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Traditional Yoruba Society And Mechanisms Of Conflict Management, Prevention And Resolution In "The Gods Are Not To Blame" By Ola Rotimi.

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Abstract: The importance of social harmony is addressed in literature, particularly African literature, in which it has a prominent place. In *The Gods are not to Blame* by Olawale Gladstone Emmanuel Rotimi, a Nigerian playwright better known as Ola Rotimi, we have a description of endogenous mechanisms and practices that aim to create a harmonious living environment in the community and with its surroundings. Through the study of the play, which presents life in Kutuje, a Yoruba community, the author celebrates the efficiency of the mechanisms established by Africans, which are of various kinds in the management, prevention and resolution of conflicts. Indeed, he highlights the traditional political, social and religious mechanisms that promote social cohesion. These mechanisms can be of two kinds: coercive or non-coercive. In the context of this work, we will quote some key features of traditional Yoruba society in the first section. Then, we will focus on mechanisms developed in that society ranging from the endogenous coercive aspects to the non-coercive mechanisms depicted by the author. Through a literary and analytical approach, we will show how the advocates for a return to endogenous mechanisms for social cohesion.

IndexTerms: Conflict- mechanism- traditional- harmony.

Résumé : L'importance de l'harmonie sociale est transcrite dans la littérature et particulièrement la littérature africaine dans laquelle elle occupe une place de choix. Dans la représentation particulière de la culture et de la société traditionnelle Yoruba, faite par le dramaturge Nigérian Olawalé Gladstone Emmanuel Rotimi, plus connu sous le nom de Ola Rotimi, dans la pièce théâtrale « The *Gods Are not to Blame* », il y décrit les mécanismes et pratiques endogènes qui visent à créer un environnement de vie harmonieux dans la communauté et avec leur entourage. A travers l'étude de la pièce dramaturgique qui présente la vie à Kutuje, une communauté Yoruba, l'auteur célèbre l'efficience des mécanismes établis par les Africains qui sont de divers ordres dans la gestion, prévention et résolution de conflits. En effet, il fait étalage des mécanismes traditionnels à caractères politique, social, et religieux qui militent pour la cohésion sociale. Ces derniers pour l'atteinte des résultats escomptés peuvent être de deux natures : coercitifs ou non coercitifs. Dans le cadre de ce travail, nous nous intéresserons dans un premier temps aux aspects coercitifs avant de conclure avec les mécanismes endogènes non coercitifs dépeints par l'auteur. Par une approche littéraire et analytique, nous montrerons comment l'auteur milite pour un retour aux mécanismes endogènes pour une cohésion sociale.

Mots clés : Conflit- mécanisme- traditionnel- harmonie.

Introduction

Like any other human communities in general, African society has shaped a way of life that has certain forms of organisation or at least a hierarchy. This way of life leads to the creation and adoption of moral virtues and social regulation mechanisms for mutual defence and interest. The respect of these norms allows the members of the community to live in harmony with each other and with their environment. However, the encounter between Africa and the West in the form of colonisation has contributed to the destabilisation of this organisation, to the disintegration of cultures and then to the abandonment of some traditional African knowledge and practices. The result has been a disorientation and extraversion of the functioning of African society, which makes Africa almost entirely dependent on external aid and contributions. Its development is essentially contingent upon international stakeholders and is evaluated according to Western standards.

This situation, more than ever, weakens the continent, which has been broken up into small nation states, and above all the social fabric. It is also undermining the ability of many communities to live together. We are therefore [2]witnessing the emergence of hotbeds of tension, crises and wars throughout the continent. Social cohesion, once commonplace in traditional African society, is nowadays an invaluable treasure pursued by all through mediation and national days of reconciliation, all of which are incapable of really healing hearts.

In the light of the multiple failures of these various attempts to resolve issues through modern methods, there is a growing interest in returning to traditional methods. Indeed, Africa has its own mechanisms for preventing and resolving conflicts, which may help to cope with the situation. Thus, modern models of conflict management can be associated to traditional institutions and practices, or more precisely by local conflict management mechanisms, which are indispensable tools for conflict prevention, management and resolution.

The present article, "*Yoruba traditional society and mechanisms of conflict management, prevention and resolution in Ola Rotimi's The Gods are not to Blame*", addresses the Nigerian writer's particular representation of these mechanisms in traditional Yoruba society. It is to be a contribution to the search for alternative solutions for viable conflict resolution in Africa in order to ensure sustainable development in a peaceful environment.

