



Culture and Peace-Keeping Challenges in Bediako Asare's *Rebel*

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Abstract: Drawing on the religious theory, anthropomorphism, and sociocultural approach, this study seeks to throw light on peace management in African creative realm. Peace and harmony can be considered as the two most precious ingredients of any human society. Incidentally, these values are so often threatened by different social and cultural happenings including religious practices that could be of particular relevance to stability. Further, this essay interrogates the moral validity of the religious institution and the religious leaders in *Rebel*.

Keywords: peace, religion, justice, manipulation, power

Résumé : Se basant sur la théorie religieuse, l'anthropomorphisme, et l'approche socioculturelle, cet article a pour objectif de mettre en lumière la gestion de la paix dans le monde créatif africain. La paix et l'harmonie peuvent être considérées comme les deux ingrédients les plus précieux de toute société humaine. D'ailleurs, ces valeurs sont si souvent menacées par différents événements sociaux-culturels, y compris des pratiques religieuses qui pourraient jouer un rôle prépondérant dans la quête de la stabilité. En outre, cette étude interroge la validité morale de l'institution religieuse et des dirigeants religieux dans *Rebel*.

Mots clés : paix, religion, justice, manipulation, pouvoir

Introduction

The problem of the legitimacy of the leaders has always been a reality in human societies. Many communities entrust gods to lead them in order to ensure stability and peace because these extraterrestrial beings are deemed to be powerful and omniscient. It is a fact that

in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Africans as well as Europeans saw religion and public policy as intimately linked. Religion was expected to serve political ends, and public policy to promote the established religion. African rulers shared with early Modern European monarchs the belief that political authority had a divine base. Many African kings were thought to be so charged with spiritual powers that they could not live like ordinary mortals (Northrup, 2014: 28)



In post-independence Africa, the place of religion in peace-keeping is still an evergreen subject. However, Gyekye (1996: 9) argued that “in certain instances religion plays a major role in instigating violence, social unrest and cultural tension. Some scholars have gone so far to assert an essential connection between religion and violence.” Also, many writers among whom Asare and Nzekwu (1961) deal with this issue in their fictional works. Asare, in his *Rebel*, depicts this tandem of culture and peace whereby the narrator tells the story of Mzee Matata who victimizes his own people in the name of cultural practices. People of Pachanga entrust their fate to Mzee Matata and the gods. More importantly, he tells the story of a man, Ngurumo, who is preoccupied with the survival of the same people against all odds.

This study examines the real impact of cultural practices on the people of Pachanga as far as peace and harmony are concerned so that they may affect life positively. It further highlights how religious beliefs are used by Mzee Matata and his henchmen as an avenue of oppression of the very people that expect their protection to feel at home.

The analysis in this paper is sustained by anthropomorphism, a theory of religion and sociocultural approach. As a general rule, Guthrie (1993: p.vii) opines that we all anthropomorphize, inevitably and automatically. Human beings give their invisible gods human characteristics and expect the solutions to their daily problems from these gods. But, more often than not, they are disappointed by their gods who seem to be either powerless or insensitive in the face of the humans’ challenges. This situation gives impetus to a number of excesses ranging from the manipulation of religious beliefs to serve personal interest to the cold executions of fellow humans in the name of the hypothetical gods. In the context of this study, religious and cultural beliefs perform a narrative function amounting to some excesses that jeopardize peace. As for the

critics whose major interest is the sociocultural approach, (they) insist that the only way to locate the real work is in reference to the civilization that produced it. They define civilization as the attitudes and actions of a specific group of people and point out that literature takes these attitudes and actions as its subject matter. They feel, therefore, that it is necessary that the critic investigate the social milieu in which a work was created and which it necessarily reflects (Rohrberger et al., 1968: 8).

