

Communication Challenged and Political Ideologies in Africa : A Case Study of Ivory Coast

Edmond DOUA, Ph.D. is currently Senior Lecturer and Head of the Department of Information and Communication Sciences at the Faculty of Information, Communication and Arts (Félix Houphouët-Boigny University of Ivory Coast). Expert in Media Communications, Corporate Management, and Marketing, his research fields cover the following areas: Mediation, Arts and Culture, Cultural Industries Marketing, Lobbying and Advocacy Communication, Communication and Media, Institutional Communication and Globalization.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines communication and political ideologies in Africa. With a particular focus on the case of Ivory Coast, the author shows how democracies were put to severe tests on the continent through political doctrines with often clouded and unclear prospects. In Ivory Coast, for example, given the difficulties in designing and implementing inclusive and sustainable development projects, successive political leaders initiated language elements based on demagoguery. The ultimate goal was to promote their ideological concepts, which are at odds with the realities on the ground. In this context, concepts such as *Ivoirité*, *la Refondation* and *l'Ivoirien nouveau*, became subjects of much controversy and rejection by the Ivorien society. The reason is that despite the large media propaganda of the admirers of these slogans, the expected results in terms of promoting social, cultural, economic and political, could not be reached. Instead, these ideologies have rather contributed to divide the people along ethnic and religious lines.

INTRODUCTION

Viewed with anthropological lens, communication is seen as stage for the powerful used to legitimize authority. The public approach posits that this interdisciplinary science is associated with the idea of propaganda, which controls the social representations and mobilizes the governed people. In addition, by tapping into the mass media, communication provides the most favorable way to promote the actions of rulers. It thus becomes a political communication, whose interest is to build this place of expression and confrontation of the constitutive and contradictory legitimacies of mass democracy (Wolton 2016). However, political communication is only possible if citizens identify, in one way or another, speeches meant for them. For it to be fully achieved, political communication must indeed rest on the dialogic model, bringing together and integrating individuals, public space and the media. These stakeholders must be in an egalitarian interaction in order to achieve together the set common goals (Dacheux, 2016). Thus, to be effective and accepted, a good leader should speak right. In other words, a good political theory should seek a balance between philosophy, which is perceived as ideological or doctrinal convictions, and sociology, which represents empirical acts. Otherwise the rest is a set of mere demagoguery and empty speeches (Schemeil, 2015). In fact, a first series of questions that communication sciences had to deal with lies in the relationships between the technique used to communicate, convince and the truth between seduction and argumentation. In this nebula, how can we locate the communication challenges in the face of the political ideologies meant to establish democracy in the world? What do these concepts actually bring to African societies, which are still unable to assimilate and integrate the very concept of democracy in their political practices? To answer these questions, the paper leans on the experience of Ivory Coast, to discuss the contribution of the ideologies to political thought in Africa. It reviews the functioning of these concepts and their possible pitfalls in their design and implementation. The assumption here is that, far from being catalysts for the "good practice" of democracy, ideologies remain, *conversely*, sources of internal division on the continent. In terms of methodology, this paper draws on a rich and varied literature on political science and communication, to develop and place, at first, the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study. It then empirically examines the foundation of political ideologies in Ivory Coast. In this context, it questions political action and identifies the factors of the big "misunderstanding" and the lack of interest of social players in the "political matter." Finally, it shows how, with this situation, political communication experiences, in practice, obvious problems in Africa and the world.

COMMUNICATION, POLITICS AND IDEOLOGY: CONCEPT NOTE AND THEORY

About communication

Communication cuts across all human activities. Gradually, in the twentieth century, it has become an academic discipline dedicated to observe, analyze, build, through research, knowledge about it and train for communication-based jobs. Communication has always been there but has become a discipline only recently. So, communication sciences use the acquired knowledge from many other disciplines. Some, like rhetoric, exist since ancient times. Etymologically, rhetoric is the art of arguing, the art of public speaking (Carrilho, 2012). Others, like media sociology or information theory, appeared in the twentieth century. Communication sciences are thus an interdisciplinary field that puts together concepts, knowledge and methods from other disciplines. They combine them to build their close approaches. Researchers, refusing to build a general theory of communication, have been developing for the last forty years, knowledge that help address the most pressing questions of companies (Ollivier, 2007). This is notably the case of communication and political ideologies.