I. Fundamental aspects of traditional Yoruba society

Human communities are organised according to a particular vision of life and of the world in general. Therefore, life is based on an established structure, which denotes the originality of any society. In the African context in general, and the Yoruba community in particular, there are some characteristics, which show “the Africanness” of their ways and practices, in other words, which make these societies African or Yoruba. These characteristics are representative of the African conception of life; the relevance of which allows these societies to be time-resistant while helping people to have a harmonious existence.

In the present section, we refer to these cornerstone aspects of African societies as “the fundamental aspects.” The author of the reference play *The Gods Are Not to Blame (TGAB)* speaks, though superficially, about these fundamental elements, which help create cohesion and harmony in the traditional society. Life in general and its regulation are modelled according to and in respect of these aspects among Yoruba people. In *TGAB*, Rotimi addresses some of the cherished aspects that govern people’s existence and make harmony efficient in the dramatized Yoruba community.

In traditional societies, people experience a set of cherished beliefs and practices, the aim of which is to cope with the versatile nature of human beings. These beliefs and practices are [1]special attitudes, behaviours, and rites very expressive of the belief system, the ways of life in African societies, and they help promote moral virtues and social order. In other words, they contribute to create a harmonious social environment.

[1] Les sociétés traditionnelles …se concevaient essentiellement comme gouvernées par la volonté divine…L’ordre social était d’abord et avant tout un ordre divin. Ainsi les hiérarchies, les inégalités, l’autorité exprimaient la volonté divine…Dans les sociétés traditionnelles, le sens et la signification de la vie humaine et sociale sont donnés par Dieu. (Sfez, 1993)

1. Customs

Life in African societies is governed by customs. Customs are the regulatory principles and any true African individual knows their place and role in his/ her life. Every act, activity and deed rests upon them. Customs mainly define every aspect of human existence and represent the accepted way of behaving or doing things in the community. According to Ola Rotimi in *TGAB*, customs derive their importance mostly from the fact that they are not man made. Rotimi shows that customs rather have a divine or spiritual origin. In the reference play, the priest of Ogun clearly states this when Odewale, the king, threatens to know who ordered the killing of the baby in the forest. The priest says "It is the custom: when the gods command, we men must obey" (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002)). Through this statement, it comes out that customs are the implementation of the will of the gods. Men are only performers. Rotimi stresses the fact that traditional societies rest on divine authority enforced by the living. Lucien Sfez pointedly expresses this idea in *Dictionnaire Critique de la Communication* (Tome 1) :

> Traditional societies […] were essentially seen as being governed by the divine will. Social order was primarily a divine one. The hierarchies, the inequalities and authority, were the expression of the divine will. In traditional societies, the sense and meaning of human being's life and that of the society were given by God. (Translation ours) (Sfez, 1993)

In the same way, the respect and reverence for deities and ancestors are likewise devoted to customs. Every member of the community must fulfil what customs demand. The use of the modal "must" denies any possibility of refusal without sanctions.

Customs are time resistant. This perennial characteristic shows the relevance of customs in generating welfare and harmony in the community, ethnic group, or village. Africans in general have a positive apprehension of their customs. In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, Ananse, the protagonist, shows the continuity of customs when he addresses the chief of Sapa in the following terms: "I know you who are seated on the Ancient stools of our land know the a-b-c of all our cherished laws, all our time-honoured customs." (Sutherland, Marriage of Anansewa, 1987) To Ananse, as well as any African, traditional laws or customs meet the needs for which they are set, and they operate efficiently in the traditional societies. The satisfaction customs bring about explains why people continue to practise and abide by them. We see it in the performing of the presentation of the first-born baby boy ceremony in *TGAB* as required in Yoruba's families:

> It is their first baby, so they bring him for blessing to the shrine of Ogun, the God of war, of iron and doctor of all male children. Then they call a priest of Ifa, as is the custom, to divine the future that this boy has brought with him. (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002))

Yoruba people obey the will of their gods. As shown in the present ceremony, customs in traditional life take effect from the birth of the individual and will guide it all their lifelong. In happy or sad moments, customs show the behaviour to adopt. Rotimi describes the cultural practice in vigour in traditional Yoruba community further to the death of a king: "It is the custom of our land to find how our kings die." (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002))

