

Interethnic Matrimonial Unions and Intercommunity Relation Within a “Migrants” Community

Danhi Alice

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Jean Lorougnon Guédé University, Daloa, Ivory Coast

Email address:

alsenad07@yahoo.fr

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Abstract: According to the customs and standard governing social life. The difference in traditions and customs between peoples can however be a source of reluctance towards the other. This can be seen in Kouamékro, a rural locality in the southern forest zone of Côte d'Ivoire. In this area characterized by exposure to a significant migratory flow of populations from the Central and Northern region of the country but also from neighboring countries because of the cash-crop farming practiced there, many inter-ethnic unions are contracted. In Kouamékro, as in several other settlements and villages in the south-west, the first migrants, the Baoulé people, lived almost in “autarky”, isolated from the host people and set up their own social and political standard. Over time, the latter acquired the status of indigenous people with regard to those who arrived after them. Several national and non-national ethnic groups live there and many unions are contracted between them. However, the in-depth exploration reveals a tendency for Baoulé girls to contract inter-ethnic unions, unlike men who only engage in intra-ethnic marriage. Faced with this observation, this article aims to understand the social logics that generate a strong tendency to inter-ethnic marriages between allochthones and “native” girls, while the men of this same group only contract intra-ethnic unions. Based on a qualitative approach, a study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with around thirty inter-ethnic couples and men from the Baoulé groups in intra-ethnic unions in Kouamékro. Three main points emerging from the content analysis carried out account for the interethnic union relationship within these communities. They are on one hand a feeling of superiority and a “negative” perception of the other by the natives, on the other hand the matrilineal system, a social framework explaining interethnic unions in this village or even marriage which is mobilized as means of circumventing social boundaries and reconfiguring social ties.

Keywords: Interethnic Marriages, Family, Migrants, Social Integration, Côte d'Ivoire

1. Introduction

This study is a reflection on social relations in a context of differentiation, distancing and even conflicts due to ethnic differences, but specifically social relations in the marriage field. First, let's define marriage. It can be defined as: “a social institution, a culturally legitimized union founding a unit of reproduction, and thereby, an alliance between two families or communities to which the spouses belong” [1]. It is an alliance which grants spouses new statuses and implicitly rights and obligations. The primary function of marriage is therefore the reproduction, the perpetuation of the blood bond, the social bond and through them, that of the tradition, of the culture of the people [2]. This perpetuation is done by the socialization of the descendants. This group therefore symbolically and

historically shares a common cultural heritage (language, custom, moral values, religion and collective consciousness). What about relations in a context between distinct ethnic groups? It is appropriate to wonder about the implications of an exogamous union on social relations. To do this, the interest of this research focused on a locality which does not remain on the sidelines of this phenomenon because of its ethnic and cultural diversity.

Kouamékro is a village located in the Sud-Bandama region. This region is distinguished by a massive settlement (6%) of migrants¹. They are mostly foreigners from the center and north of Côte d'Ivoire but also foreigners from the West

¹ The highest rate after that of the Bas-Sassandra region which was 9%. According to General Population and Housing Census, 1998.

Africa sub-region, devoting themselves to a so-called "survival" migration [3, 4]. They are from Mali, Burkina Faso and even Niger. It is in this context that in 2002, non-natives accounted for 35% and foreigners for 44% of the total population of the south-west of the country [5]; a proportion that rose to 52% in 2014 [6]. Indeed, the opening of the Ivorian society, particularly the rural forest areas, to the outside world favors the migration of the arid northern populations, towards those who are more conducive to agricultural activities. Due to the policy of the plantation economy initiated by the colonial administration and even afterwards by the Ivorian government in the aftermath of independence in 1960, there was a migration of individuals towards the "cocoa zone" designating the forest zone conducive to the plantation of coffee and cocoa [7] to live there and practice farming, commerce and informal trades.

However, sense of belonging to a locality or a village is a social construction [8]. Kouamékro was a hosting village. The Baoule of this village are adventurers hosted by the Dida, a native group originating from the region. It is a "crossroads village" linking several settlements where travellers, peasants and adventurers circulate. The owners of the land are the people of the Dida group, native of the region, but they do not reside there. In this village, the Baoule are the first migrants there. And the Dida people accepted the cultivations of their land by their early guests. They generously offered to the Baoulé, a territory to exploit, manifesting their hospitality. In return, the latter symbolically received a present which is either drink or livestock. Other non-natives (Akans, Malinkés, Mandés and Gours, some Krou) and foreigners (Nigerians, Burkinabés, Ghanaians, Guineans, Beninese, Malians and later Mauritians) arrived later. But, as the first to arrive, the Baoulé consider this village as their own village and therefore installed themselves there like the "natives".