Questioning politics

The adjective "political" from the Greek word "*polis*" meaning "city" refers to the "things of the city", "*your politica*", which according to Aristotle refers to "everything about the *polis*," which represents the natural body in which man can spend a happy life, made of very different activities, in no way limited to the exercise of power. Politics is a "field, according to how the French sociologist Bourdieu defines it. It is basically a stage where individuals and groups compete to be in power. Concretely, this reflects, essentially, competition between political parties and figures to be in charge of the State, local governments or international organizations (Baldwin, 1998). Politics can also have a different meaning in expressions such as "government policy", "health policy", "public policy", etc. It then identifies a consistent set of intentions and decisions, due to rulers acting within their institutional responsibilities. Finally, politics can be considered in another context, as the art of governing humans living in society, as frequently used in Philosophy (Braud, 2014).

Ideology in politics

Ideology can be seen as a science of ideas. It was developed in France in the late eighteenth century to describe a new science in the field of psychology. This concept helps to understand and describe the origin of ideas, that is to say, how thoughts or representations are born and bloom in the human mind (Valdée 1973). In political science, understanding the meaning of the concept of ideology is recognizing that ideology is a socio-practical function. Indeed, the work of ideologues led to note the dependence of ideas on the conditions of material and social existence. Therefore, from the fact that a thought or an idea is socially and historically determined, it appears that ideas are predefined by a particular social system and the analysis of reality is based on them. From this point of view, ideology can be identified with a power system or a social institution, taking into account all areas of the society : culture, society, religion, economics and politics. Such a holistic sense of ideology helps to understand that the latter is constitutive of social existence (Parenteau et al, 2008).

Moreover, ideology, unlike scientific knowledge, whose proposals are trying to make the world understandable, finding causes for observed phenomena, is presented as a system of ideas on what the world should be to be livable. This is for example the case of normative and subjective beliefs. Thus, as ideology is intended to be released, the ideologue is still proselyte. He will always seek to convince others, to rally them behind his political discourse, using the moral force of the values in which he believes. Finally, "*ideology is a set of disparate perceptions on edifying episodes of the past which we are proud of, whose heroes are role models and that we celebrate at every occasion*" (Schemeil, 2015). Finally, this concept is a language which gives a direction to life and politics.

Political ideology and democracy : conflicting interests

Political ideology is a "Weltanschauung". In other words, political ideology is a global vision of the world, which has both an account of origins, a basis for the next story, analysis tools and proposals to move towards this ideal. In democracy, for example, ideologies structure the political field in the first place because they are the basis for the polarization of public debate around issues related to the life of the city (Dosquet, 2017). It is a representation system, which vacillates between the impossible and the possible, the dream and the reality and can observe a confrontation, competition between ideologies and what characterizes modern politics. From this point of view, ideology is a political doctrine, a coherent set of

ideas being the line or political orientation, shared by a group of people called political party (Benoit 1980). Political ideas studies thus include a body generally seen as representations, whether in the form of structured sets (theories and doctrines) or sparse in written texts, contributing to the understanding of the action and the evolution of human in society. The ideology in this case can be seen as an action program (electoral suffrage) to gain or maintain political power (Baldwin, 1998). As a doctrine, ideology constitutes the identity of a political party and is characterized by a statutory stability based on domestic legislation complying with the state laws. This institutional aspect, given to ideology, makes it the foundation of politics, that is to say the platform for the application of values and universally recognized ideals ; but especially the implementation of projects or action program for a specific company. Ultimately, in addition to being a unifying element and an explanatory factor of political behavior, adherence to an ideology structures the political field in opposing camps, by positioning players. The main political forces, when they play the game of democracy, to the point of winning enough votes, are successively leaders or in the opposition (Edelman, 1991).