Through this utterance, it is clear that for anything related to human life, there is a prescription set by customs, which people must abide by. This aspect is not peculiar to the Yoruba society as dramatized by Rotimi, but it is a common feature in many other traditional African communities. For instance, Efua Sutherland in *The Marriage of Anansewa* depicts what is required regarding marriage in the Akan society. She shows the importance of performing customary prescriptions or rites, which certify a marriage. Indeed, when Akwasi in love with Akosua, pursues her everywhere and dares to shame her in public, the latter reminds him:

> Akosua: I'm not your wife, so let me go!
> Akwasi: Ask your mother, ask your father; if you don't know, they do […] Do you suppose they're as senseless as you are?
>
> Akosua: Oh, no, I don't think that at all. Quite the contrary, they are far wiser. They know I'm not your wife until you have to come to their home and placed the customary head-drink on their table….Any time you're ready, bring my head-drink home to my parents. After that, I will stop when you call. I will take care of your house. (Sutherland, Marriage of Anansewa, 1987)

The dialogue between Akwasi and Akosua underscores the importance of customs and their role in the community. In fact, the customary prescriptions give rights to the head of a family to have his wife at his disposal and they inversely bound the woman to some obligations towards her husband. These practices are the public acknowledgement of marital contract between a man and a woman. Customs, in this way, contribute to the promotion of social cohesion and harmony among people.

No one in traditional society is forced to do anything, everybody knows the socially accepted norms and what awaits people who may break these regulatory rules. In *TGAB*, Odewale who is aware of the customs explains his own fate after Baba Fakunle, the seer, identifies him as the murderer he has been looking for: "Well, he has done what you sons of Kutuje wished. He called me murderer which means I must leave the land. Is that not so?" (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002))

The question "is that not so?" is an indication of Odewale's awareness of the requirements of customs although he does not belong to that society. We see that the two different tribes –Ijekun and Kutuje– have the same regulations.

Traditional societies are organised in such a way that people must not venture into risky or forbidden domains. As such, the rigidity of customs is understandable. It aims at avoiding divine wrath or punishments for possible misdeeds or unwary behaviours. In *TGAB*, Rotimi dramatizes the case of the inhabitants of Kutuje. The villagers are experiencing strong hardships due to the breach of traditions or customs. Aderopo, sent by the king and his chiefs to the oracle at Ile-Ife, makes this report when back home:

> The oracle of Ifa at the shrine of Orunmila has found the cause of the sickness and deaths now in our midst […] the oracle warns us that we have left our pot unwatched, and our food now burns. (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002))

It is clear that the breach or violation of the established order be it consciously or inadvertently, brings about many drawbacks which do not affect the culprit alone. All the community must experience this retribution. In the portrayed traditional Yoruba society, there are various ways through which the culprits pay for their acts. The sentence can be in the form of natural calamities, diseases or deaths, etc.

Customs are the backbone of life in traditional African communities and the protagonist of Ola Rotimi's play *Kurunmi* clearly emphasizes this importance of traditions in the existence of any people. For him, "the day a people lose their traditions is the day their death begins." He further explains this to his people:

> My people, we too have tradition
> This is what makes us men
> This is what makes us…people, distinct from mud (Rotimi, Kurunmi, 1971)
> (Rotimi, *Kurunmi*, 1971:15-16).

Traditional societies, as Kurunmi says, derive their dignity and value from traditions or customs. It is these social norms and mainly their observance that make Yoruba communities well-structured and strong. This social structure also owes its stability and efficiency to people's beliefs in deities and to practices like sacrifices.

2. Deities and sacrifices

In Rotimi's dramatization, the Yoruba people do not draw a sharp division between religious and social life. Indeed, generally, African communities do not have the sacred on one side and the profane on the other. This mainly accounts for the supremacy of religion in their daily life.

2.1. Deities

Life among traditional Yoruba is highly influenced by a strong belief in the presence of supernatural forces or beings that control the day-to-day life of people. Deities include gods and their go-between such as spirits and ancestors. According to Rotimi, they are held in high esteem in Yorubaland and are an important element of traditional Yoruba society. The belief in deities is so vital in the understanding of the role of traditional religion in inculcating the ideal of harmonious living to African people.