Furthermore, the cohabitation of individuals of various nationalities and various ethnic groups has led to inter-ethnic unions. However, one finding aroused the interest of this study. A more in-depth exploration made it possible to highlight the fact that the inter-ethnic unions contracted, identified in this village, are mainly with the Baoulé girls of the group constituted as "natives" and the non-natives. On the other hand, the men of this group only contract intra-ethnic unions. Faced with this observation, our study questioned the social logic behind the strong trend of unions between "native" girls and "non-native" living in this village, unlike men who avoid it. More explicitly, what perceptions do the social actors of this village have in the inter-ethnic marriage? What is the nature of the relationships that the members of the inter-ethnic marriage have with the institutions of the village? What are the stakes of these unions among the actors concerned, in this case the natives and the non-natives?

Several authors analyze the social relations around marriage in the societies with ethnic diversity. Among others, Rocher [9] argues that the social organization of traditional societies is based on kinship and that marriage leads to the reorganization of social relations. This would generally result in an exchange of goods and/or services between the families

of the two spouses. Becker [10] qualifies the field of market marriage. In this market, the different types of inheritance available to the actors are negotiated. In the same vein, Levi Strauss [2] affirms to him that in traditional societies marriage is essentially a mode of exchanging women which creates a complex network of links between kinship groups which ensures the solidarity of society as a whole. And this solidarity requires the integration of the different actors that make up the community. Moreover, Schnapper (2007) adds that integration is not just for the immigrant to conform to rules. There is also participation in collective life and especially in the invention of social rules. The first process is called cultural assimilation or cultural integration and social or structural integration for the second. It is in this perspective that Koné [11] argues that land is the social resource through which foreigners negotiate their integration. She adds that the inheritance of land is conditioned by biological kinship. Foreigners, for the most part, have acquired land for several decades, encounter difficulties in preserving this capital, whereas it is the social resource through which these foreigners negotiate their integration. Multiple analyzes on the phenomena of integration of migrants in the host societies, exclusions due to ethnic differences are observed, but also that of inter-ethnic marriages and their influences on social relations. However, there is no analysis to explain this tendency to marry according to gender. This reflection is an attempt to understand the social logics that lies behind the trend towards inter-ethnic marriage among "native" girls and "non-native" girls living in the village, while the men of this same group only engage in to endogamous unions.

2. Methodology

From a methodological point of view, the study is part of a qualitative approach based on an ethnographic method. The social field relates to a target group composed of people likely to provide us with information that can help answer the problem of this study. More than thirty inter-ethnic couples with Baoulé spouses have been identified using the network technique. To do this, we contacted the political authorities of Kouamékro to find out about the political, economic and cultural organization of the village; to indigenous Baoulé women who are wives and their perception and position regarding this type of marriage; to the spouses of inter-ethnic marriage to understand their motivation for this type of marriage; to the descendants of these marriages to know their mechanism of integration and production of their ethnicity. In addition to them, institutional actors of chieftaincy and notability were the subject of the study. Data collection was based on semi-structured interviews, direct observation and documentary research for secondary data. The resulting corpus was analyzed using the content analysis method [12]. This methodological process made it possible to obtain the results, the most explanatory of which made it possible to account for the configuration of social relations in the matrimonial field in Kouamékro.

Three main motivations underlying the configuration of social relations around the matrimonial field in Kouamékro. They are: i) a feeling of superiority and a "negative" perception of the other by the natives, ii) the matrilineal system, an explanatory social framework for interethnic unions in the village and iii) marriage as a means of circumventing social boundaries and reconfiguration of social ties.

3. Results

3.1. *A feeling of Superiority and a "Negative" Perception of the Other as a Brake to Inter-Ethnic Unions*

The Baoulé people, the first to settle around 1949, built themselves as "dominant" compared to other migrants. Indeed, after them, populations of various ethnic groups subsequently migrated in search of arable land in order to improve their living conditions. The latter were employed as laborers in the Baoulé plantations. They are the Mandés and Gour populations originating from the north of Côte d'Ivoire and foreigners (Burkinabés, Guineans and Malians). They were therefore inscribed in a relationship of "master to servant or slave". The employees were therefore relegated to the lower rank of "kanga"², they and their families, by the Baoulé community. This perception is therefore reproduced and until today, this structure has repercussions on the conception of this people, which is therefore not favorable to the union between "the master and the servant".