Emergence, issues and stakeholders of political communication

Political communication refers to everything relating to the production and exchange of political speeches done by the various stakeholders and reflected by the media. The emergence of political communication is the culmination of the dual process of democratization and communication; which corresponds to the deep aspirations of human. At all levels, politics needs communication to be fully achieved. Anthropologically, communication works as a staging of the powers-that-be, coupled with a work to legitimize the authority. At the government level, it is linked to the propaganda that controls social representations and mobilizes the governed people (Mercier, 2017). The originality and interest in political communication therefore lie in the fact that communication itself, as an interdisciplinary science, is the place of expression and confrontation of constitutive and contradictory legitimacies of mass democracy. In this sense it is a new reality, observable both at the functional and theoretical stage in societies (Wolton, 2016). In this turbulent history, the contemporary era introduces a major change in politics by placing value on what concerns communication, both in terms of exchanged speech and the role of the media and public opinion today. This enhancement of communication, including the emergence of political communication, is part of the contemporary society and mass democracy, characterized by equal universal suffrage, and media and polls dominance. Polls have become both tools for

manipulation, knowledge or freedom, awakening the notion of public opinion and paving the way for many works which review the places and modalities for the practice of politics, by aligning them with the question of media, institutions and public (D'Almeida, 2018).

However, despite the unquestionable place it occupies, political communication still does not enjoy a better representation. As much mass democracy, universal suffrage, polls and even television, have finally managed to acquire their credibility, so political communication continues to raise skepticism. It seems, indeed, to have a "bad reputation". The reason for this mistrust and this distrust concerning political communication is that it condenses everything we can blame modern politics for (Wolton, 2015). In addition, two characteristics may help explain the suspicion that political communication is subject to. Indeed, it gives the impression of an inexorable tyranny of communication on politics and its public perversion. These misgivings are accompanied by this implicit assumption, always invalidated by the facts, but always so vivid, claiming that the public is fragile, manipulable and vulnerable. While it is not a "cancerous tumor", political communication is one of the ventricles of democracy, in the sense that it is used to manage the main contradiction of the democratic political system, namely: create a balance between a opening system to new issues and a closure system to prevent that everything is constantly and publicly debated. To manage this dual function of opening and closing, political communication has three functions : identifying new problems, their integration into the political debate and the eradication of terms which are no longer subject of conflicts (Dacheux, 2017). The emergence of political communication, seen as an important phenomenon, is simply the result of the dual process of democratization and communication. Ideally, political communication should ensure the transcription of the democratic political ideal of the eighteenth century, in a broader public space where different stakeholders have a legitimate status. For the past two centuries, the big issue was not only to accept the democratic model, but also to adapt it to a society radically different from that in which it had been thought. Hence the need for the inclusion of concert concept in communication, that is to say the connection and interactions between different stakeholders living in the society (Schemeil, 1994).

Finally, the competence required to be a player in political communication, is a model of three levels, according to the dialogic: individuals are *rational, free and equal*. *Reason*, for example, is the ability of any person to articulate an argument that can be understood by any human. Reason is the condition without which one can not produce a dialogue. It is the presupposition that we must do when we start sharing opinions with others (Achache, 2017). Rationality is the claim to be able to do a speech globally accepted. While rational discourse

is understandable by all and may possibly be eligible for all, it means that the validity of its content is identical for all. In a nutshell, rationality is the claim to be able to do a speech with a globally accepted content.

The *freedom* of the interlocutor is not primarily the freedom of expression. Being free in the dialogic model is to be able to control with oneself any psychological determination that could disrupt the exercise of reason, including everything related to one's personal peculiarity, affects and feelings. Freedom is to maintain and reproduce for oneself, public and private distinction (rational and emotional), and let one's opinion uninfluenced by motives or powers that we can not explain and make clear to oneself and others. Freedom is therefore the condition which can evacuate the passion of the political discourse (Bachofen, 2002).

Finally, *equality* is the ability to speak or to understand what is said to you, sufficient for every individual. This equality is enough to start a reversal of the relationship transmitter / receiver. With it, anyone can alternatively take the place of another during the discussion. No role properly belongs to no player. The politician is ultimately nothing more than one of us (Achache, 2017).