The presence of deities is strongly felt and recognised in virtually every community. The traditional Yoruba holds tenaciously to his belief in the gods, spirits and ancestors and he reveres them as powerful and mystical members of the community. The deities are thought to be the inhabitants of the invisible

world since traditional Africans view the universe as comprising two basic realms: the visible one where human beings live and the invisible one owned by the ancestral spirits and other supernatural beings.

Africans believe that the deities intervene in their existence. In *TGAB*, the author states this interference of deities and the role they play in creating a peaceful life. Odewale, the king, referring to his subjects struck by a famine explains:

> Sacrifice, did you say? To what gods have we not made sacrifice, my chiefs and I? Soponna, the god of the poxes? Ela the god of deliverance? What god? Sango, the god of thunder and rainfall, whose showers can help wash away the evil in the soil on which we stand? What god have we not called upon to help us? (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002))

From Odewale's assertion, deities are not invoked by mere words of the mouth. Because of their unearthly nature, deities are rather summoned through sacrifices or libations. Elechi Amadi in *The Concubine* also hinds at such a practice. When Anyika is called to the side of Emenike whose condition is getting serious after his fight with Madume, he asks for a kola nut and gin. Then, he pours out some gin as libation and mutters as each drop reaches the ground:

> Gods of the night, take this,
> Gods of the earth, take this
> Ojukwu the fair, take this
> Amadioha, king of the skies
> This is yours.
> And you ancestors, small and great,
> Guardians of this compound, take this. (Amadi, 1966 (1975))

Rotimi and Amadi reveal that deities hold a prominent place among the traditional people they are portraying. The traditional Yoruba people like many other African people acknowledge a pantheon of divinities. This fact explains why people view traditional African religions as being polytheist. But an insight into those religions shows that all African religions recognize the existence of a supreme god. This supreme god seems to be far from his creatures and is therefore shapeless. In any traditional society or culture, people dare not give a tangible or material incarnation to the supreme God, but he is easily named in all societies. Among the Yoruba for example, the supreme God is called "Olodumare" (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002)); other writers attest to the effectiveness of this Supreme Being among Africans. In *The River Between,* Ngugi Wa Thiong'o calls him "Murungu" among the Gikuyu of Kenya (Ngugi, 1965) and "Chukwu" in *Things Fall Apart.* (Achebe, 1958)

The supreme God is considered the creator of the world. But, as people do not have access to the supreme God for their daily affairs, they have recourse to secondary gods or spirits of departed ancestors, who can intercede with their supreme God. Ulli Beier asserts that: "The Yoruba people see the multiplicity of gods merely as aspects or facets of the same divine force." (Beier, 1980) Every god in the Yoruba society pertains to a given field of their life. Ola Rotimi in the selected play mentions some of these secondary Yoruba gods and their fields of action:

Ogun, the god of war, of iron and doctor to all male children (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002))
Obatala, god of creation (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002))
Soponna, the god of the poxes? Ela, the god of deliverance?
Sango, the god of thunder and rainfall… (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002))

This way of sharing divine power aims at allowing the deities to be more efficient in their domains and ensuring well-being of the society. In this, Ola Rotimi gives evidence of how the Yoruba people materialize the omnipresence and omnipotence of the supreme God in their life.

Sacrifices

A sacrifice constitutes a major social practice among traditional people. Malgoubri Mathieu quoting Louis Vincent Thomas in his "maitrise" dissertation gives the following definition of sacrifices:

> A sacrifice can be defined as a move (by a priest and for the satisfaction of the faithful) of mystic forces created by god thanks to the intervention of a spirit and possibly the ancestors. (Malgoubri, n.d)

This definition indicates that sacrifices are not simple human performances. They connote spiritual powers. Sacrifices are an important means of communication with supernatural forces and contribute to ensure happiness and prosperity of individuals as well as the community.

