

RESILIENCE DU RITE BOSOSO FACE A L'ACCULTURATION DU PEUPLE BOYELA

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the Bososo rite, the most practiced by the Boyela people of the Tshuapa Sector in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Its role in regulating social relations within this rural administrative entity remains active and thus constitutes the bastion that resists any form of acculturation. It brings together two components: judicial and administrative, thus imitating the forms of organization of the legal and administrative structures of the national jurisdiction. However, its current practical deployment leads to a high visibility of the predatory and extremist nature of the animators of the Boyela customary structures who use it for food purposes only. The Boyela customary norms need to be revisited and the customary structures to be really taken care of by the Congolese State. We believe that under these conditions, the customary Boyela extremism crystallized today by the Bososo rite will turn its back on the path of radicalization to be an important partner of the State for the socio-economic development of the Tshuapa Sector.

Keywords: Resilience, Acculturation, Customary Rite, Hybridity, Positive Law

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Every collectively organized society is subject to systematically established and structured rites, and this in all aspects of community life¹. In contemporary traditional Africa, and especially in the villages, almost everything is ritualized², liturgized.

However, globalization, acting as a steamroller, is making its way through and trampling on customs, traditions and ways of life, thus accelerating the process of acculturation of indigenous societies.

On the other hand, the way of life of certain peoples seems to give the lie to this reality. This is the case of the Boyela people living in the Tshuapa Sector in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Indeed, the social life of this people is subject to a varied range of ritual activities, the practical deployment of which proves to be the bastion that best resists acculturation. One of them is the judicial ritual Bososo, the subject of this study.

¹ Mgr Tshibangu Tshisiku, le rite et la condition humaine, in Actes du 3e colloque International du CERA, Kinshasa 16-22 février 1986. Special issue Cahiers de religions Africaines Vol. XX-XXI, N°39-42, Faculty of Catholic Theology of Kinshasa, 1987.

² Jean Koulagna and Al Moustafa, the history of religious facts in Africa, 2023 version, P.5

The Bososo rite manages both administrative costs and customary transgressions among the Boyela people of the Tshuapa Sector. Its regulatory role remains active despite the presence of competing institutions such as modern schools, revealed religions, state jurisdictions, and a nearby university.

On the other hand, Mongo nationals from neighbouring sectors currently rely much more on the jurisdictions of national jurisdiction to regulate the life of the population. The root causes of the resilience of this rite in this rural environment need to be elucidated, and this is precisely the central idea of this modest work. We want, in fact, through the analysis of the ceremonial deployment of this rite, to explain why the customary resilience of the Boyela people of the Sector under examination passes through the Bososo rite?

Already, and in view of the observations made, we think at this stage of our reflection that socio-cultural, economic and psychological factors justify the customary resilience of the Boyela people in the face of acculturation.

Thus, in addition to the introduction and conclusion, this article is structured around four points: the first contains the theoretical and methodological corpus of the study. The second presents the study environment, the third describes the Bososo rite and highlights its different functions in Boyela society. The fourth point emphasizes the root causes that channel the Boyela nationals towards the performance of the Bososo rite and presents the results of this research. A conclusion and a few recommendations conclude this scientific reflection.

2.0 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CORPUS

The theoretical approach used in this study is Robert King Merton's renewed functionalism, a medium-range theory that takes into account the distinction between the overt and latent functions of a society's organs as well as the notion of dysfunction. As for the methodological approach, we have resorted to functional analysis which, according to Professor OTEMIKONGO MANDEFU³, assigns to the researcher the task of discovering the organs in which the main social functions that allow the proper functioning and maintenance of a given society are embodied, and to describe their specific contribution to the play of social dynamics.

Through the free interview on the history of the Bososo rite, its evolution and its functions in Boyela society, we obtained the information that served as support for our assertions in the form of empirical data. The resource persons were some initiates in the Boyela customary rites and their offspring, the administrator of the Ikela territory and the former chiefs of the Tshuapa Sector who, at the time of the survey, were students in the sociology department of the University of Ikela. and some personalities of civil society, in this case doctors and teachers who are sons of the soil. The targeting was made in favor of individuals who were supposed to be able to form a will in relation to the question under study. The ENE and IKOLOMWA groups, located respectively 10 and 34 km from the capital of the territory of Ikela, were targeted by our intensive field surveys during the first six months of 2025

³ OTEMIKONGO MANDEFU, *The War of Methods in Social Sciences. From the choice of the epistemological paradigm to the evaluation of results*, Paris, Harmattan, 2018, P.

