother—that Assita now had seven children to take care of—her two sons, her husband's two children, her husband's young sister and his two nephews. They reached a compromise and she volunteered as a public relations manager for the Islamic NGO three days a week. However, tension kept mounting in the household and Assita eventually left her husband. She went back to her old job and remained involved in a number of Islamic associations and activities. Her parents feel that she was justified to divorce. Her mother told me in 2000 that:

> he [her daughter's husband] knew exactly what he was getting into when he married her. He is an educated man. He should understand that he married an educated woman. She is a good Muslim. She respects her parents. She speaks as a Muslim. She has also learned to read the Qu'ran in Arabic. [Author's translation from Dioula, Bouaké, 2000]

Despite their different outcomes, the stories of Hawa and Assita show how through their religious experience, notions of humility and social modesty were re-defined outside of the limiting scope of male authority and strict purdha. Hawa re-oriented her career in an Islamic framework. Assita, for her part, rejected family obligations that traditionally defined "proper female Muslimhood" for the

benefit of her own personal achievements with the support of her family and social network.

## Conclusion: Faith and Intentionality

In this article, I have described the role of young women in the recent Ivorian Islamic revivalism. As in the case of their contemporaries, these women claim an Arabized Islam which, to a large extent, reproduces familiar elements of their lifestyle, namely, literacy and organizational structures borrowed from the postcolonial model of the state. Due to the specificity of their life experiences, these women are at the juncture of opposing ideologies: modernity, local cultural traditions and Islam (LeBlanc 2000a). Their predicament in regards to local matrimonial practices highlights the tension between these ideologies; their Westernized lifestyle runs counter to local notions of proper womanhood and Muslimhood. The display of "public signs of piety," to borrow Benjamin F. Soares' (2004b) terminology, through physical modesty and djenebaya as public markers of faith, legitimizes their social and family position, while allowing them to redefine certain social practices upheld by their elders. When raising the issue of religiosity and matrimony, as I have done so far, one cannot ignore the question of intentionality, or the purposes of thinking, believing or feeling the mediation of objective situations by practical activities and strategic imagination (see Jackson 1996). As such, intentionality is relevant both in terms of instrumentalization and agency. In light of the matrimonial strategies described here, imaniya can be seen as the instrumentalization of religious identities. However, while matrimonial strategies cannot be conceived of separately from imaniya, it does not mean that the experience of faith is not meaningful.

Without going back to the old debate in the study of religion regarding the intellectualist conception of religious beliefs as disembodied and abstract experience—a debate to which anthropology has already made tremendous contributions (see the works of Victor Turner and Mary Douglas, among others)—it is clear that to understand the experience of imaniya, both as a sociological and as a psychological phenomenon, one needs to move beyond a dichotomous conception of faith and instrumentalization, and to recognize the embodied nature of religious belief (see Werbner and Basu 1998 for a similar argument). The focus on physical modesty shows the extent to which religious beliefs are embodied. The experience of imaniya suggests a re-ordering of the self that is ultimately grounded in practice, forms of practice that reach beyond the realm of the sacred into the profane, including entry into matrimony and motherhood. Return to one's faith suggests both a bodily experience that Aïcha

ties to kinesthetic memory and emotional sensitivity, and a rationalizing process through which young women come to consciously tie together matrimony and religiosity. In an eschatological sense, faith comes to be known as the accomplishment of one's purpose or life projects.

This last comment reinstates the issue of social change raised at the beginning of this article. While it is expected that spiritual growth comes about with progression through the life course among Muslim believers, the return to one's faith experienced by Western-style educated women in Côte d'Ivoire corresponds to a number of ruptures. Most significant, it implies a shift in the control over timing of marriage and motherhood away from elders into the hands of young women. It must be noted that this shift also takes place in a context where traditional forms of authority based on hereditary charisma are significantly shaken up by the more generalized adoption of an Arabized Islam by young Ivorian Muslims and by the restructuring and so-called modernization of the Muslim community in the 1990s.