In traditional life, sacrifices are offered to gods for other purposes such as thanksgiving, atonement, propitiation, request, etc. Ola Rotimi dramatizes such usage of sacrifices in *TGAB*. When death and illnesses strike the local people, a villager in the mob suggests to the king the necessity of sacrifice saying: "let us sacrifice rams to the gods." (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002)) A sacrifice here is required to alleviate the illnesses and hardships the villagers are going through. The quotation also raises the point that even the common villager is aware of the significance and influence of such practices on their lives. Wole Soyinka, in his play *The Swamp Dwellers*, also underlines this awareness of traditional people for the value and the utility of sacrifices. In fact, Igwezu, the protagonist, highlights this when he addresses the Kadiye (the priest of the local god):

> And he [Kadiye] made it clear that the offering was from me? That I demanded the protection of the heavens on me and on my house, on my father and my mother, on my wife, land and chattels? (Soyinka, 1973)

From Igwezu's assertion, one can notice that people make sacrifices to ask for divine protection or assistance among the Yoruba as is the case in any traditional African community.

In effect, sacrifices are vital to the divinities, for Africans believe gods derive more power from human practices. John Pepper Clark explains this vision of sacrifice when he states:

They [men] still thought that by performing certain magical rites, they could aid the god who was the principle of life in his struggle with the opposing principle of death. (Killam, 1978(reprinted))

Through sacrifices, people influence the action of their deities. The latter are given support in their deeds and manifestations. So, aware of their effect in securing their existence, people keep up the performance of sacrifices in their different communities. But as an organised society, African people do not perform sacrifices at random. People make them in specific locations especially arranged for this effect such as shrines, altars, etc.

3. Rituals

Ola Rotimi remarks that there are different types of rituals among traditional Yoruba people, which express important ideas, beliefs and values concerning their religious, social and political life. In fact, the Yoruba traditionally preserve and express the ideal of harmonious community life through their dominant rituals. Rituals therefore partake of the Yoruba's struggle to ensure that the major values related to their survival are well preserved and successfully transmitted to successive generations. The importance of rituals among traditional men may explain the attention that Odewale gives to the "feast of Ogun." The deadline of the king's decision to capture the murderer of King Adetusa, who is responsible for his people's sufferings, is conditioned by the feast:

> Before Ogun the god of iron, I stand on oath. Witness now all of you present that before the feast of Ogun, which starts at sunrise, I, Odewale, the son of Ogundele, shall search and fully lay open before your very eyes the murderer of King Adetusa. (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002))

One can guess that the power or interest in a ritual resides in the supernatural being to which it refers primarily.

Rituals in traditional Africa bring many people together and one of their purposes is to socialize the individual. The presentation ritual of the first male child evidences this aspect. It is not the couple alone which takes part in the ceremony. Many other villagers too are concerned. Rituals then create a sense of community, togetherness, and belonging.

There are in traditional society rituals which engage people individually. In *TGAB*, the author presents his protagonist, performing a cleansing ritual when he is informed that his predecessor, King Adetusa, has been murdered. This ritual is one through which Odewale, the performer, finds the strength and power to transform his life when his mind is in confusion and terrible fear. Odewale acts as follows:

> Gods! What a woman! [Kneels before the household shrine, arms raised] Give me some of her patience, I pray you. Some…some of her cool heart…Let her cool spirit enter my body; the hot blood of a gorilla! [Cleansing himself in the sacred water.] Cool me, Ogun, cool me. The touch of palm oil is cool to the body. Cool me… (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002)).

This part of Odewale's cleansing ritual celebrates his beliefs and clarifies the significance of any ritual: associating people together or boosting them psychologically.

In sum, customs, the beliefs in deities, sacrifices, and rituals among traditional Yoruba constitute an effort to achieve some form of control over people themselves and their unpredictable universe. In traditional communities, people's beliefs in these aspects of their life have led them to understand the significance of the various mechanisms set for the management, prevention and resolution of conflict and therefore, experience a certain cohesion and stability.

II. Mechanisms to safeguard social cohesion

Every society aims at achieving cohesion among its members to make them feel secured and allow them to live in peace and tranquillity. To perpetuate this social stability, people set some norms and practices, which in fact are mechanisms to manage, prevent and resolve conflict in order to control and run their society. These 'mechanisms' constitute measures which help people to enhance harmony and therefore maintain social order in the community.

In this part, we endeavour to find out the ways in the play which traditional people resort to, to preserve their lives and harmony in society. We shall strive to show how certain punitive sanctions like wars, corporal punishment, ostracism, and other practices such as oath taking, divination, and sacrifices, help curb deviance and indirectly may advance the cause of harmonious communal living in traditional Africa. To achieve this objective, we classify these measures under two headings entitle "coercive measures" on the one hand and "non coercive measures" on the other hand.