The realization of this study was made possible thanks to the savings we made over four years and thanks to the support of some members of our family of origin and our acquaintances. In the field, we benefited from the help of a team of interviewers who worked almost voluntarily with whom we were in contact both face-to-face and online.

3.0 PRESENTATION OF THE STUDY ENVIRONMENT

3.1 Geographical and demographic aspects of the Tshuapa Sector

The Tshuapa Sector is one of the five Sectors that make up the Ikela Territory. It is a crossroads linking the province of Tshuapa to the other three, namely the province of Tshopo through the territory of Opala, that of Maniema by the Samanda group and that of Sankuru via the forest of Looli. By road, it is located 85 km from the capital of the territory of Ikela and 545 km from Boende, capital of the province of Tshuapa.

Its area is 355Km² and its population was estimated at 44,953 inhabitants in 2015. Its density is 0.8 h/km², one of the lowest in the country. It has an equatorial climate characterized by high temperatures and it rains almost all year round. Its lush vegetation is made up of diverse arboreal species, very high values and a fairly rich fauna. In addition to the Tshuapa River, which is navigable for the most part and which flows into the Congo River upstream from the city of Mbandaka, there are several other rivers and streams, the most important of which are LOKENDU, LOKELA and LWA. Its sandy and clayey soil lends it to both an agricultural and mining vocation.

3.2 Historical aspects

The Tshuapa Sector is populated mainly by the Boyela tribe, considered pygmoid by other fractions of the Mongo ethnic group living in the west of the country. Hypotheses concerning the origin of this people claim that they were part of the great migration of Bantu from the north, driven by ethnic wars and motivated by the search for new peaceful sites of residence. In their migration, they crossed the Congo River upstream from BUMBA and YAKATA. This route allowed them to reach the sources of the LUO River in DJOLU⁴

3.3 Political-administrative aspects.

The Tshuapa Sector is one of the decentralized territorial entities enjoying a certain organic and financial autonomy. It has legal personality under Law No. 82-006 of 26 July 1982. Under the Constitution of 18 February 2006 and pursuant to Organic Law No. 08/016 of 7 October 2008, on the composition, organization and functioning of decentralized territorial entities, the Tshuapa Sector enjoys the status of a decentralized territorial entity and is therefore placed at the third administrative level after the provinces, cities and territories.

3.4 Economic aspects

Agriculture is the main economic activity in this rural area. It is practiced mainly for subsistence. Generally, cassava is the crop that predominates, followed on a smaller scale by

⁴ VANDER KERKEN, *Ethnie Mongo*, Brussels, IRCB, 1943, p.76

plantain and maize. Pig and goat breeding, hunting, especially trapping, and fishing are also practiced there. Coffee cultivation has lost its momentum there. However, there is still a rubber plantation belonging to the Busira-Lomami company in the Lokofe group, which continues to produce synthetic rubber.

Despite the constant pressure on the forest, the fauna and flora continue to provide animal protein as best they can. Mushroom picking and caterpillar collection complete the list of food products available to the population of the Tshuapa Sector.

3.4.1 Socio-cultural aspects

The Tshuapa Sector is full of linguistic diversity linked to the tribal groups established in the region. Among the indigenous people are the Balanga, the Bakutsu and the Lokalo, who are a linguistic minority compared to the Boyela, who occupy 11 of the 13 groupings of this territorial entity. Among the non-natives, there is a Topoke community from the neighboring province of Tshopo. In addition to the dialects of the various groups mentioned above, the Lingala language is used inter-communally. Thirty primary schools and seventeen secondary schools are operational. Health coverage is provided by 20 health posts and six health centres.

4.0 OVERVIEW OF THE BOSOSO RITE

4.1 Brief history

According to historical accounts, the Bososo rite has been part of the ancestral tradition of the Boyela people since pre-colonial times. However, its current posture, described by some as extremist, manifested itself within the Boyela customary structures around 1969 in order to put an end to the period described as "Bonyenye" which, according to the language of the milieu, means disorder, rebellion, anarchy and chaos. It will be remembered with interest that at that time, the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly Zaire, was emerging from a similar crisis that spared no institution.

