
PRACTICES OF THE INCEST RITUAL ZANKOUMANDO: LEGITIMACY AND REGISTRATION IN THE FON D'ABOMEY-CALAVI COMMUNITIES IN BENIN

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<https://doi.org/10.35410/IJAEB.2021.5627>

ABSTRACT

Incest is a rite that has been practiced since time immemorial in South Benin society. Yet, this way of life is still as gruesome to hear. The present research aims to understand the foundations of the practices of ritual incest in the Fon communities of Abomey-Calavi. In order to do this, a methodological approach based on documentary research, field investigation is essential: direct observation, interviews with 30 individuals were used with the technique of reasoned choice and snowball. The functionalist strategic approaches of B. Malinowki, the determinism of the sociology of deviancy of A. Ogien's determinism of the sociology of deviance and especially the historical method which seemed to be a privileged means to describe, tell and better understand an episode or a person's life experience were used to analyze the data. It emerged that the zankoumando incest ritual practiced in the Fon community since time immemorial is an ancestral heritage and is neither a taboo nor a social anomaly. The rite It ensures the social and cultural balance of the actors. However, the rite is depreciated by the collective vision because it is a social prohibition and a social norm that must be preserved. It is inconceivable that a father and his daughter, a mother and her son, a brother and a sister, in short two parents of the same blood make love to each other or even marry at the right wedding.

Keywords: Ritual incest, legitimacy, inheritance, social prohibition, Abomey-Calavi.

1. INTRODUCTION

The social organization of men is founded on institutions. By institutions, we mean all the social forms or structures established by law or custom (A. Aguessi, 1987, p.36). Even though living together does not have clearly stated rules, it nonetheless obeys a set of rigorous instructions that a member must respect if he wishes to remain in the group (F. Badou, 2002). , p.18). First, due to the universal incest prohibition, all societies prohibit intimate relationships between parents in the direct line. The prohibitions are not exclusively related to consanguinity links. In addition, "societies enact positive rules fixing the choice of spouse: for example, the daughter of the father's sister is prohibited, while marriage is strongly recommended, or even prescribed, with the daughter of the mother's brother" (D. Ahouangonou, 1992, p.75).

We understand that the idea of future spouses choosing each other for love refers to a recent

phenomenon, which is far from being a generalized model across the world. In ancient traditions, the choice of partners was oriented (J. Biao, 2003, p.48). The spouses are first co-opted by their respective families before being taxed. Under the influence of Western cultures, this practice is increasingly frowned upon and poorly tolerated (A.Girard, 1964, p.5). Because, Western civilization characterized by the preeminence of individual freedom recognizes the free will of partners (P. Bonté, 2005). The education received in schools and the progress of the means of communication have helped to strengthen this influence on African cultures. The new conditions of existence and changes in mentality favor the exercise of this freedom: population growth, increased mobility, mixing of groups among themselves (E. Fourn, 1995, p.81).

2. METHODOLOGICAL ITINERARY AND RESEARCH MATERIAL

The present research on ritual incest was carried out in the socio-cultural group Fon living in the municipality of Abomey-Calavi which constitutes the framework of empirical collection. It is limited to the North by the Municipality of Zê, to the South by the Atlantic Ocean, in the East by the Communes of Sô-Ava and Cotonou, and in the West by the Communes of Tori-Bossito and Ouidah. It has nine districts which are: Calavi-Center, Godomey, Zinvié, Akassato, Ouèdo, Togba, Hêvié, Kpanroun and Glo-Djigbé. Religion occupies a large part in the life of the men living in this locality and most often strengthens the existing social relations. Despite the establishment of imported religions, there are endogenous practices. Many actors continue to practice them endogenously despite the pressure of revealed religions because they are indigenous.

In order to achieve the set objective, the empirical data were collected and analyzed according to the structural-functionalist approach of Talcott Pearson, the determinism of the sociology of deviance of A. Ogien and especially the historical method are carried out to the helps tools such as observation and semi-structured interviews with a target population comprising young people under supervision, young people in the liberal profession, political actors and resource persons. Qualitative in nature, the production of data was based on a sample of 30 individuals surveyed who reached the information saturation threshold.