1. Coercive measures

In *TGAB*, Rotimi shows that traditional society possesses a set of punitive sanctions to impose harmony and peace. Though these measures apply ordeal either physical or psychological on those who break social norms, they are reprisals, which aim mainly at managing and resolving conflict in society and by the way, protecting social cohesion.

1.1. War

Wars have always occurred in human societies though they do not always have the same motives and significance. Depending on the cause of 'the rise of wars' between communities, it is important to identify different types and understandings of them.

In traditional African society, war was usually not declared for the sake of fighting or killing because life in general is sacred. It was the last resort to solve a problem. People go to war to fight for their freedom and protect their community against any outside attack. War in this case is a self defence to set harmony in society. And this better explains the reactions of the citizens of Kutuje towards the village of Ikolu. In fact, under the guidance of Odewale, the people of Kutuje attacked Ikolu to take back their properties and they even annexed their lands. This attack allows them to restore social harmony and regain their stability. These words from Odewale bring the point into salience:

> Under my power
> We attacked the people of Ikolu,
> Freed our people,
> Seized the lands of Ikolu,
> And prospered from their sweat
> So it is —
> He who pelts another with pebbles
> Asks for rocks in return
> Ikolu is no more,

But Kutuje prospered (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002)).

War is sometimes a way of repairing imbalances created in society. In this sense, war is retaliation to a previous wrong done to a particular people. The latter mainly react to restore their dignity, which is an important principle of traditional life, and to create a good image of their society. They prove their worth before their neighbourhood, so that other communities fear and respect them.

In general, a war is a collective and coercive measure directed against a whole community or social group. In this sense, the sufferings it brings about affects innocent people. To avoid such an injustice, traditional people resort to some practices, which concern the culprit only.

1.2. Corporal Punishments

In Yoruba society, there is no special judicial body controlling life as such; but people create some mechanisms based on customs rendered by courts occasionally arranged for any purpose. These mechanisms are run by elders and the leaders of the tribe or community. They are given the right to punish trespassers in order to appease social tensions. In this ward, Yoruba and Africans in general do not possess a clear and definite store of sanctions. They rather rate punishments according to the degree of the crime.

Throughout *TGAB*, it appears that in traditional Yoruba context, sanctions stem from the "retaliation law" and the Ogun Priest duly states this point. In fact, after the king and his council are informed that the cause of the diseases in the land is the presence in their midst of a murderer, one who kills King Adetusa, the priest affirms "Whoever he is, he shall pay for his act –Life for life; death, hot death awaits him." (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002)) This sententious utterance underscores the punishment system among traditional people, but the harshness evokes in their eagerness to maintain social order and harmony. Such a practice forces any culprit to assume his deeds and by the same way, it compels the rest of the community to the strict respect of taboos and unacceptable behaviours of their society.

1.3. Ostracism

According to traditional Africans, human beings are communal beings who plainly assert themselves in a group context. In this context, they consider that individual offences necessarily affect the whole community. And this vision is shared in *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe. When Okonkwo breaks the week of peace, Ezeani, the priest of the Earth goddess tells him: "You are not a stranger in Umuofia […] the evil you have done can ruin the whole clan" (Achebe, 1958). Thus, in case of a serious breach of social norms such as murder, incest, rape, and so on, traditional people ban the culprit from the community.

In traditional communities, the major aim of expelling an individual or a group is to cleanse the land. By so doing, it secures the whole community from the wrath and punishments of the gods in order to guarantee harmony and peace in society. Rotimi presents such a situation with the citizens of Kutuje who endure much suffering, because they have left a murderer unpunished in their midst.

Ostracism is also applied to preserve social values. Among traditional people, one who goes against social values is a bad example to other members of the community and mainly to the youth. This is dangerous for education as children in those societies learn the accepted and acceptable things from the deeds and behaviours of the grown-ups. To preclude such acts, traditional people ban the culprit. The merit of such a strong action is to deter anyone from venturing in likely offences.

Moreover, in the particular case of a murder that necessarily sets a conflictual atmosphere, ostracising the defaulter appeases the wrath and pain of the affected family. In fact, it contributes to descend any idea of revenge, because justice has been rendered. Ostracising then avoids internal contentions and maintains good relationships between the parties in conflict. Ostracism makes clear that the family or village of the offender does not endorse what happened because they accepted to ban the culprit from their group.

