

How crisis affects	in the context of	
- gender relations	gerontocratic rule	
- gender discourse	gender divide marked by taboo	
- equilibrium of power	economic, religious	
Crisis and conflict management	Female (self-) exclusion from public space	Alternative strategies of female affirmation
Crisis as a learning experience	of the Konon (traditional forum for semi-democratic negotiation)	Following in the footsteps of Appenzell 1991
The village as model of gendered activities	urban poverty	AGRA project
	Current food price crisis	

Local analysis

How the crisis affects gender relations

Does this become a learning experience?

By this is meant: goal-oriented behavior, new definition of goals, of a new equilibrium of society?

Learning would also mean that the experience of the crisis is somehow integrated in the behavior under the conditions of return to normal life. (This may be a little early to say.)

I want to say : Yes.

A re-negotiated gender contract ?

I will give a sort of an ethnographic description, you could call it, of the classical sort. We tend to forget that with all the changes of modern Africa, traditional society has not simply gone but maintains its influence on so-called modern African society. There is a lot of this in African literature, but more so in the literature in African languages such as Swahili playwright Ephraim Hussein's which poetizes Kenya's famous Odinka case from the angle of the unbroken power of the village.

This I will shorten

To understand this, we must first get a glimpse of traditional gender relations. The Tura are known as gerontocratic. Quote. Which means ultimate control of all aspects of public life by male elders. The council of elders is the ultimate reference.

The nature of this control is magic, supernatural, we might say. Old men are feared for harm they can do to those who act against them by their word. No one will incur the risk to have to bear the consequences of a spell cast over him or her by one of the powerful old men. They know the secrets.

The power concentrated in the hands, heads and mouths of the old is at the same time a guarantee of stability. It is essentially seen as a factor of regulation in the society.

It is a means of keeping the house in order. Seniority is synonymous with prerogatives such as attribution of land use. Intergenerational relations are systematically asymmetric, with the power balance always tipping in the direction of the elder. Seniority is a social axiom.

The power of the elder is in the last resort a religious power. This means that it is outside of the realm of the negotiable. It is symbolized by the *gbèèlé-moán*, the one who is supposed to be in direct contact with the ancestors.

The power of the elders is not only a factor of threat and constraint. Even more than that, it is a resource of society. It is a guarantee of stability and prosperity, even of development. Intergenerational solidarity is the first law of sustainability.

War does not change this. Compared to this order, war, as dramatic its effects may be, is episodic.

An example. A recording of negotiation between the adult males on Dec. 27, 2002 with the elders. After a nightly attack by marodeurs (armed gangs who extort the population under the pretext of supporting the rebellion), they come to the elders to be authorized to organize the self-defense of the village. They ask for three things:

1. the authorization to defend the village and to mount guards during the night
2. the guns which are kept by the elders
3. magic power of which the elders know the secret. This includes both *léé* and “arrow-cleaners” (= things which make you vulnerable). *Léé*, sorcery, is generally considered bad, but its legitimate use is with the elders.

What has to be added, simply, is that the elders and the eldest, the old man, the local representative of the clan and its ancestors is the one who embodies local power, which is shared power to the extent that is plural in a village inhabited by several clans.

In this universe, what is the position of the woman? She is under “agnatic law” as Gonnin says. By the transaction involving the so-called bride price – matrimonial compensation – she ceases to be under the jurisdiction of the clan and the “house” in which she was borne and socialized, and comes under the jurisdiction of the husband’s clan. In an exogamous society, the two are never identical.

Rights of property are transmitted from one generation to the next only through patrilineal descent. This includes rights regarding wives and their properties, including property acquired income-generating activities. So a woman who is cheated by her husband has no chance to get a fair hearing with village authorities nor anywhere else. However, whether this right extends to money which has been acquired through a women’s development association has become a public argument

Where the gender divide is institutionalized, the most important religious instances are also the most strongly gender-marked, and carry with them the most sacrosanct taboos. While the breaking of minor behavioural taboos was grudgingly admitted in exceptional conditions during the war, no one would dare touch on taboos keeping women from the ancestors’ huts, or men from entering the sacred shrine of the women.