The data collection was highly qualitative in that it allowed not only to gain insight into the behavior and perceptions of informants but also to analyze their opinions on the subject in more depth. To better conduct this research, data collection techniques and tools were used. Data collection was facilitated by the following techniques: documentary research, semi-structured interview and observation with their respective tools such as the reading sheet, the interview guide. The observation grid and the questionnaire were used for data collection. To this end, methodological requirements have prompted the choice of two sampling techniques. The sampling techniques that prevailed in the selection of respondents are those of reasoned choice and snowball.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1. Clarification of essential concepts

3.1.1.Zankoumando

Etymologically defined, Zakumando is composed of: zan = the night, ku = to die, to fall, mando = to lie down. The word zankumando literally means if it is dark, I sleep or lie down or rest. This means that, the individual rests where the night surprises him. So he lays his head wherever he

finds it. He can enter any house to lie down. This is why the rite has no prohibitions or sexual taboos. Indeed, Zankumando is a rite which is practiced by the sociocultural group Fon which prohibits to maintain intimate relations with a relative close to oneself in violation of social norms which prohibit the carnal union with a member of the lineage of an individual. given. Zankumando is a ritual incest.

3.1.2. Meaning of incest

The etymology of the concept of incest is further detailed in the work of J-B. Kaboré (2007), For him, the word incest would have appeared in religious writings around 1350. A. Naouri enriched it when he wrote: "From Latin incestum which means strictly sacrilege. Incestum itself derives from incestus which means impure and defiled which incestus is forged on the private "in" and cestus deformation of castus which means chaste, pure so that incestus would also have the meaning of not chaste. It turns out that the same castus quickly and curiously became confused in the evolution of the language with cassus which means empty and free from, until it was supplanted as the supine of the verb careo which literally means "I lack". This etymological track emphasizes the idea of lack and / or emptiness. However, this corresponds perfectly to the state in which the victim finds himself following successive assaults.

Incest is a relationship or union with a close relative and the harms of consanguinity are often cited to justify this prohibition. But in fact, according to ethnologists, the prohibition of incest finds its *raison d'être* in alliance relations with other lineages imposed on future spouses. These alliances allow the family to diversify, to grow stronger, while ultimately incest condemns it to isolation and etiolation. Marriage is an alliance that has the function of linking two different lineages and always corresponds to specific cultural responses. Regardless of the greater or lesser part of the freedom left to individuals, the group prescribes certain rules according to the clans, groups, etc. There are various forms of union including exogamy and endogamy.

3.1.3 Function of the rite

The rite is the set of gestures, acts, words, manipulated objects and associated representations which are repeated whenever the events or circumstances to which they are linked occur periodically or randomly. Moon

One of the characteristics of a rite is that it does not necessarily have a ritualistic goal that is built mostly from symbols. Indeed, the zankumando rite is similar to the initiation rite. It gives the child their integration into the Fon community. They accompany the admission of individuals from the family group or a given group of children to that of adults.

Rites are in fact to link the present to the past, from the individual to the community. The rite also plays the function of integration; which prompts one to write that "what makes the strength of the rite is undoubtedly its effect, nor its intrinsic meaning, nor its practical effectiveness, nor the subjective security that it provides, but the fact that it transforms the situation by strengthening the solidarity of the group that executes it "(P. Laburthe-Tolra and R. Warnier, 1993).

3.2. Zankumando or rite of socialization

3.2.1. Origin of the zankumando rite

The origin of the zankumando rite dates back to the 18th century, when slave raids pushed people to confine themselves to swamps or caves or caves in order to escape a sad fate. In the past, in order to restore the quantitative imbalance existing between men and women, various communities resorted to unnatural relationships. Over time, this community has resorted to the practice of this meeting. The practice has been carried on in some Fon communities from generation to generation to this day. As such, an actor declares:

I cannot say with precision the origin of the zankumando rite that we regularly celebrate in our community. However, I know that this is an ancient practice adopted by our grandparents for centuries. It is a practice that is passed down from generation to generation in some families like ours (B.G, couturier, father, 53 years old).