While marriage and motherhood remain central to the transition path towards adulthood, highly educated women face the challenge to remain "marry-able" in a context where schooling and economic independence have pushed them out of the traditional marriage market. As a matter of fact, unmarried, economically independent women do not exist in the terminology of age categories presented in this article; they are neither sungoruni (unmarried pubescent female, 12-18), nor balimamusso (adult woman, as a family member, 30-50). The transformation of their religious identity allows them to re-legitimize their status as potential "proper wives." Clearly, this shift operates mainly among elite women, and largely to the exclusion of other women. The difference in Maïmona and Hawa's life trajectories exemplifies this distinction. Hawa relied on her schooling and economic employability to evade any form of imposed marriage. While she was anxious about marrying, she was not willing to accept any husband. She managed to operate an intricate articulation between economic independence, marriage and motherhood through her renewed religiosity. Maïmona did not enjoy Hawa's relative freedom to pursue her schooling.

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## Notes

1  These women are also referred to by the local population as "intellectuals."

2  For a description of these changes, see Miran 2006; and LeBlanc 1998, 1999, 2003.

3  The notions of humility and modesty correspond to a number of expressions in Dioula. However, in most cases, humility and modesty are designated through negation; it is described through what people are not when they are humble or modest. For instance, *moro me yada ni lo* ("people who are pretentious"), *moro me kafa ni lo* ("people who are self-centred").

4  The concept of remorse here is used in reference to having suppressed or neglected one's true identity. It does not correspond to the experience of repentance and guilt among Christians. This is mainly due to the fact that despite one's possible neglect of the observance of the pillars of Islam for any period of time, one can return to observance and be considered a good Muslim without reflecting back on the past.

5  These 50 cases were selected out of a sample of 200 informants in the context of ethnographic fieldwork that lasted 22 months between 1992 and 1995. They are longitudinal cases to the extent that they were revisited in 1998 and 2000. In five cases, Internet allowed me to pursue individual trajectories up to the present.

6  Recently, authors such as Mamadou Diouf (2003) and John and Jean Comaroff (1999) have written extensively on how, in the face of economic and political uncertainty, young men and young women are "inventing" ways out of youthful powerlessness.

7  *Grin* are informal, neighborhood-based male associations, mainly found in Mali.

8  These Franco-Arabic schools are distinct from the Franco-Arabic schools created by the French colonial administrations in Mali and elsewhere in West Africa. They resulted from postcolonial local initiatives.

9  It must be noted that the Arabized version of Islam appeals to a reformist rhetoric that is similar to the one used in the 1940s and 1950s by a network of students and merchants that had contacts with the Middle East, especially the Islamic university in Cairo, referred to by French colonial administrators as the "Wahhabiyya" movement (see Kaba 1974). While the appeal to a reformist rhetoric (in terms of return to the written sources) is similar, the historical context in Côte d'Ivoire is drastically different. In the 1950s, Côte d'Ivoire was at the brink of de-colonization and emerging local political leaders were committed to the notion of the nation-state and its privileged model of modernization. Whereas in the 1990s, young Muslims are facing the breakdown of the nation-state and the bankruptcy of the paradigm of modernization (see LeBlanc 1998).

10  This description of gender perception can be extended beyond the Muslim collectivity to the local society in general. Isabelle Bardem (N.d.) has observed the same types of gendered perception between young men and women in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

11  Most studies that examine the issue of women and religion in Africa adopt a therapeutic perspective (see Boddy 1989 and Tshikeru 2003 for instance). They look at how religious rituals shape local notions of femininity. A few studies have examined the role of women in contemporary African Islam (see for instance Constantin 1998 on women and brother-hoods in East Africa and Reyverand-Coulon 1993 for the case in Northern Nigeria).

12  It is must be noted here that among Muslims in Côte d'Ivoire, balmafuru is still frequently practised. It should also be noted that with increased interregional and international migration, notions of the family are often extended to ethnic categories, so that balmafuru can at times refer to ethnic endogamy rather than kin-based marriages (LeBlanc 1998).

13  It is commonly believed among Muslims that sending one's parent, or someone that has taken care of you, to the hajj brings blessings upon oneself due to the fact that one helps another to accomplish one of the five pillars of Islam.

14  Contrary to practice in some Middle Eastern and North African countries, in Côte d'Ivoire, before the 1990s, Muslim women rarely wore Western-style clothes with a head scarf.

15  Riviera is a bourgeois neighbourhood in Abidjan, close to the university.

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