POLITICAL IDEOLOGY IN PRACTICE IN IVORY COAST

As we have defined it, ideology helps determine how thoughts or representations are born and bloom in the human mind, while political communication refers to the production and exchange of political discourse and passed by the media. In Ivory Coast, the 1980s were marked by a series of economic crises, the most serious and most acute in its history. The aftermath was marked by social and political tensions, gestures challenging the state authority. The highlight was the first coup made in 1999, following the breakdown of the political dialogue between the regime and the opposition (Dozon, 2011). The multiparty system "imposed" by France in 1990 was the basis for this. Proponents of this position refer to the speech of La Baule in France, of the former Head of State François Mitterrand. Indeed, France has conditioned its assistance to developing countries, in a democratic system, which integrates all political parties in a transparent way. France had adopted this position, when Africa's relations with the Western bloc were based at that time on the preservation of anti-communist regimes. It must be recalled that it was during the Cold War. In essence, this speech could be summed up as follows: *"There is no development without democracy and no democracy without development. The speech of La Baule gave an undeniable boost to the development of democracy in Africa"* (Rohan, 2011). In fact, "national conferences" held in

the early 90s, in a few sub-Saharan African countries such as Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Congo etc., allowed the participation of civil society and the emergence of democratic demands. In many cases, they have defined new democratic institutions and boost significant constitutional revisions.

The term of multiparty had just been created and its implementation was going to be ordered to all the leaders of that time. Against their will, several Heads of States have therefore accepted this conditionality. This is the case of Côte d'Ivoire where until 1990 the concept of democracy was still misunderstood. Since independence in 1960 until 1990, the country was still having only one party. In 1990, the various successive governments were unable to provide adequate and sustainable solutions to the concerns of the population, in terms of sustainable and inclusive economic development (Yao, 2011). Then a trust crisis broke out between the authorities, the people and Bretton Woods institutions (IMF, World Bank etc.). In his film: "*Ivory Coast, identity tinderbox*" Benoit Scheuer seriously questions the authorities concerning the violences which occurred in 1990. He points at fabricated political ideologies, as the basis for interethnic conflicts developments in the country.

POLITICAL ACTION AND SOCIAL STAKEHOLDERS DISINTEREST

The deleterious political and social climate and the brutal fall in commodity prices mainly based on coffee and cocoa have left Ivory Coast in an economic slump. Therefore, there were untimely strikes, especially in the education sector, with strong disturbances (Appiah, 2013). Politically, the most determined opponents were arrested and imprisoned. This is the case of the militants of the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI), as well as labor unions and student associations from 1990 to 1995. Thus, the truncated election of 1995, the coup of 1999 and the election in October 2000, described as "disastrous", are factors of the trauma of Ivory Coast. The highlight is obviously the attempt to overthrow the Head of State Laurent Gbagbo in September 2002 (Hofnung, 2011). Based on this failure programmed at the macroeconomic level, the majority of citizens of the country began to show indifference towards any political action and electoral competitions. According to them, the speeches of their leaders are meaningless and do not lead them to any economic and social progress. In reality, the people's distrust finds its explanation in the growing and widespread poverty (Cogneau et al, 2003). As proof, the adjustment policies have contributed to the decline of urban incomes in the early 1980s. Housing subsidies have been stopped and civil servants' remunerations have been blocked. From 1985 hiring in the public service have halved and a

retirement voluntary severance policy was introduced. Prices of utilities, such as electricity, water or public transport, have been revalued by 25%. Foodstuff prices in urban areas have increased, while the minimum wage has not changed between 1982 and 1993. According to data from the Ministry of Employment, the modern private employment rate has decreased by 3.3% on average per year between 1980 and 1990. This trend was even more serious between 1992 and 1994, with a decrease of 14% of the workforce in companies registered in the financial database.

IDEOLOGIES AND MIRAGE OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

So since 1993, with their inability to ensure better governance of public affairs successive political leaders have undertaken the design of government communication campaigns based mostly on manipulation and demagoguery, with the unacknowledged goal of maintaining themselves in power at all costs despite a legitimacy well started. The situation therefore leads to frustration, a resurgence of xenophobic rhetoric and heavy tensions in the societies. Political actors initiate dogmas opposed to people's realities. They thus manufacture language elements, that would help them tie and feed, at best, the axes of political communication. Successively, the terms of *Ivoirité*, *Refondation* and *l'Ivoirien nouveau* break into the jargon of Ivorians, to furnish the popular discourses. But what is the real content of these concepts and how did they manifest in Ivory Coast?