The perceptions of communities on this kind of relationship relate to endogenous knowledge. Knowledge is based on values such as solidarity, sharing, respect for divinities, etc. Marriage is a union between individuals (man and woman) from the same large family designated by ako ie the panegyric. It is an arrangement, a new union that allows to expand or to converse intrinsic values in a family.

Originally, incest was caused by the promiscuity of members of a given family. The children are born and pile up in enclosures that they used to live in. Children from the same family grow up and go to bed together, sometimes naked. The secondary characters increase and the touching is regular. The nudity of the one and the other does not interfere. The growing curiosity in the eyes of all relatives leads to the act. Thus, the phenomenon is developing. It has not only evolved into a simple intimate relationship, but beyond to the point where marriage ensues.

3.2.2 Description of the zankumando rite

The evolution of the phenomenon has led people to marry. They were making children. At that time, there were real problems in the families. The children were dying. Famine was rife. Diseases of all kinds swept through the ranks of the people. After consultations, the oracle revealed that the people for lack of knowledge. We must therefore atone for evil. To this end, an actor recounts the story of events in these terms:

The Fa revealed that our parents committed mortal sins because of their toll. The misfortune that arose in the community could be averted if the purification rite. What was done. The rite is performed at an early age, as soon as the teenager has entered puberty. The parents organized the session on a day set for the occasion. It begins with a college of parents. The ceremony is officiated by the oldest woman appointed for the occasion. When the time comes, the father enters the room holding his daughter by the left hand. The actual session consists of the father lightly tapping the girl's penis with his own while taking care to avoid penetration. From now on, the girl has joined the community (B.E. the patriarch of the family, 71 years old).

The collective representation of the act conditions the modification of social behavior and local production methods. The culture of the zankumando rite ensures the social, economic and cultural balance of the practitioners. This culture allows practitioners to benefit in all circumstances from the support of the two great allied families. This type of marriage therefore

guarantees protection within the community. In return, the spouses must reciprocally support the members of their respective families in carrying out the various income-generating activities, namely: fishing, agriculture, trade, breeding, crafts. Indeed, the social balance is established. It improves the situation without affecting the well-being of other members of that society. The family being the home and the basis of any human society, its development is fundamental for the well-being of a people or nation.

African rural societies offer resistance, obstacles to progress. They are still largely dependent on traditional, archaic realities, little capable of innovating and adopting rational economic behavior. However, each society has its own social logics, as practices and organizations. All development starts with what we have and what we feel the need; then what the others offer and finally an ingenious capacity to adapt this to local realities

It is evoked the selection of positive values of foreign cultures and endogenous ones. Social actors involved in the practice are inspired by the idea of culture in order to respect tradition, the only vector of connection between past, present and future generations. This makes it possible to live together, 'in a spirit of solidarity while respecting predefined values, norms and mores (O. Bagodo, 2008, p.11).

3.2.3. Permit for the phenomenon

Societal norms dictate the behaviors to be adopted by individuals in order to live without disturbance. By way of illustration, incest, an anomic act, has always disturbed people, regardless of culture and society, and it is still so scary. Empirical research in anthropology, sociology, psychology and mythology shows that the phenomenon of incest is part of the history of communities. Several researchers have demonstrated the existence of constant violations of the incest ban.

Like the Pharaoh of Egypt where the king rarely took a foreigner to become a royal wife. His wife was often chosen from more or less distant members of his family in order to maintain the purity of the race in the dynasty. It's the same scenario that happened with the kings of Abomey. In the commune of Abomey-Calavi, there is a similar system that the actors call bloxouédo which is a practice whereby a young man marries a young girl in his family. It's a marriage by arrangement.