Added to this are the prejudices of the natives against the cultural mode of other groups. They deem far too exorbitant the cost of the dowry demanded by groups such as Mande and Gour as well as Nigerians who demand bulk of valuable cloths, cooking utensils and money for the festivities which extend over several days.

Finally, religion is constructed here as the selective criterion in the choice of spouse. The non-native peoples of the north of the country and predominantly of the Muslim religion are resistant to inter-ethnic or intra-religious unions. Foreigners converted to Muslim refuse to give their daughters in marriage to non-Muslims. The reason according to them is that the man, the head of the family, submits the woman to his culture and shares the same fact with his religion. Thus, they fear that the girls they give in marriage will give up their religious identity to the profile of that of the community of their husbands whom they designate by the expression "kafiri"³.

In addition, girls are very often promised in marriage at birth or before puberty by agreements between families or between communities. Thus, as soon as they reach puberty, they return to the place of origin of the parents to be handed over to the one to whom she was promised.

Thus, even if these perceptions and practices limit unions between Baoulé men and non-indigenous girls, on the contrary, they are rather favorable to Baoulé girls and non-indigenous men. This perception of the matrimonial bond by

the Baoulé people has been in favor and caused several inter-ethnic unions which present themselves as a social resource, an asset for the non-indigenous of the community. Indigenous peoples therefore erect symbolic barriers that prompt the implementation of strategies by non-indigenous people (non-natives and foreigners) to deviate from them. The latter do not remain passive in the face of the consequences of the ethnic borders between them. Among the resources used, there is marriage with the girls of the indigenous group. But, what could explain the motivation of the women in this group?

3.2. *Matrilinearity and Flexibility of Standard with Regard to the Baoulé Girls*

While admitting that these actors are united by the sincere bond of love. It should also be noted that marriage is for social actors, an investment where everyone expects to derive a profit, either material or symbolic. Thus, the quest for the improvement of social capital is by no means to be ruled out. This leads individuals to make a choice in reference to the social class from which they come. For the Baoulé girls, contracting an exogamous union is relatively easy. A certain "freedom" is granted to the young girl. In any case, the choice of spouse is not constraining by social rules due to the functioning of the matrilineal system of filiation in which the Baoulé group is registered. In the event of conception, the child resulting from the unions of daughters is admitted and accepted within its maternal family, whatever its agnatic filiation. In fact, in matrilineal or uterine filiation, the descendants of interethnic marriages, regardless of the ethnicity of the spouse, are integrated and "belong" to the group to which their mother belongs and inherit it. According to the group Akans, a large ethnic group from which the Baoulé belongs, the descendant of the sister carries the blood of the family of his mother while it is not obvious that he is really a descendant of his father. It is a system unfavorable to the men of the Baoulé group whose descendants cannot benefit from the privileges of the group of their father, from the fruit of their work if they are from a mother of another ethnic group and inherit it. This mode of transmission of inheritance to uterine nephews tends to be moderated or even abandoned as it is challenged in favour of the provisions of the legislation.

In addition, the marriages contracted between the Baoulé girls of Kouamékro and non-indigenous people respond to socioeconomic issues. The socio-economic stake is the material or symbolic interest expected by a social actor by taking an action in "a field" within his community or society. For most Baoulé girls, it is a means of acquiring another social and professional status different from the women of their ethnic group, who are mostly dedicated to farming and trading of food products for the subsistence of the family. As a result, Baoulé girls who, according to indigenous men, seek financial security have entered into unions with them. Because according to them: "...foreigners are generous towards their in-laws, they take better care of their wives and children, they give them gifts and often even build houses for

² Term designating a slave in Baoulé, a vernacular language of central Côte d'Ivoire

³ Terme désignant le non-musulman par les musulmans

their in-laws". In addition, the latter marry the commercial culture of their spouses and engage in activities for profit and not just for subsistence. This gives them a certain financial independence. Through these unions, one of the spouses or even both therefore hope for a better social and economic situation, hence the reason for strategies mobilized.