4.2 Definition

The word Bososo comes from the verb kososa which, in the Boyela language, has a double meaning:

On the one hand, it means blessing a person who pays his customary fines or who pays customary administrative fees within the allotted time; on the other hand, it deals with contentious cases involving fines or unpaid customary administrative fees. In the second case, the mode of operation of the Bososo rite is accompanied by scenes of inconvenience and sudden illnesses, serious and incurable by modern medicine, or by fatal accidents, which most often end in the death of the litigant or customary debtor.

4.3 Conduct of the Bososo rite

4.3.1 Preparations

As soon as a case of deviance or litigation is observed at the level of a Boyela village, the customary people who have performed the succession rite called Bonkindo mobilize around the leader of the group whose power has been legitimized by his peers. Thus, the chief of the village concerned, his clan chiefs and families will gather around the chief of the group to identify the fine or customary administrative fee previously established in the Boyela nomenclature of customary sanctions and to make it known to the litigant

4.3.2 Setting penalties by customary people

The penalties required in the context of the Bososo rite are paid in increments of two, five, ten, twenty, or even thirty hens depending on the nature of the transgression. To this are added in the same order, the equivalent of smoked game legs as well as one or two goats which must serve as a libation in favor of the customary litigant; without omitting the equivalent measures of salt, bottles of palm oil, loincloths of chikwange called Mombita, as well as copper objects (konga), all crowned by a small quantity of alcoholic beverages, part of which is consumed during the cooking of food brought by the litigant or customary debtor and the other part will be used during the blessing formulas at the end of the rite.

4.3.3 Scenography of the Bososo rite

1. The referral to the customary body by the offender's relative, a former initiate in the various Boyela rites.
2. Establishment of evidence and setting of fines by customary people
3. Payment of recommended fines
4. Symbolic incarceration of the offender in his or her box
5. Cooking the food brought in according to the standards: wash it lightly, without cutting the game meat legs into pieces, nor removing the gizzards from the hens, except for the pancreas, but cover everything with leaves adding palm oil, salt and chili pepper and leave the pot heated for less than half an hour.
6. The cook on instruction brings the whole pot and places it in front of the customary
7. Sharing of the food thus prepared according to the status of each member of the customary body
8. Speech in the open air by the authorized customary chief relating the conduct of the offender, the date of the offence, his desire to amend himself to respect custom, the goods he offered to the elders to prove it. As a result, he will say, that he is now free to carry out all his activities and to prosper, he and his family now protected, will anyone who wishes him harm live? And the assembly of customary people gathered together will respond with a choir! In the Boyela language, the question that sanctions the discourse is Afoseko? (right?) Oseko e, e, eh! (so be it)

4.3.4 Deviant acts, fines and administrative taxes

Deviant acts and administrative costs in the Boyela custom are currently divided into four levels according to the seriousness of the transgression or the size of the customary fees to be paid, the unit of measurement being a hen or a rooster, a leg of smoked game, palm oil, salt and a little wine. Thus, level I, the weakest, is double; Level 2 is fivefold, level 3 is tenfold, level 4 is twenty-fold and thirty-fold. From the transgression of level 2, copper and goat are

added in proportion to the level concerned. The current value of copper objects is 2000 Congolese francs, a little less than one US dollar

Below are some recurrent examples of transgressions and the movable and immovable property to be taxed provided for by the Boyela custom and their levels of fines or corresponding fees to be paid. We present them here according to their level of transgression (1, 2, 3, 4) or the importance of the taxes (1, 2, 3, 4) to be paid to the customary administration:

Table 1: Recurrent Examples of Judicial Fines and Customary Administrative Fees in the Tshuapa Sector

