

Reconfiguration of the social practices of protection among the Ebrié of Yopougon Kouté in a context of modernity

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Abstract:- The study on the question of social protections among the Ebriés of Kouté was made to analyze the reconfiguration of the practices of protection among the Ebrié and their mechanisms of social protection in a context of modernity. In fact, to account for this social reality, this study mobilized a qualitative and ethnographic approach to 30 people (Ghiglione and Mathalon, 1998), during the month of March 2010.

It arises a duality of social protection practices among the Ebrié of Yopougon Kouté. This duality is updated by traditional protection practices and the new configurations of social protection.

Thus, the study unveils a duality of social practices of protection in Yopougon Kouté through the traditional and modern forms of protection.

Key words: *Social protection, Tchaman, Kouté, modernity, Côte d'Ivoire.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of social protection indicates all the mechanisms of collective foresights which allow the individuals to face social risks. These risks encompass the situations likely to compromise the safety all over the place (social, economic) in order to prolong the life of the individual or his family, by causing a fall of its resources or a rise of its expenditure (old age, disease, disability, unemployment, motherhood, family responsibilities) (Bathelemy, 2004). In fact, each society builds its model of protection according to the contingencies of the social background (world perception, history, etc). However, the model of social protection in the modern societies is structured around several theoretical approaches among other things the neoliberalism theory and the sociological neo-institutionalism theory. The neoliberalism theory maintains that any individual is and must be, supposed to be responsible for its fate, its life, its destiny. The authors spoke of "an insurance society" (Ewald, (1996), March and Olsen (1989), quoted by Andre Lecours (2002), Guillmard, (2008), Castel, (1995) Castel (2003) Elisabeth Longenesse, Catusse et Destreman (2005) Palier (2001), Destreman (2005), Tourné (2003, Diop (2006)). For some authors in the African societies, the individuals developed some mechanisms of protection against the natural disasters. These mechanisms are amongst other things the myths around the taboos, the respect of the divinities, the libations against some diseases to beseech the protection of the ancestors on the members of the community. In these various societies, there are no particular institutions to deal with the protection of the individuals. As soon as the individuals are born, they are embedded in a tight network and are under the protection of all the community. (Bah, 2009, Castel, 1995, Laé, 2003, Fonteneau, 2008, Blandine, Bénédicte (2003). Finally, certain people see a reconfiguration of the practices of social protection in the traditional societies further to the modernity (Valerie, 2006). In regard to former works on social protection, one notices that these works focused on the modern aspect of social protection through the assistance, the insurances. These various writings did not take into account the cultural character of social protection in all the societies, namely the traditional societies. Before the existence of the State; that is to say in the "pre-industrial" society, there were forms of social protection. This means that each society is a vector of some form of social protection insofar as it constitutes the lever around which is built all the relationships of the community life. The social actors have always deployed forms and protection measures against any form of aggressions, threats of the human existence, to prolong and preserve their life. Yopougon Kouté, a village located in the city does not fail this prospect. In this village, the actors have set up some mechanisms of protection to prevent the calamities, which manifested themselves in the dimensions of social protection. This study sets up these mechanisms in three great phases.

At the level of health, the Ebrié¹ of yopougon kouté use the "dja"² in the preparation of the drugs against the oedemas of any origin. The "Adjatendu"³, (sand of the dja) is used for the preparation of the drugs to fight against asthma⁴ (Niangoran-Bouah (1973)). The yellow powder and the grains of sand have the same symbolic value and the same preventive power. To fight against some natural disasters such as measles, the Ebrié of kouté purified the village by pouring water of the cemetery up to the end of the village. This ceremony was carried out by the menopause women. As a matter of fact, as from midnight, these women got "naked" in the streets to make incantations in order to protect the members of the community of this epidemic⁵.

At the level of religion, the interrogation of the history has revealed that before 1913⁶, the Ebrié were "idolaters"⁷. This practice led them to adore the spirits of waters, forests, and secret trees. According to the respondents, there was a 6 day calendar. The most sacred day was named "agou ". It was devoted to the worship of these genies to get them protect the whole village. This day is variable; it can be Monday or Thursday. On such sacred day, postmenopausal women would prepare white fofou⁸ and worship the genies with the "Nana" (senior of the village). Those of them who would not respect these divinities would get mad, sick, or a great misfortune would fall down on their family. Under the effect of urbanization, all these practices are no longer formalized or are officialized, and everybody despite their Christian belief keep on these practices in secret⁹. The official religious practice is the Christian religion (catholic, harrist and methodist). In these various churches, when an individual takes part in the activities (chorus-singer, driver, Pastor, etc.) and pays its contributions regularly, he is assisted in the event of disease and environmental aggressiveness by the prayers.