Ivoirité

This is a concept developed, promoted and maintained under the mandate of Bédié government from 1993 to 1999. *Ivoirité* was challenged and fought because it was considered as an instrument for exclusion and xenophobia designed to exclude people of foreign origins and doubtful identities. *Ivoirité*, in principle, should instead focus on belonging to the Ivorian nation, under the cultural prism, to forge a national identity. But finally, this concept has divided more the Ivorian society, than to seek to unite the country's citizens.

Refondation

The concept was invented during the administration of Laurent Gbagbo from 2000 to 2010. According to those who designed this doctrine, "everything had to be rebuilt in a country" where verbal and physical violences were part of the people daily lives. All this happening in a context of extreme poverty and social division. Originally, the term

Refondation was shaped in a process of reorganizing the Ivorian society. It was based on the systematic questioning of some prior acquired assets of Ivory Coast, with the Western world. For admirers of this doctrine as Mamadou Coulibaly, former President of the National Assembly in 2001, "*We had to cut the umbilical cord with France which was a hindrance at the development of Ivorians.*"

L'Ivoirien nouveau

Under Alassane Ouattara's administration, current Head of State since the 2011 election, the concept of *l'Ivoirien nouveau* (*new Ivorian*) took shape as a result of a prospective study entitled "Ivory Coast 2040", adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2015. This ideology was based on the principle that all social players adopt a new paradigm, on the socio-cultural level, to ensure the success of the "emergence" project of the country. The concept of emerging countries, according to the definition, means the fastest growing economies among the developing countries and the better integrated economies into the global economy. Several measuring elements contribute to this notion that marks a real turning point, moving a poor country with a low-growth balance to a better, strong and sustainable growth balance. In so doing, in Ivory Coast, they had to redesign certain moral, ethical and political values, which will prevent ivorians from experiencing economic slump again, whose consequence would be social conflicts.

Finally, these three concepts, arising from the political ideology of their founders, although broadcast and heavily hyped through the media, seminars, symposia, in religious temples, within traditional communities, have all ended up being a setback. During the exercise of state power, all these schools of thought have collapsed following the disappearance of these creators. The mass media deployed in order to give legitimacy and visibility to public action, have had very little impact on the target populations. In 2016 once again, this breakdown of trust between the political leaders and citizens continues to fuel the controversy over the need to implement structural reforms, for a strong and resilient economy. Some members of the opposition saw in this act some demagogic techniques of the RHDP (Gathering of Houphouetists for Democracy and Peace), the ruling party, "*to distract the people,*" according to their own expressions. Ironically or seriously, they often proclaim loudly that "*Building bridges does not bring food on our table,*" hinting at some major development projects related to road infrastructure (bridge construction), do not add anything to their daily lives.

Thus, in this country, small circumstances produce great events. The society is still infested with internal divisions, threatening, therefore, peace, stability and national cohesion. Political communication is used simply as a marketing tool and a logic of "com' and manipulation, to paraphrase Dominique Wolton. Ivorian politicians have become more and more fragile, because they have lost their prestige and the trust of the people. For example, participation rates during the various national and local elections have become very low. The explanation is that political speeches are not always followed by concrete actions on the ground, notwithstanding some notable advances, at the economic and diplomatic levels since 2011. Notwithstanding, at the level of political dialogue, serious difficulties are encountered in the field. The ambitious development projects are regularly sabotaged by the coalition of political opposition parties. As a reminder, at the end of the post-election crisis of 2011, the government decided to revive the tradition of planning and putting it at the heart of public action. In this direction, the National Development Plan (NDP) was developed over the period from 2012 to 2015. The aim was to have updated and reliable sociodemographic and macroeconomic data. To this end, a General Census of Population and Housing (RGPH) was initiated in 2014, throughout the territory. However, this technical operation did not have a smooth running; the opposition has called for its boycott and without reserve.

In 2016, the opposition, once again, called to boycott the referendum on the draft of the new Constitution. It was intended to clarify particular conditions of eligibility for the Presidency of the Republic. It also sought to create the position of a Vice-President elected at the same time as the President and the Senate. In 2018, finally, the opposition went down in the street to demand the outright cancellation of the election of senators. In this general suspicion environment, part of the public expressed reservations as to its participation in the debates on issues of public policy, for fear of reprisals. As we can see what is happening in Ivory Coast, we can say that Africa has a long way to go, to bring credibility to political communication.