Upon the background of the foregoing statements, I will study Asare’s fictional work with the premise that his fictional work is about the same place he comes from. In other words, Asare is expected to have created a literature that takes into account the socio-cultural



realities of his own society. Here, “the writer observes and interprets the norms, the values and the customs of society he or she negates or affirms those values according to his/her personal convictions. In this way, he/she creates or destroys social values” (Matiang’i, 1992: 9). Thus, I will study Asare also as the artist’s own apprehension of reality and at the same time his criticism of what he does not support or mediate for what he feels is positive. To reach my goal, I have structured my clusters of ideas into two aspects. The first facet unveils the negative aspects of religion in the life of the people of Pachanga. The concern here is to show that, contrary to what one might be tempted to believe, sometimes, the practice of religious and cultural beliefs divides people more than it unites them. The second one addresses the necessity of reinventing religious paradigms for the welfare of the people. In other words, it is high time human beings used religion not as an end in itself but rather as a means towards harmonious societies where the human person should be at the centre of any undertaking.

I- Religion as an Impediment to Peace and Wellbeing

An impediment is an obstacle to the achievement of a project or an ideal. In this context, peace and social welfare make up the ideal. From a general perspective, religion is expected to foster peace and well-being in the society, yet religious practices are sometimes the cause of crises and even wars. In *Rebel*, the people of Pachanga live in constant fear of their ruler and fetish priest Mzee Matata and the gods. They undergo all sorts of terror and punishments, i.e. hunger, torture and even murder, in the name of the gods embodied by Mzee Matata. In fact, the fate of the people of Pachanga is doubly dramatic. On the one hand, their ruler is at the same time the fetish priest who performs the needed sacrifices with his own hands. So, power is concentrated in the sole hands of the single ruler. On the other hand, all powers are in Mzee Matata’s hands. He was in fact, “the soothsayer of the village and he alone could interpret omens.” (*Rebel*: 3) This is obviously a dangerous practice because it leads to exaggerations and moral corruption, for, according to the hence popular saying, absolute power will but corrupt absolutely. Asare, through his depiction of Mzee Matata, shows how absolute power conferred by religion can “turn a leader into a tyrant.” (Eze, 2019: 140). He “is shown throughout to be bloodthirsty, ruthless and too impatient with criticism.” (Ibid)



Mzee Matata holds too much power to the extent that he can do anything-from torture to murder- that he wants in order to discard his enemies or those who challenge him, especially when he is sure that people comply with the traditional practices unquestionably. At this point of the discussion, what needs to be suggested is to dissociate the role of the traditional priest with the one of the leader because the domain of the spiritual is overwhelmingly irrational while the government of a fictional country, such as Pachanga, rests on concrete and measurable actions. The fact that he cumulates the two powers gives no credit to his soothsaying which is liable to be biased. He uses his uncontested powers conferred on him by the much dreaded gods to settle individual scores. This attitude seriously cripples peace and harmonious life in Pachanga. As a consequence, traditional beliefs and practices tend to be viewed, and rightly so, as “disguised vehicles of oppression” (Richter, 1994: 87) instead of being a source of individual and communal protection. As the narrator has it, “The exaggerated powers of the gods made the people submissive to the whims and caprice of Mzee Matata... They believed the gods controlled the destiny of the living and held the power of life and death” (3). This situation, rather than enhancing peace and harmony, leads to resentment and revolt. As a matter of fact, people of Pachanga fear their ruler and, by extension, the gods more than natural calamities such as epidemics and hunger. So, Mzee Matata takes advantage of the fact that his people regarded him “with awe and revered” (Ibid) him in order to victimize them. For instance, he has Old Bishara, his wife and their three children poisoned in a cowardly manner because Bishara dared oppose him about his so-called gods’ claim for maize as an offering to them. Old Bishara pleaded with him in the first place in these words: “my wife is sick and needs the maize. If she doesn’t eat, she’ll die.” (4). Old Bishara’s behavior is commonsensical; it is that of a responsible husband who cares about the welfare of his sick wife and children. He could not afford to give the least food that he has, otherwise his sick wife and children would starve to death. But Mzee Matata’s reaction was “that of one who knew he was all-powerful and not to be defied... He was not accustomed to opposition.” (4) Arrogantly, he hammers: “bring me the maize or your wife and children will die. Already, the gods are annoyed that you should dare oppose them” (Ibid). Instead of sympathizing with Bishara’s ordeals, Mzee Matata ruthlessly decrees his death and that of his wife and children. Even if his claim was true, he, as a ruler, is supposed to protect them, for example, by offering sacrifices to the gods to appease them if need be because at least “pardon could ... be granted through propitiation to the gods” (Ibid). In this particular case, peace is threatened in the sense that a whole family is decimated in the name of religious practices. The death of Old Bishara, his wife and their three children has grieved