It should be noted that on the level of the generation and the age groups, the various institutions of this society are formed. The individuals who make it up ensure their maturity while contributing to the life of the community. The major goal of the generation is to protect the ébrié community against any form of aggressions which threaten the existence of its members, to be in favour with the "gods", and also to preserve and prolong the life. This is shown in the ceremonies, the libations, indeed the public sacrifices.

At the level of the family, it is the most senior person who takes care of the members of the family in case of disease and any social calamity. He/she takes care of everyone without exception, through the family sacrifices, the libations (even those which do not take part in the perpetuation of the family goods).

All these forms of social protection in Yopougon Koute have been influenced in their structure by modernity, with the construction of the State, and the urbanization.

In fact, at the socio-cultural level, its villages are recently characterized by a cultural heterogeneity related to the cohabitation between the ébrié natives and some social groups such as the lobi, the baoulé¹⁰. Economically speaking, the housing estate and the urbanization of the old village grounds have resulted in the transformation, even the reduction of the traditional sources of incomes of the Ébrié villages (fishing and agriculture in particular). At the political and institutional level, the proximity to the administration and the whole modern structures of the State favours the heads of villages' symbolic or sometimes real reduction room for manoeuvre.

Finally, at the ideological level, the urban pressure manifests itself in the diffusion in the village social space, of the ideologies and the symbols related to urban modernity like the urban architecture, the development and the use of urban space, the rites, the rituals, the religious ideologies. All things considered, modernity has influenced the practices of social protection of the ébrié from kouté. Faced with the influence of modernity (at the cultural, economic, ideological, and political level), one is led to put the following question: what are the social mechanisms of operation of the practices of social protection at Yopougon Kouté?

This work will be structured around the practices of social protection among the Ebrié of Yopougon Kouté and the new configurations of social protection in a context of modernity.

¹ The term is an abuse. It indicates a variety of black silures of the marshes (ebrie). The Abouré gave them this name, which means in their dialect black-complexion men, wicked men.

² The "dja " term which means in the atchan language the sand of gold

³ The " adjatendu " term which means in ébrié the sand of gold

⁴ Georges, «Symboles institutionnelles chez les akans», L'homme, Volume13; N°1, P.207 237.

⁵ Words collected from the spokesperson of the chiefdom during the exploratory investigation.

⁶ Claude Hélène Perrot (1996) «Les ravages des prophètes dans les civilisations paysannes», Journal des africanistes, volume 66, N°1, P 319-330.

⁷ "Idolaters": this is a form of belief which is different from that of the Christians or the Muslims.

⁸ "White Fofou" mashed yam with palm oil, one of the dish of the atchan people.

⁹ Information collected from the interviews during the exploratory investigation.

¹⁰ Koffi Kra Valerie (2005-2006), Les enjeux sociaux de la production de l'identité villageoise dans les villes d'Abidjan d'Anonkoua (commune d'Abobo), mémoire de Maitrise.

II. METHODOLOGY/METHODS OR RESEARCH MATERIALS

This study was carried out in Yopougon kouté during the month of March 2010. It was interested in the following resource people: the head of the village of Yopougon kouté (1), the spokespersons of the chiefdom (4), the members of the various age groups which are within the generations (7). The age bracket of these actors ranges from 69 to 90 years. The persons in charge of the great matrilineal families (from 40 to 88 years) (5) were also interviewed. As for the various rites of incantation, we selected the menopause women (from 70 to 80 years) regardless of age groups (13). These people were selected on the basis of their knowledge of the practices of social protection within their social space, and the participation in the various rites, ritual of protection of the individuals. In the framework of this study, a semi-structured conversation guide and an analysis of contents were mobilized. We also made use of the ethnography as the method of data collection. This method is perceived as an approach which requires a direct immersion of the researcher in the environment investigated in order to apprehend the "life style" of a group starting from the description and the analytical and interpretative rebuilding of the culture, the forms of life and the social structure of the studied group. According to Spradley (1979), quoted by Marta Anadon (2006), the ethical principles which govern the ethnographic research are: "the dialogue with the respondents, in order to communicate the goals and the results of the research, the protection of the private life and the writing of the research report to help the respondents to understand them".¹¹ According to Ghiglione and Mathalon, a qualitative study should at least include fifteen people and thirty people at the most.¹² As for the theoretical orientation, the theory of the social change of Guy Rock and the theory of the experience of François Dubet were mobilized to analyze the data of this work.