No.	Customary justice	Level	No.	Customary administration	Level
1	Innocence confirmed by a soothsayer	01	1	First harvest made by a daughter-in-law	01
2	Renunciation of self-defense	01	2	Teenager who builds his first panel	01
3	Fights between married people or between co-wives	02	3	Report of travel or stay outside the village	01
4	Fights without injuries or material or human damage	02	4	Acquisition of modern manufactured goods (vehicle, motorcycle, bicycle, television, radio, etc.)	02
5	Intentional or unintentional injuries	02	5	Professional development	02
6	Defamation confirmed	02	6	School Diplomas	02
7	Rape of a young girl	-			
8	Fall of a notable during his trip by motorcycle or bicycle	02			
	Public nudity of a married person	2			
9	Theft with evidence	2			
10	Absence from activities of common interest	2			
11	Wicked destruction on the effect of anger (Houses, clothes, objects of any kind)	3			
12	Failing to hand over to the customary people the breasts of goats, slaughtered goats and those of warthogs	3			
4	Failing to bring to the customaries, before dawn, without butchering them, a crocodile, a python or a giant pangolin	3			
5	A public day for the opposite sex	3			
6	Crossing the home of a traditional chief while chasing his opponent	3			
7	Keeping a harmful fetish for personal use outside the customary circuit	4			

8	Keeping a goat or a goat under the pretext of wandering	4			
9	Kill a leopard or golden eagle	4			

Notes on Level 4: Twenty-Fold, Thirtie-Increment

The Boyela ancestors were limited to level 3 of fines or customary administrative fees. However, for a person who privately owned a fetish that would allow him to cause death in the village, the customary people would seize him and take him to the forest to be hanged, since all fetishes should be used only in the customary structure. It is within the latter that everything related to harmful magic must be poured for appropriate collective use. The Boyela customary structure therefore functions in the manner of a secret society.

Given that only the State has the monopoly of legitimate physical violence, the current Boyela customs, for fear of being prosecuted, take refuge in their nomenclature of penalties by adding the rubric of twenty and thirty with the idea that the offender could not acquit himself and that he will certainly die by customary means.

The construction of an ecclesial building or demonstrations under the Congolese state are not taken into account. However, the honored Boyela natives will have to return to the village to pay the fees related to their new status.

4.3.5 Totemism linked to the Bososo rite

Radcliffe-Brown⁵ gives the word totem the following ethnographic meaning: The totem refers to all situations where, in a society divided into groups, there is a special relationship between each of them and one or more classes of objects, usually natural species of animals or plants. Among the Boyela people, the leopard, the golden eagle, the goat or the goat are considered totemic. To do this, they require special attitudes and treatments. Indeed, the death of a leopard, whatever the reason, will be accompanied by that of at least two people in this village and several ceremonies and offerings will have to be offered in honor of the dead king. The same is true for the golden eagle.