CONCLUSION

The situation described above is not specific to Ivory Coast. The disinterest in politics is seen throughout Africa and elsewhere in the world. This is the case for example in France where *"if the intensity of the political crisis reached its current level, psychology and feedbacks from citizens themselves inevitably loom large. Only hypocrites and demagogues can or want to ignore it"* (Duhamel, 2016). Indeed, in general, without citizens involved and

without structures enabling to make politics a trade, there will not be no growth and no distribution of its profits and not enough justice. In reality, politics is embedded in society. It is not separate from it. "*What is political in a society is certainly larger and more ambitious than what is simply public.*" (Schemeil, 2015). Citizens are not interested in public affairs.

Given this theoretical approach, the paper revealed, in light of the Ivorian case, that very few people now believe in the efficacy of political action in Africa. The following questions need to be asked, in the light of this reality: does democracy not guarantee justice and freedom for all? Should ideology not be a language that gives meaning to life and politics? In principle, it is generally accepted that, like all languages, ideology should be understood without effort by those who have learned it. This notion should be the cement of a community activist, a passion that, like other passions, should always include the same basic elements: a sacred book, with its vocabulary and syntax, feelings of persecution, misunderstanding of the heroes and pioneers we look up to and who inspire us, significant sacrifices to justify our passion, beyond what is reasonable, going to the same public places and participating in the big gathering of all those who share the same faith (Schemeil, 2015).

Unfortunately, in practice, human history has shown that ideology is rather extreme and radical. The will or desire to impose it at all costs and to all by a ruling minority to the majority, most often creates this feeling of rejection and disinterest in politics in its practice. Africa, like the rest of the world, faces this reality.

BILIOGRAPHY

Appiah, A. (2013). *Le syndicalisme en Afrique subsaharienne. L'expérience de la Côte d'Ivoire*. Paris : L'Harmattan.

Bachofen B. (2002). *La condition de la liberté : Rousseau, critique des raisons politiques*. Paris : Broché.

- Benoit, Francis-P. (1980). *Les idéologies politiques modernes. Le temps de Hegel*. Paris : PUF.
- Braud, P. (1982). *La science politique*. Paris : PUF.
- Koné. S. (2015). *Information et désinformation. La presse ivoirienne aux élections présidentielles de 2010*. S. Samba Koné.
- Cogneau, D. & Soms, S. (2005). *Les illusions perdues de l'économie ivoirienne et la crise politique, in Afrique Contemporaine*. Cairn.info.
- Dacheux, E. (2016). *Sans les citoyens, l'Europe n'est rien. Pour une nouvelle communication publique au service de la démocratie*. Paris : L'Harmattan.
- Dosquet, F. (2017). *Marketing et communication politique*. Paris : EMS.
- Dozon, J.P. (2011). *La clef de la crise ivoirienne*. Paris : Karthala.
- Edelman M. (1991), *Pièces et règles du jeu politique (Constructing the political spectacle)*. Paris : Le Seuil.
- Grize, Jean-B. (2012). *Argumentation et logique naturelle. Convaincre et persuader*. Paris : Les Essentiels Hermès, CNRS.
- Hofnung, T. (2011). *La crise ivoirienne. De Felix Houphouët- Boigny à la chute de Laurent Gbagbo*. Paris : La Découverte.
- Mercier, A. (2017). *La communication politique*. Paris: Les Essentiels Hermès, CNRS.
- Parenteau, D. & Parenteau I. (2008). *Les idéologies politiques. Le clivage gauche-droite*. Presse de l'Université du Québec.
- Schemeil, Y. (2015). *Introduction à la science politique. Objets, méthodes, Résultats, objectifs*. Presse de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques.
- Vadée, M. (1973). *L'idéologie*. Paris. PUF.
- Wolton, D. (2016). *Communiquer c'est vivre. Entretien avec Arnaud Benedetti*, Paris : Le Cherche midi.
- Wolton D. (2012). *La communication, les hommes et la politique*. Paris : Odile Jacob.
- Yao, G. (2011). *L'Afrique face aux grandes contradictions du monde. Plaidoyer pour un monde juste*. IADS.