Findings

I- The practices of social protection among the Ebríé of Yopougon Kouté

I-1- The practice of disease prevention within the ébríé community of Kouté

The practices of disease prevention among the ébríé of Kouté depend on their representation of the disease. As illustrated by the talks of one of the surveyed: " *diseases are due to a demon, the anger of the genies with the population, when they feel that they are badly worshiped (...) there were individuals who were endowed with supernatural powers. The latter would fight against the demons, the genies that brought the disease in the form of epidemics upon the members of the community* "(A notable from Yopougon Kouté).

This prevention of disease was done through some ceremonies of purification of the whole village. Such is the case of chicken pox. To guard against this disease during the dry season, the actors put water in a bucket in the middle of the village for the bath of all the community. Besides, there are some materials which are used for the preparation of the drugs against certain diseases. Among them stands the "dja". In theory, nothing is thrown away from the "dja". As soon as the objects are in contacts with the package containing the relics of the ancestors, they become automatically sacred, and remain as such indefinitely in the "sonaa". That is the reason why the ébríé of Côte.d'ivoire in general and those of Kouté in particular seek and recover carefully the grains of sand remaining in the sacred package.¹³ They use them in the preparation of the drugs against any kind of oedemas. The "Adjatendu" (sand of the dja) is also used for the preparation of the drug against asthma and fights against the loss of the word. Indeed, the "adjatendu" is in great demand and costs a lot for the prevention of certain diseases. The powder of the metal and the grains of sand have the same symbolic values and the same preventive power.

Moreover, the prevention of certain diseases was operated by some genies. As this respondent says: "*there were spirits, some statuettes animated by spirits which spoke to the clairvoyants. They would show them the drugs or ceremonies to perform to fight against misfortune (curse, madness, disease, sterility...) that the genies had cast on the village* ". (Words of a woman belonging to the Dogba generation in Kouté).

When the statuettes and the spirits finish speaking, all the community gathers to offer a sheep as a sign of recognition. All these practices of prevention which had been set up by the individuals did not need specific institutions, but would essentially reproduce the injunctions of the tradition and the custom. These customs are established in a social system in connection with all the dimensions of the system. Their mode of effectiveness is based on an experience. The experience is defined as a combination of logic of actions which bind the actor to each dimension of a system. The actor is bound to articulate the different logics of actions, and it is the dynamics generated by this activity which constitutes the subjectivity of the actor and his reflexivity. Today,

¹¹ Marta Anadon (2006), «La recherche qualitative de la dynamique de son évolution aux acquis indéniables et aux questionnements présents», Université du Québec à Chicoutimi.

¹² Benjamin Mathalon et Rodolphe Ghiglione (1982), *Les enquêtes sociologiques. Théories et pratiques*, Armand Colin.

¹³ Georges Niangoran Boua (1973), «Symboles institutionnels chez les akans», *L'homme*, Volume 13 N°1, P 206- 232.

with modernity (the church, the conventional school...) the individual as a thinking creature will ignore all these logics of actions and will position within the system. This will bring about the change of the mode of prevention of the disease. From now on, they resort to the hospitals and traditional pharmacopeia "Today, when there are vaccination campaigns against certain diseases, we sensitize the population to get vaccinated". The chart below recapitulates certain practices of protection.

Pathologies	Indication in atchan language	Practice of prevention
Measles	<i>Gnankanna</i>	The actors purified the village with water from the cemetery till the end of the village. This ritual was carried out by the menopause women.
Chicken pox	<i>N'zanzan</i>	The ébrie put water in a bucket in the middle of the village and the members of the community used it to wash themselves.
Prostate	<i>n'tômiepoussi</i>	They used some leaves with palm wine for the preparation of the drugs to prevent it.
Asthma	<i>Ahwinwin</i>	They use the sand of the bone for the preparation of the drugs.
variola	<i>Alôbôbia</i>	The actors use the barks in the preparation of the drugs.

Source: From the authors' investigations, March 2010.

I.2 The logic of traditional protection within the generations

The generation constitutes a very significant institution in the protection of the individuals among the ébriés of Kouté. Indeed, the individuals who take part in the generation are entitled to a field to practise the farming techniques or to settle. *"According to one respondent, the generation gathers the mature individuals, the latter are meant to leave the family residence. The field will thus enable them to be safe from hunger and to have a housing". Within each age group, there is a solidarity between the various members in the event of disease, death or marriage. Moreover, the various members of the generation practise ceremonies of libations, public sacrifices, offer drink to the manes of the ancestors to avoid all kinds of curse and attacks from the wizards"* (From a notable of Kouté).