3.3. The Bypassing of Social Boundaries and Reconfiguration of Social Ties Through Marriage

In all traditional African societies, the family is the basis of social organization. In Kouamékro, families are not big. The oldest Baoulé families consisted of only three to four generations. Among the non-natives and foreigners, on the other hand, we observed the existence of a nuclear family or of two generations. They have left the classificatory families in their locality of origin and come to settle alone for some and marry girls from the host village. The prolonged cohabitation of individuals generates the birth of bonds of affinity which often go as far as founding a family through traditional or modern and religious marriage.

However, in a society, dominated agents can adopt subversion strategies that aim to reorient the social order in their favor. Social actors seek to obtain the goods produced (money, social position). Indeed, the stakes of these unions are economic and relational or social and political depending on the individual concerned. These different capitals are favorable to the integration of non-indigenous people; an integration characterized by the acquisition of capital whose indicators confront us with this reality in Kouamékro. Economic capital refers to access to land, commercial activity, acquisition of goods; political capital refers to the post of political responsibility, association or community, finally social or relational capital refers to the set of social relations beneficial to an individual and his whole family such as friendship, alliances and kinship. These different indicators highlight the negotiation or conflict relationships maintained by the different social actors of Kouamékro.

Non-indigenous people have worked to improve their social condition. Over time, they or their descendants settled in Kouamékro also became owners of large farms or engaged in other activities such as transport, trade, etc. This granted economic power to some of them. Capital is an asset that allows you to position yourself in the society. Thus, because of their economic power, these non-natives reposition themselves in the social space and are no longer perceived as "servants" or dominated.

In addition, some Baoulé affirm that at the time, under the mandates of former President Félix Houphouët Boigny, the Baoulé group was seen as a "superior" or dominant people by these foreigners who used their economic power to marry their daughters. On the other hand, the descendant of the non-indigenous with an indigenous daughter will benefit from integration and inherit the indigenous group through his maternal uncle. The survey showed that the families of some girls own large farms as well as some spouses. Through these unions, one of the spouses or even both hope for a better

economic and social situation. Indeed, kinship is not limited to the conjugal family. Marriage leads to kinship with the in-laws. This link gives rise to emotional relationships, solidarity, cohesion between the two families and not at the restricted level. With his new kinship, the beautiful can benefit from a portion of land to meet the needs of his family or a lot for a dwelling. In the event of a dispute, for example, he enjoys a certain indulgence in the village. It is the birth of new family ties leading to a sociological reality that 'codifies' the behavior of the actors (respect, familiarity, affection, indulgence in the event of conflict, etc.).

The matrimonial exchange therefore allows emigrants to negotiate integration. When they undertake and therefore maintain a union outside their group of origin, they not only broaden their social capital, but they also participate in the strengthening of solidarity among all. Through this cultural integration, the immigrant hopes to achieve or enable his descendants to achieve structural integration, which is participation in collective life. In this case, he is accepted as their fellow man and participates fully in the social life and even in the citizenship of the group. There is, therefore, a renegotiation of the relationships between actors (politics, social position) in the socio-political organization of the village.

However, in Kouamékro, barriers are erected in the political field. There is a disqualification of non-indigenous people and their descendants in the political field. There is a monopolization, a control of political power by the Baoulé. The the chieftaincy and the positions of association officials are reserved to '100% Baoulé'; that is to say to the descendants of two spouses both belonging to the Baoulé group; in other words, the descendants of father and mother Baoulé. Indeed, the presence of a large number of foreigners has caused pressure on natural resources and within the population of this village, competition, individualism in all social fields. The chief is the representative of the village before the state authorities. It has under its governance more than fifty other surrounding camps administered by community leaders (national and non-national). They are headed by a representative vested with the authority of the central chief and act under his orders. Individuals from the Baoulé group build an identity around political power by excluding actors who are not from their ethnic group; an approach aimed at preserving their hegemony as indigenous peoples.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The displacement of peoples towards others is the main factor favoring mixing between various ethnic groups. One cause of this migration is the socio-economic crisis in some countries. Populations go to localities that offer families better survival conditions, as is the case for migrants between the neighboring countries of Côte d'Ivoire. The cohabitation of an ethnic plurality leads to significant cultural mixing, thus reducing the intensity of traditional differences. Cohabitation often generates tensions between communities [13] and causes integration difficulties for

immigrants. Among other factors of cultural mixing is marriage. Thus, the strong tendency towards inter-ethnic marriage in these localities contributes to the integration of individuals who migrate there. Indeed, two societies are in real interaction only when they exchange women [2, 14]. The social cohesion of a people depends on the relationship between matrimonial exchanges and the material and symbolic means held by individuals and families, according to their social position.