In traditional Africa, ostracism is a popular sanction. Therefore, everybody is aware that in case of a serious offence against social norms, they may be banned from the society. In *TGAB*, the words of Odewale to the First Chief illustrate this awareness: "He called me murderer. Which means I must leave the land. Is that not so?" (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002)).

For the Yoruba or most African communities, expelling an individual or a group who infringes a moral law or who causes a breach of the harmonious co-existence among members of the community, is thought

to be the most severe punishment that could be meted out to anybody. In Act one Scene two of *TGAB*, Odewale stresses the significance of such an ordeal when he plans the penalty of King Adetusa's murderer.

> And then, the final agony: we shall cut him from his roots.
> Expelled from this land of his birth,
> He shall roam in darkness in the land of nowhere,
> And there die unmourned by men who know him,
> And buried by vultures who know him not" (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002)).

This punishment aims at isolating the defaulter, so that they assumes their forfeit alone. Ostracising an individual feels like death for any one so punished because they are cut off from their roots which 'nourish' their being, and give sense and meaning to their existence. In chapter fourteen of *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe mentioning the exile of Okonkwo from Umuofia says: "He had been cast out of his clan like a fish onto a dry, sandy beach, panting" (Achebe, 1958). This comparison shows that the guilty person is set apart from his community. He will no longer be allowed to share in the life of his community. As such, every member of traditional societies highly dreads the punishment of ostracism, and would therefore do anything possible to avoid it. The rigidity of this practice disarms people and deters them from perpetrating offences that may alter social harmony. Ostracism is then directed towards protecting the community and promoting harmony within society.

2. Non-coercive measures

The non-coercive measures are common practices among Africans. They are somehow premonitory procedures or peaceful ways that people use to prevent, manage and solve their problems and keep order in society.

2.1. Oath taking

Because of their strong attachment to community, Africans have a very high sense of justice. For them, it is impossible to achieve harmony in the community without justice. In this line, Yoruba people and Africans in general strive to be true to their community members and therefore to themselves. And an important means which urges on this truthfulness is oath taking which is a formal statement that something is true or a formal promise to do something. In traditional African communities in general, people usually enhance these oaths by calling to some deities to witness them.

In fact, people more often swear by a particular divinity, asking him to visit his wrath on them if they betray their community's norms or simply if what they say is not the truth. Rotimi illustrates this direct appeal to God through Gbonka, the only eye-witness of King Adetusa's murder. When Odewale and his council urge him to give clear information on the identity of the murderer, Gbonka takes an oath:

> Gbonka: A man, your highness.
> Chiefs: A man! Did you not tell us a band of robbers?
> Odewale: Which do you want us to believe now? Answer quick.
> Gbonka: A man! May Sango's lightning strike me dead if I'm lying!" (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002)).

As in this case with Gbonka, oath- taking represents a barrier to lying, deceit, and cheating. Taking an oath prevents people from undertaking actions against social values and norms. It constitutes an objection to injustice, and therefore a guarantee for harmonious living among people. When an individual refuses to take an oath, he may lose the confidence of his people and be seen as one who is against their communal welfare. And this is what happens to Waiyaki who refused to take allegiance to the Kiama, the council of the local people, in *The River Between* by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o.

In traditional Africa, oath- taking secures integrity and frankness, which are basic elements for the development of a true communal life. Both integrity and frankness create total and mutual confidence towards each community dweller. This allows traditional people to share life together without suspicions and doubts on everyone's good intentions for the group's well-being.

The taking of oath is above all a motivation towards achieving promises since everyone knows the strength and wrath of the deities they usually call to witness. This motivation is mainly important for the pressure it exerts on leaders to execute their duties in favour of their community members. In Act one Scene one of *TGAB*, Rotimi reveals the importance of oaths through Odewale. Because he has sworn to do so, the latter shows much devotion to catch the murderer of his predecessor. He tells the seer who is reluctant to help them:

> I shall count to three…Baba, feel this… [Lets him feel his sword.] I have sworn by Ogun to expose the murderer before the eyes of all at the feast of Ogun that ends tonight. I brought you all the way from Oyo to help us; and you are headstrong" (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002)).