All these practices allow the generation to exist, to have, to last, and to delay death.

In addition, to profit from this protection, the individuals must be initiated, take part in the life of the community (meetings, ceremonies...) and to update their contributions. Today, with modernity, the generation constitutes the lever around which is built the protection of the individual. In fact, in spite of the influence of modernity, it constitutes the structuring and operating mode of protection of the individuals of Yopougon Kouté.

I-3- Work as a form of social protection.

Before, the lagoon was full of fish; the bulk of the people were therefore fishermen, farmers. These functions enabled them to fight against hunger, unemployment. As reported by one respondent *"At the time, fishing was very profitable, and it was this money which I used to build my house and to send my children to school"*. The individuals who refused to attend school were taught fishing next to their parents or farming. The income that they obtained from fishing and the culture helped them meet their needs ". (A notable from Kouté)

The distribution of the tasks and the sexual division of the work allowed the young people to learn how to manufacture and market attiéké to their mothers. As for the old people, they walked kilometers to go to the

farms as far as 5 hours in the morning. This work enabled them to practise sport and to avoid being sick (diabetes, tension...), as a result these people lasted. According to the talk of this respondent, "In my family, people would die at the age of 102, 100". Beside the work, they would consume natural foods, without fertilizer; all the foods came from their farms. There was no maggi cube “. (A man living in Kouté)

With the phenomenon of urbanization, all these practices have disappeared. The individuals do not have any more forests to practise the farming techniques, they are obliged to buy grounds in Dabou, Agboville to breed rabbits, and to create cocoa, coffee and rubber plantations to prevent the problems of housing, schooling and health.

III. II. THE NEW CONFIGURATIONS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

II.1 The stakes of the individuals’ economic reproduction of the practices of protection

The chart below presents the new forms of configuration of the practices of protection among the Ebrié of Kouté.

Economic activities	Old forms of social protection	New forms and practices of resistance.
Fishing	Fishing	
Agriculture	Culture of the tarot, potato, banana, cocoa, rubber...	Rabbit breeding, wage-earning jobs, taxes paid for certain trades practised in the village, the renting of property and the manufacture of attiéké.

Source: From the authors’ investigations, March 2011.

The economic stakes can be illustrated by the incomes or the revenues from the urban marketing of the village resources asserted like such. It concerns the employment of the "young people" coming from the village in the companies established in the village: the town hall of Yopougon for example. It also deals with the taxes contribution on certain trade practised in the village, and the renting of the property. What is more, some women invest themselves in the manufacture and the marketing of attiéké while others deal with the catering. The incomes that they get from these activities help them to assist their families and to pay for their children’s education fees. The talks of this respondent support the idea: "There are women who sell attiéké to allow their family to live, to treat themselves and to find accommodation ". (A man living in Kouté)

These new forms of protection account for the individualism and the evolution from the expanded family towards the nuclear family. The Community solidarity which allowed the individuals to fight against certain calamities of the life is put to the hard test because of the modern economies (urbanization, geographical mobility and demographic growth).

IV. THE RELIGION

In most colonial situations, one notices a missionary action parallel with the colonization undertaking or complementary to this one. The church contributes to the integration of new standards of behaviour, not only moral, but also medical and economic. These standards bring the colonized people to give up their religious systems for the benefit of the church. In Yopougon Kouté, the advent of the church was at the origin of the formal abandon of the religious practices which were intended for the protection of the individuals. These practices are amongst other things the worship of the genies, of the sacred forests which helped the individuals to face the natural disasters. Beside the worships to the divinities, there was the system of taboos. All these practices were formally abandoned for the profit of the church. From now on, the protection of the individuals is done within these various religious denominations, via the prayer.

V. DISCUSSION

The work on the reconfiguration of the social practices of protection among the Ebrié of Yopougon Kouté in a context of modernity has helped to clarify the various forms of practices of social protection among the Ebrié of Yopougon Kouté and the new configurations of social protection in a context of modernity. There are two (2) main findings: the traditional forms of social protection and the new forms of social protection.

VI. THE TRADITIONAL FORMS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

The traditional forms of social protection always are still firmly rooted in the modes of preventions of the individuals, namely the African societies. It is a question of showing the trans-cultural and trans-historical

character of social protection. This quote from Jean Pierre Gozon unveils that social protection has always existed and still exists within time and space. This reality appears in several localities of Africa. In fact, according to Jean Pierre Bah, the child's convulsion is also known as the disease of the bird, in several areas of Côte d'Ivoire.