In Kouamékro, several factors therefore explain the configuration of social relations in the marriage field. These are among others the perceptions of the actors, the matrilineal system that structures the Baoulé people, but also the strategies of repositioning and renegotiation by the different actors of these marriages. Anthropological studies of the matrilineal system within the Baoulé group legitimize the practices of girls and men of the indigenous group in the face of interethnic unions. These point to a non-rigidity of social rules regarding intimate relationships forged by girls. The latter circulate or maintain relations with men with great freedom, which is extremely difficult for the community to control [15]. This leads individuals to make a choice in reference to the social class from which they come. For the girls of the Baoulé group, contracting an exogamous union presents relatively no difficulty. A certain "freedom" is granted to the young girl. They have the opportunity to diversify the sexual partners and then choose the one she will marry. There are no standards sanctioning this practice implicitly accepted by the community.

Also, within traditional societies in general, a brother-in-law is a brother and is treated as such. A brother-in-law accepts obligations, but also privileges and is treated with more consideration. The construction of this new link leads to a sociological reality that 'codifies' the behavior between the maternal uncle and the uterine nephew, between the son-in-law and his in-laws. Levi-Strauss [2] calls this 'joking relationship'. This relationship entails respect or distance, familiarity or rudeness, affection or aggressiveness. Matrimonial exchange allows migrants to easily integrate into the family in which he finds a wife. If one undertakes and therefore maintains several unions outside of one's original group, one not only expands one's social capital but one also participates in the strengthening of solidarity among all. Through this cultural integration, the immigrant hopes to achieve or enable his descendants to achieve structural integration, which is participation in collective life and above all the invention of rules in the community that adopted him Schnapper [16]. However, even if for the spouses interviewed, their union is the pure and simple result of their love, it should however be noted that for the social actors, it is an investment from which each expects to derive a profit, either material [17] or symbolic [18].

To do this, social and ethnic interactions must be analyzed as competitive exchanges for which ethnic groups are formed to maximize their advantages (economic and power). The balance of power becomes unequal and the dominant class, because it benefits from significant symbolic capital,

succeeds in imposing its organization on the other classes. The agent who dominates a social field adopts, a priori, a strategy of conservation which consists in maintaining his position in the field even when other agents try to subvert this order. Dominated agents can, however, adopt subversion strategies that aim to reorient the social order in their favor and must, for this, succeed in imposing a conception of society that values them.

To this end, Dozon [17], in a socio-economic analysis in Côte d'Ivoire, affirms that the natives, to differentiate themselves from other ethnic groups, rely on the identity differentiation between them and non-natives. For him, economic reasons are the basis of this distinction. Indigenous people build an identity around the economy and political power. Whether they present themselves as rational or not, these inter- or intra-ethnic unions are used as social resources for making and circumventing social borders. They are used as an operator of integration, differentiation and/or transformation of the status and position of actors in the village social space. Marriage allows a family to increase their property [19], gain social prestige or even gain political power. Duverger [20] considers the political field as a means of achieving the integration of all individuals into the community. According to him, a policy that ensures social order by equal integration of all actors contributes to perfect social cohesion. But it is noted here, a disqualification of spouses and descendants in the political field which limits the integration of non-indigenous people; a process of making social boundaries in inter-community relations [21] generally observed in rural areas.

In this mechanism of creating ethnic borders, the object of this research was to understand the social relations linked to inter-ethnic marriage between members of the indigenous community and those of non-indigenous people. At the end of the analysis, it should be noted that Kouamékro, like the other villages of the region, is a village cherished by the entire population of farmers in the savannah zone. Its natural assets have earned it its extensive occupation by various ethnic groups in the country and especially in the West Africa sub-region. The Baoulé group, which is the people considered as autochthonous in the village, dominates all the other ethnic groups, especially at the political and land level. Each social agent therefore uses strategies, some to maintain their social position, others to build themselves, improve their social status or make a fortune and integrate by imposing themselves through the acquisition of economic and relational capital. Through marriage, some indigenous girls as well as foreigners (immigrants and non-indigenous) aim to improve their situation by acquiring economic capital for Baoulé girls and political for non-indigenous people. The tendency towards inter-ethnic unions is explained by the configuration of the matrimonial social framework within the Baoulé group. Furthermore, marriage is mobilized as a resource for social integration by "allochtones" who are nevertheless confronted with the barriers erected by "natives" to maintain their conception of the social order.

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