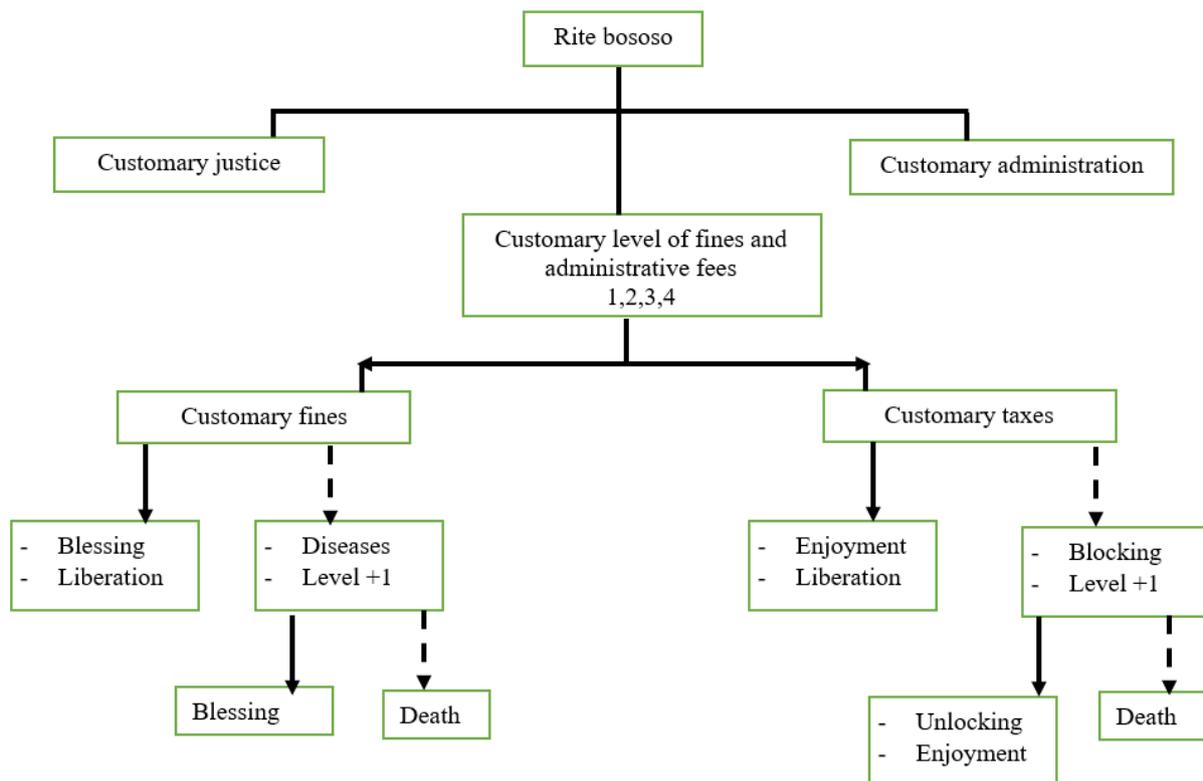
As for goats or goats, it is forbidden to capture them because of wandering or because they damage the crops. Their death in captivity costs the death of at least one person in the family of the person who captured them. Custom recommends that villagers take the trouble to build enclosures rather than touch this animal. Although the goat is totemic, it can be sold alive. In the event that it is slaughtered, its breast must be offered to the customary people under penalty of loss of life in the family of the owner of the goat or goat. The same is true of the warthog's chest and finally, the case of the crocodile and the python. Once hunted and captured, they must be transported fresh to the customary chief before dawn. In all these cases, the Bososo rite will intervene to stop the succession of deaths. All the extraordinary power of the Bososo rite is linked to the power of the words that come from the mouths of the assembled customary chiefs. Although sometimes extremist in nature, this rite regulates social relations in the Tshuapa Sector.

⁵ A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, Structure et fonction dans la société primitive, Paris, Ed. de Minuit, 1968, pp 188

4.3.6 Semiotics of the Bososo rite?

For people who do not comply with customary requirements, their lives show one of the following signs: Sudden illnesses incurable by modern medicine, manufactured goods blocked in their operation, successive deaths in the offender's family, the visit of the "Bononga" policeman, death of the offender or customary debtor.

Operational diagram of the Bososo rite



4.3.7 Function of the Bososo rite in Boyela society

The descriptive protocol of functional analysis as suggested by Professor ESISO⁶ led us to detect the following functions of the Bososo rite:

a) The Bososo rite contributes to the adaptation or adjustment of the Boyela customary legal system. Indeed, thanks to the resources generated by the Bososo rite, the Boyela customary people, who are responsible for regulating the daily life of the inhabitants of the Tshuapa Sector, can adapt to the constraints of a social and economic environment of scarcity. For their part, customary litigants find themselves faced with a local justice system and an ancestral administration that highlights their identity.

b) The Bososo rite is full of both manifest and latent functions.

⁶ ESISO ASIA-AMANI, Manual of Research Methodology in Social Sciences, Ed. de l'IRSA, Kisangani, 2012, PP 62-63

In its judicial aspect, the Bososo rite habitually re-educates the components of Boyela society, fights against delinquency and ensures peace throughout the Tshuapa Sector. Thanks to the above-mentioned rite, the generation of non-initiates in customary rites learns about the values of Boyela society and its prohibitions, formal initiation rites being abolished. However, the rite under scrutiny activates the mystical elements who are accused of being at the origin of the socio-economic blockage in the Tshuapa sector.

c) The Bososo rite has allowed us to discern its perverse effects

Apart from peace and security, the Bososo rite has transformed the customary structures of the Boyela and its leaders into local potentates under the powerless gaze of the political and judicial structures of the national jurisdiction. The latter excel in the production of norms and the search for infringements with a view to non-transactional fines. It is with good reason that the population of the Tshuapa Sector sticks the name of CARITAS to it by analogy with this structure of the Catholic Church in charge of the remuneration of Congolese state officials working in this rural environment. Here, the creditors are the customary people who will have to expect their remuneration from the Bososo rite as do state officials. Following its current mode of operation, the customary people now turn more to the material and financial aspects than, as in the past, to the cultural aspects of Boyela society.