the whole village seen that in African traditions, the family is an extended one. Even if these deaths did not engender open conflicts in Pachanga, there was an atmosphere of suspicion and unease. In fact, there is no logic in Mzee Matata's decision, in the name of the gods, to eliminate Bishara and his whole family. This behavior is characteristic of anthropomorphism which gives God human qualities and flaws:

People believe in invisible but otherwise humanlike gods in each grove and field. Even when we think of an all-powerful God, we transfer to him "human pas- sions and infirmities [and] represent him as a jealous and revengeful, capricious and partial, and, in short, a wicked and foolish man, in every respect but his superior power and authority." (Guthrie, 1993: 70)

Here, Mzee Matata gives God human attributes like anger and the desire to avenge. Taking into account the African cultural beliefs, everybody should be concerned with the trouble of Bishara in the name of solidarity. In the same vein, Gyekye concurs:

Traditional African religion is built into the culture of the people and so is a way of life. African life is traditionally communal. Social solidarity, harmony, and cooperation are therefore values that are of great importance to the African people, and African religion provides a constant support for this social dimension of culture. (Gyekye, 1996: 17).

Instead, Bishara is not only abandoned, but he is also harassed and required to provide for the gods who, according to their cultural beliefs, are expected to protect him and his family in these challenging times, that is the very moment he and his family are in need of support. This behavior contrasts heavily with the nature of solidarity promoted by African cultural values. At least, he could spare the three children who are innocent because it is their father who refused the so-called gods' claim for the maize. Again, it is the instinct of survival which drives Bishara to this decision to reject Mzee Matata's claim in the name of the gods. When one carefully analyses Mzee Matata's declarations, one notices that he takes his decisions first, and tries to mention the gods in order to legitimize and even rationalize them. Even though the narrative does not say anything about the past, it can rightly be assumed that Old Bishara has not so far disobeyed the ruler and fetish priest and that this is his first time. This is a form of injustice which threatens peace, for the tension is thick and Pachanga could erupt into violence at any time. This disproportionate reaction of the ruler is Bediako Asare's strategy to sow seeds of sympathy and hence revolt in other characters so that they may be shocked to the point of fighting for change. The questions that can rightfully arise from the above analyses here are: do the gods really need Bishara's maize? If they are so powerful,



why can't they see that Bishara's wife is sick and that she needs the maize? Why can't they see that the three children should not be blamed for their parents' faults? Why can't Mzee Matata require propitiation to appease the gods' anger?

One might be tempted to think that Old Bishara is foolhardy. But this judgement may be too quick and unsympathetic in the sense that in situations of crisis, most human beings develop an extraordinary strength for their own survival. Here, Bishara's aim was not to challenge or defy the authority of Mzee Matata and that of the gods for the sake of doing so, but being faced already with disease and want, his usual submissiveness has shaken to the point of making of him a new being with a new logic. This new being's attitude, even though normal or pragmatic, threatens the established order by daring to oppose Mzee Mata's order: the usual yes-manship that characterizes all traditional beliefs in Pachanga. He is seen by his contemporaries as a rebel. At this point of the discussion, it is important to stress that, unlike what happens in his fictional world (Pachanga), Asare's real world (traditional societies in Ghana) back then in the 1960 and even today, is a traditional setting where "consultation and consensus are important features of decision-making that allow for individual input." (Gyekye, 1996: 153). In fact, sometimes, what one calls peace is the conscious and unconscious submissiveness of the downtrodden. What I mean here is that society is so overwhelmed with forms of social injustice that if the victims had to react all the time, there would never be peace.