Indeed, in the communities where the system is practiced, sexual relations are allowed between brothers and sisters, cousins and cousins, or between members having a bond of affinity, because this union ensures the survival of the tribe and the preservation of the territory. Families multiplied and men sought to meet their needs for belonging and sharing. In some traditionally conservative families, ritual incest is easily practiced, incest is well regarded, but also partially obligatory because it is a transmission of the values of kinship. Marriage was compulsory and the closer the kinship was between the spouses, the more commendable it was. In this perspective, an actress testifies, in these terms:

I am Amélie, 28, seamstress by profession, married to Georges, electrician. We sign the same name. My husband is my uncle's child. We are cousin and cousin. Don't be surprised. It is a rite

that we perform in our family and that requires that we can marry like this. It is without any gene or prohibited. Many of my cousins did the same. But some of us, especially those with higher education, shirk this tradition. I have no problem with this rite because our differences are settled between our parents (A.B. Couturière, 28 years old).

3.2.4. Prohibition of incest

Incest is above all a symbolic transgression of the genealogical order fraught with psychological and somatic consequences. Incest itself is the subject of a taboo which it shares with sexual violence in general, especially when it affects children. The prohibition of incest is the object of copious interpretations finalists: biological aversion of spontaneous, apprehension of the presumed negative effects of inbreeding, or symbolic underpinning of the passage from nature to culture based on the universality of the social contract.

In Beninese societies, it is strictly forbidden to have intimate relations with consanguinity. To this end, an actor advises:

In our community, I think it's the same almost everywhere in other societies, also spawning mothers, daughters, your sisters, your paternal aunts, your maternal aunts, your brothers 'daughters, your sisters' daughters, your mothers who breastfed you, your foster sisters, the mothers of your wives, the daughters-in-law placed under your tutelage, born of your wives with whom you have consummated the marriage, no fault, however, will be imputed to you if the marriage has not been consumed, the wives of your sons, from your kidneys. You are still prohibited from marrying two sisters. If a man takes a girl in marriage and then also lives with her mother and sister, he commits a capital crime. He also prohibits sexual relations between a man and his mother, between a man and his daughter (T; G. Patriarch, 81 years old).

4. DISCUSSION

The constitution of a couple for the perpetuation of the human species is often subject to some ritual which gives it its legitimacy. The child born of this alliance "represents in itself a threat to the equilibrium of the society into which it introduces a foreign body. It will be necessary to integrate it into society, to communicate its rules to it "(P. Laburthe-Tolra and R. Bureau, 2011, p.68).

Man has his vision of the world in which both his problems and resolution fit. Life sometimes appears mysterious and you have to look for the meaning of each event. From reflection on the mystery of life, death and the need to survive and seek happiness arises the idea of rites. Thus, the society in which the individual finds himself is subject to laws or rules. And it calls for institutions like religion governed by norms that create and maintain harmony and cohesion among members of society (E. Durkheim, 2017, p.92).

Sometimes certain beliefs of one group influence those of the other but do not change them. Human beings are not able to give themselves the salvation they desire. They admit that a transcendental force could overpower evil and establish world order. It is through manifestations that men find this salvation. The manifestations of necessarily pass through the rites sometimes

relating to prohibitions or taboos of gods and spirits. Any religion therefore presupposes a minimum of organization and hierarchy. Rite is an effective language in that it acts on social reality. Man must rely on symbols recognized by the community to perform the rite. Its effectiveness depends on the overall validity of the ceremonial, that is to say so that there must be a certain number of operations, gestures, words and objects agreed upon, that there is belief to one of transcendence (FA Isambert, 1982, p.109).

The individual prefers to free himself from social constraints, even if it means losing comfort and security. The zankumando rite at higher degrees of very complex esoteric knowledge cannot cope with the desire of the masses to achieve individual autonomy. It responds neither to the requirements of a personal morality, nor to that of modern rationalism, a condition of technical development, nor to that of an ideal of progress, since it is a practice based on repetition and exaltation. the past.