Taboo, incidentally, is what enacts//concretizes the gender divide in everyday life and behaviour, anchoring it beyond the merely social.

One has to understand that we have not just a code of social behaviour, which could be negotiated as the need arises. <But Honorine Guéli thinks and writes in *Dynamiques du genre* that the religious is pretext to maintain the social.> The fact that the **social is embedded in**

the religious, sets strict limits as to what under normal conditions can be negotiated in open dialogue, since the religious by definition tends to be non negotiable

The social edifice and its rules of behaviour has its ties in religion, which is more than beliefs, which has to do with entities whose ontological status is not in doubt to anyone. This comes out clearly in the density and pervasiveness of gender taboo, sets strict limits to what can be negotiated in view of adjusting to modern ways of life. The gender divide is very strong as one would expect in a dual-gender economy. The hallmark, which amounts to an invisible wall between male and female universe is the taboo.

Taboo in a sense is spatial: Most spaces of and around the village are not gender-neutral. This applies in the first place to public space, however. Public space is essentially male in the village, but the religious which is absolutely forbidden for women is the gb... Taboo, including taboos of mentioning, listening to, seeing, surrounds the appearance of masks.

However, in this respect, symmetry is re : Women have their own sacred place, their own initiation, their own secrets and power which is feared by men. <Guéli>

Change is possible and change does occur, initiated by women themselves. But it occurs from the interior, as Lydie Vé Kouadio says. Presuppositions are made explicit and certain their meaning is called into question.

The best example I can think of is the debate about the meaning of the “dot”. In one public assembly, a group of women who have been cheated by their male counterparts in the management of a huller project claim vis-à-vis the men that the transfer of property rights through the bride-price has its limits.

We can see from this that if change occurs it is negotiated in conflicts and it draws its force from the economic potential of the women, their determination and their capacity and the liberty granted to them to organize themselves as, indeed, a consequence of participation in market economy. It draws its legitimacy from the space which is assigned to them by society itself, including the elders whose rulings and perhaps even whose rule may be contested. However, it draws its ethnic legitimacy, and that is essential, from its recognition of gender divide and boundary marking by religious taboo.

The conclusion is that crisis if anything has strengthened the inherited view of society, rather than disrupting it. This applies to its religious roots, above all.

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Still a long way to go. I must come to my main point. In fact, the preceding prolegomena must be strictly limited to 5 minutes maximum.

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Economic impact of the crisis has been dramatic. The almost total collapse of the male pillar, see ETH dissertation Böni <ppt>, meant that there were no revenue-generating activities left.

Quote from the abstract of Bearth (ed., 2007): “Tura society, though protected from open fighting and wanton destruction by virtue of its geographical isolation, was undeniably shaken to its foundations by the Ivorian civil war, with noticeable side-effects on traditional gender relations (Baya, Guéli). While an emerging paradigm of perceived

equality between men and women at household level can be traced to pre-war pressures on male-generated cash crop income, the crisis sparked a more radical reversal in the balance of economic power between men and women (Bearth). In the wake of that economic shock, a dialogue between the sexes was instigated in which the topic of traditional roles of men and women is no longer taboo.”

Whereas in many parts of Africa, female leadership has gained acceptance, this remains a taboo in Tura society. By way of anecdote, when in September had to be declared and transvested as a man

I would say that chances of a new “Gender contract” to come out of this are good because of a number of factors which are independent, about as good as the case for female vote in a certain Swiss canton 17 years ago. The situation, paradoxically, is a secondary effect of state failure in Ivory Coast. The Kono was the only remaining body of corporate decision which, at the village level, involves all clans in what could be called democratic deliberation. For the first time, at FELETO, the suggestion was made of a Kono of the men who would discuss the admission of women as full members of Kono. The Kono would then bring together the two

The argument was based on the fact (a) that the Kono is

If a new “Gender contract” is in the process of being negotiated, it is so within the bounds and in deference to the preexistent, inherited “contrat social” which is essentially communitarian, i.e. based on solidarity between the generations, the importance given to seniority as a source of legitimacy.

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