In fact, for Bonnet (1990: 249), "the topic of "the bird " responsible for the convulsion of the child is well known by the majority of the African societies". Jean Pierre Bah claims that "the social etiology indicates various species of birds, namely the birds of prey are at the origin of this disease" in the Ivorian societies. Among the Baoulés, the bird responsible for this disease is the sparrowhawk; the touraco among the Attié. Contrary to these people, the Guéré of Côte-d'Ivoire relate the origin of this disease to the respect of the prohibited foods (monkeys, electric fish, black mushroom). To prevent these diseases, the Attié make use of the "béza".¹⁴ Among the Baoulé, the object of health is called " *n'glo n'glo gnamman* ", which means "the cord of the bird" which is made of pearl and feather of sparrowhawk (the bird transmitter of the disease). Among the Guéré, the prevention of this disease depends on the respect of the taboos and a weaving of sheets of raffia. The number of sheets depends on the sex of the child, namely three for the males and four for the girls.

The key observation is that there are varied forms of social protection among the people of Côte d'Ivoire. Among certain people however, a certain similarity in the traditional forms of social protection is noticed. This social reality is observed on our field of study. Among the Ebrié of Kouté, several forms of social protection are revealed. At the level of health, the Ebriés use "*djas*" for the preparation of the drugs against the oedemas of any origin and the "*Adjatendu*" for the preparation of the drugs to avoid asthma. At the level of the family, it is the senior of family who take care of the members in the case of disease and social calamity, through the family sacrifices, the libations, and the rites. At the level of the generation, the Ebriés of Yopougon Kouté organize ceremonies, libations, even public sacrifices to protect the community from all forms of aggressiveness which threaten their existence.

In regard to the various practices of social protection, we notice that there exists traditional forms of social protection in the societies of Côte d'Ivoire, but these forms show specific characteristics according to the societies.

VII. NEW FORMS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

In regard to the data of our study, one notices the emergence of new forms of social protection in the social practices of the Ebriés of Yopougon Kouté. This new configuration manifests itself in the influence of modernity in the functioning of social protection. As a matter of fact, among the Ebriés, on the level of health, the ceremonies against certain diseases, in fact measles were reinforced by the modern forms of social protection such as vaccinations, etc.

At the cultural level, we notice a cultural heterogeneity related to the cohabitation between the Ebrié natives and the immigrants (Lobi, Baoulé, Bété, etc). At the religious level, the advent of Christianity in this village has deeply influenced the traditional practices such as the rites; the ceremonies and the system of taboos which were intended to protect the Ebriés of Yopougon Kouté. This change in the forms of social protection is not the only fact of the Ebrié of Yopougon Kouté. In fact, according to the works of Koffi Kra (2005- 2006) "these villages face multiple pressures related to modernity, with the construction of the State and the urbanization. This pressure, whose principal vector is the city, is perceptible at the economic, political, institutional, cultural, ideological and symbolic level. From the investigations carried out between the years 2004 and 2005 on eleven Ebrié villages integrated now into the agglomeration of Abidjan, the article tackles the ideological productions and the more or less institutionalized social practices taking part in a reproduction of the village identity facing the pressure and the urban stakes ".

From this point of view, we can say that the advent of colonization has brought a change in the social practices of the African societies in general, and especially the forms of social protection.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, this study has analyzed the reconfiguration of the practices of protection among the Ebrié and their mechanism of social protection in a context of modernity. It has revealed the forms of social protections in the society of Yopougon Kouté which has witnessed a change and manifested itself in a form of social reconfiguration of the practices of protection. The works has noted public ceremonies of purification of the village which allowed the individuals to prevent certain risks of the existence, and thus to delay death. Besides, there is the functioning of the social protection which appears through the respect of the taboos, worshiping divinities (genies of the waters, sacred river). However, with the colonization, the generation is the institution which constitutes the lever around which the social protection of the individuals is structured. Because the

¹⁴ "Béza" here, refers to a treatment made up of pearls of feathers of touraco placed on a cord made of cotton thread.

celebration of this festival enables the individuals to profit from the practices of social protection within this village space, to develop a collective solidarity, to have a ground for the farming techniques and to protect the Atchan community (Ebrié) from any form of aggression which threatens the existence of its members. This festival also renders it possible to find favour in the gods' eyes, to preserve and prolong the life. This is shown through the ceremonies, the libations, even the public sacrifices.

The generation is therefore is the operating and structuring element of social protection at Yopougon Kouté.

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