The zankumando rite is one of the oldest customs in black Africa. Its origins are lost far in the past and no one, not even the most skillfully constituted legends, can give reliable indications of it. The rite accords dignity to the family of the young man and that of the young girl, but varies from one socio-cultural group to another. However, to appreciate the rite, one should first understand the African conception of women and marriage which legitimizes the institution. She's there condition of legitimation of any union. The young man's lineage must fulfill this customary obligation since the young girl is considered a source of wealth, human through her fertility and through her work.

The patrilineal system that characterizes the family makes polygamy a societal value of maintenance, procreation and social regulation. It allows the majority of women to live in safety under a man's roof. The various contributions of theories and analyzes make it possible to orient the research in order to give it a particularity and to glimpse, in a new light, the questions of the dynamics of traditional marriage. The multiplicity of legal, economic, ethical and ritual implications has led to doubts about the universal existence of marriage (C. Rivière (1978, p.71)

The various anthropological works mentioned show how complex it is to study the institution of marriage. Indeed, according to different cultures and different times, this institution has undergone many changes. Before turning to the type of marriage that prevails in Fon communities, it is urgent to explore the methodological approach adopted in this work.

When we consider the sociological studies carried out in European societies, they reveal that the choice that appears to everyone as the result of a strictly individual decision is in fact subject to regulatory social influences. Thus, contemporary society practices a triple homogamy: geographic, social and cultural. Homogamy refers to the union between two similar individuals. The choice of spouse tends to be made in a certain geographical proximity and it is more readily focused on a partner of the same religious practice (A. Girard, 1964, p.171).

Individuals tend to conform to a collective pattern, regardless of how aware they are of it. They reproduce the family model, thus ensuring a certain permanence of social structures. This theory, at length described by the same researcher, also fits in the context of ethnic group. Even if this group attaches less importance to the socio-economic level and to the level of education in the

choice of the spouse, the fact of belonging to the same geographical environment is desired by its members, which makes them attach great importance to consideration of the union between people of the same ethnic group. The average age at which one gets married and the marriage rate are culturally specific, that is, specific to a particular group within society as a whole.

In most Western societies, men and women are free to accept whoever they want, no matter what group they belong to.

Theoretically in our society, we can choose a woman from any group of all of humanity. Without going to the limits of the planet, let's say that in theory a Frenchman can choose his wife from any group of French people. The ideal image of marriage in our society is a perfect game of chance, where only the laws of chance govern the choice of spouse, and it is the ideal model on which industrial society operates. Social, professional and geographic mobility should not in principle be limited by preferential marriage rules (H. Mendras, 1975, p.163).

The model has not been strong in traditional societies where it is believed that marriage within the group strengthens the unity of this group and contributes to an overall development in harmony with the social factor. Men have never left to the sole initiative of individuals recognized unions which ensure almost all the offspring and affect the very existence and organization of groups.

5. CONCLUSION

The practices of the Zankumadon rite continue to deeply mark the daily life of the actors despite the presence of foreign religions. The way in which the ritual practice is expressed varies according to the communities. Each people has their own beliefs. Among Fon d'Abomey-Calavi actors, it is even considered that there is more than one soul inside each human being. Nevertheless, ancestor worship remains an essential common point in many of these variants of endogenous religions. To attract favor or calm the anger of the spirits which are particularly feared, it is advisable to practice a certain number of rites, sacrifices, incantations or offerings. Believers also try to come into contact with spirits in order to obtain all kinds of benefits: healing, fertility, etc. but also advice or omens. The messages sent to the world are parallel and which, for believers, have the same materiality as the earthly world. The practice of the ritual often involves objects to which a sacred dimension is granted.

Churches and mosques do their best to root their message in cultures that are foreign to them. The advent of these religions changed the behavior of the people in the practice of ritual. The traditions undergo modifications due to modernity, the rites instituted by the ancestors still continue to be performed in the community.

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