Odewale insists on his oath to Ogun, and this is what motivates him to menace Baba Fakunle, the diviner so that he can help him achieve his decision. Hereby one understands the worth and usefulness of divination in traditional societies.

2.2. Divination

Divination in traditional African society is a way of diagnosing the causes of current and upcoming events and a key tool for preventing conflicts. Through this, people strive to know how to behave, how to think, and how in short to live in conformity with the living and the dead.

In traditional societies, diviners are endowed with some powers which make them perceive messages from the gods or spirits of the dead. Because of these capacities, they help people find out what has gone wrong spiritually. In the reference play, the priest illustrates this role of divination when he says: "We have sent Aderopo to Ile-Ife, the land of Orunmila, to ask the all-seeing god why we are in pain" (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002)). Therefore, divination is an important step towards restoring the state of equilibrium and harmony in the community.

Divination is a very common practice among Africans. It gives them the possibility to unveil things hidden to normal human beings. By so doing, divination offers the possibility to remedy plagues or evils and conflictual situations, which may happen to the citizens. In *Edufa* by Sutherland, the discussion between the protagonist Edufa and his father Kamkam rates the role of such practices in society. In Act one Scene four, Edufa's father comes to see him because a diviner revealed to him that his son, is responsible for his wife's illness:

> EDUFA: What makes me keeper of her life?
> KAMKAM: Marriage, and her innocent love. [A chilly pause] Oh, I know it all, Edufa. You cannot hide behind impudence and lies; not with me. Diviners are there for all of us to consult. [Edufa winces.] And deeds done in secret can, by the same process, be brought to light.
> EDUFA: You know nothing. Diviners? What have diviners to do with me?
> KAMKAM: That, you must tell me. I believe in their ancient art […] I went to my own diviner to consult him about my health. He spread his holy patch of sand, lit candles and over his sacred bowl of water made incantation; and scrawled his mystic symbols in the sand. I'll tell you what he saw in his divination for it was all about you, my son. (Sutherland, Edufa, 1987)

Divination is one of the most common ways used by Africans to perceive the causes of evils in the land and even the will of the gods' before operating correctly. So, diviners always prescribe sacrifices to execute in order to keep rid the land of its problems.

2.3. Sacrifices

Sacrifices in traditional societies have a paramount importance and role in securing the lives of people. They rank high in the mechanisms of conflicts prevention, management and resolution among traditional Yoruba people. Though all sacrifices are not performed for the same purposes, they all address the welfare of people. For example, sacrifices as mentioned earlier are offered for thanksgiving, expiation, request, and propitiation, etc. Particularly, we will lay an emphasis on expiatory and propitiatory sacrifices, through which people clearly try to achieve social harmony.

In offering expiatory sacrifices, human beings ask God and other spiritual beings to intervene and help them restore the peace and harmony that have been violated. These sacrifices are then supposed to make up for an evil act, remove an abomination or placate the deserved wrath of God, the divinities or the ancestors. For instance, Aderopo, back from Ile-Ife, reports that the Oracle has found the reason why they are in pain. He says:

> The Oracle of Ifa at the shrine of Orunmila has found the cause of the sickness and deaths now in our midst and it has told me what the people can do so that there may be peace of mind again in every home (Rotimi, The Gods are not to Blame, 1971(2002)).

Aderopo here also transmits the requirements of the oracle whereby sacrifices are to be made in order to re-establish unity and restore wholeness among people. By and large, African people in hard times most often make offerings to their gods and ancestors to ask for their help.

Propitiatory sacrifices are ones that people make explicitly to ask for peace even when no infringement of a social moral norm has occurred. Such sacrifices also ward off the evil spirits capable of harming people's tranquillity. They have the merits of maintaining social cohesion and avoiding breach of harmony in society. These are recurrent types of sacrifices in traditional communities though Rotimi mentioned none of the kind in *TGAB.*

To sum up, traditional African society has some prescribed practices and punishments to deter citizens from upsetting the social equilibrium, which may break harmony either in the human society or in the larger universe.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we say that the exploration of the play 'the Gods Are not to Blame' reveals the existence of traditional mechanisms of conflict prevention, management and resolution in traditional Yoruba society.

For the author, in view of their contribution to the maintenance of social cohesion in traditional society, recourse to them could be an alternative in the prevention, management and resolution of multiple crises in the African continent.

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