d) The Bososo rite is a functional alternative involving functional equivalents and functional substitutes

The Boyela people of the Tshuapa Sector evolve in a socio-economic environment of scarcity accentuated by the lack of interest that the Congolese State currently shows in the development of rural areas. Feeling abandoned by the central government, the Boyela customary people turned to the Bososo rite which ensured them the supply of money, chicken meat and game meat, which were highly prized in this environment, especially by the elderly, who were the majority in the customary structures. The Bososo rite therefore replaces the Congolese State in its role as remunerative of its partner structures.

5.0 CAUSES OF THE RESILIENCE OF THE BOSOSO RITE IN THE FACE OF ACCULTURATION

The causes of the resilience of the Bososo rite are socio-cultural, economic and psychological.

5.1 Socio-cultural

The Boyela customary people note the decline of traditional values and remain dissatisfied with the results of modern education. There is currently a trend towards a return to initiation rites. These are currently done discreetly, informally, but obligatory for the young people who have remained in the village. However, the duration of training during these initiation rites has been reduced and the assimilation of the related teachings is questionable. The increasing number of customary transgressions in this rural environment seems to be explained by the lack of assimilation of customary norms that had to be taught in appropriate sites and for the duration provided for by the original custom. However, the customary Bososo rite unfolds concomitantly with harmful magic, hence the recording of several deaths due to this rite in the Tshuapa Sector.

5.2 On the economic level

Although this rite requires the payment of non-transactional fines, it is within the reach of the majority of the population because it activates clan solidarity to save the life of the litigant or customary debtor. Unlike the fines and taxes provided for by the judicial and administrative courts emanating from the Congolese State, those relating to the Bososo rite are generally accessible to these rural people.

5.3 On the psychological level

The judicial and administrative courts have re-education centres such as prisons and amigos. Litigants can serve their sentences there and even suffer some physical violence from the specialized services of the State. However, they are supposed to return home quietly at the end of the period of incarceration. This is not the case for the customary litigant. The mode of operation of the Bososo rite activates the mystical element of custom, which begins by creating situations of inconvenience, illness and immobility in the life of the litigant or customary debtor, leading in most cases to the death of the latter. This situation creates fear in the lives of the population and predisposes them to resort to the Bososo rite, although it is quite difficult to dissociate natural diseases from those caused by customary Boyela transgressions. Here are the recurring verbatim recorded during our interviews that reflect the psychological effect on these inhabitants: "Epai na bango ngolu ezalaka te"; "Bokoko nde ezo kamba, the State te"! "kuna eza nde kindoki," "Soki bokoko te l'Etat ekokoka eloko té!" "Ozuami na lolenge wana balekisi yo na diet ya 48 hours". Literally, these five verbatim verbatims translate respectively as: "With them, there is no indulgence", "It is custom that governs and not the State", "there is witchcraft", "The State cannot rule without custom", "You are joking, we make you pass into the 48-hour regime" (you die in two days)

6.0 CONCLUSION

The Bososo ritual, like any other African customary ritual, aims at social cohesion and the strengthening of social ties among the Boyela of the Tshuapa Sector in the Democratic Republic of Congo. However, its practical deployment is coupled with a metaphysical face that besieges the population, inclining it to a forced resilience. Almost the entire population is unanimous on this point, as evidenced by these few verbatim: The Boyela customary people integrate the harmful magic "witchcraft" into their mode of operation. We therefore think, in our opinion, that the resilience of the Bososo rite in the face of acculturation is only a façade. It is based on metaphysical factors that deserve our attention in view of their developmental implications for the Tshuapa Sector.

In view of the dilemma in which this population is placed, we suggest that the Congolese State ensure that extraordinary courts are prohibited for matters provided for by Congolese positive law; to promote the training of local para-lawyers to combat ignorance of the law; to promulgate anti-totemic laws to promote the breeding of small livestock throughout the Tshuapa sector and to ensure regular care for the elderly who are in the Boyela customary structures.

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