In addition, Mzee Matata disregards one of the sacred principles of religious practices which states that "you should do others as you would have others do to you." (Newman and Graham, 2018: 5) In fact, "practicing this principle should increase one's well-being in multiple ways". (Ibid)

Also, Omari's death is another instance of disrupting peace among the inhabitants of Pachanga and a proof of the abuse of power in the name of the gods. The innocent boy dies as a consequence of laughing "very loudly at the time Mzee Matata was interceding with the gods." (13) Mzee Matata threatens Omari in these words: 'The gods are offended, 'he cried out. 'For this you shall die.' It is strange for the gods to kill someone just for laughing. If one considers the phrase "you shall die", it is clear that Mzee Mata gives no chance to the boy to redeem and so appease the anger of the gods. Rather, he decrees the death of one of his people so easily and so ruthlessly. This puts all Pachanga in a delicate situation. No one is so sure what constitutes a major offence for which one can die, for there seems to be no list of dos



and don'ts. The don'ts are especially left to the sole discretion of the sole ruler and fetish priest who decides which is a major offence, and how it should be dealt with. No one, and ironically not even the gods, is qualified to argue with Mzee Matata. In spite of his bad behavior, the gods seemed to be cooperative. This situation gives rise to fear and mistrust, thus undermining the joy of living and peace in Pachanga community.

Asare definitely puts up a scathing criticism about how religion is used to victimize the people of Pachanga. Through the life of Mzee Matata and other insensitive characters like Fundi, Zamani, Abedi and Salifu, Asare vilifies the way religion is misused. In addition, one would expect a male author like Asare to ascribe his female characters to the role of child bearers in this male-dominated society but he has been ahead of his time by having Zamani, a woman, figure among the advisors of the ruler. It is reasonable, therefore, to state that there was room for women in the decision circles in traditional Africa long before the claims of feminist movements.

But, an important aspect of African cultural values has been obscured by the novelist. Even though in the traditional African political system, the ruler holds the central position, the law drastically limits his power to the extent that he cannot dare embark on any action without the consent of the people. It is believed in almost, if not, all traditional societies that “the chief depends on his subjects for the stability of his rule; that the chief must respect the wishes of his subjects; that he could not rule without the consent of the people; and that there are limits or checks on the exercise of power by the chief.” (Gyekye, 1996:110) These practices are the basic elements of democracy which have always existed in the traditional African political system through dialogism and community works.

Yet, Asare has Mzee Matata and his cabinet rule without any accountability to the people of Pachanga as though that was the normal practice in traditional African dispensation. This can be interpreted as a strategy to tell the reader that whatever the society, there will always be some people who will try to do whatever they like and this should in no way be mistaken for the prescribed norms. Even in western civilizations, there were rulers such as Napoleon Bonaparte (France), Leopold II (Belgium), Ivan IV (Russia), Enver Pasha (Turkey) who were tyrants and ruthless killers of their people. Yet, their cultural practices are not judged in the light of their behaviors as is the case with African rulers like Mzee Matata. In other words, one should not judge the value of cultural practices basing on what one or a few individuals do, for they are not representative of the whole. Therefore, the novelist is trying to



raise his readers' awareness on the "danger of a single story" (Adichie, 2016). Asare is a Ghanaian novelist and journalist who relocated in 1963 in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania in order to help set up the Nationalist newspaper and it is obvious his commitment as a nationalist features in *Rebel* which is to be published later in 1969.

In addition, it is traditionally unimaginable to have a character like Mzee Matata, be he a ruler, do whatever he likes without a reaction from the gods who seem to be literally dispossessed of their power. Whether in African literature or real life situation, it is difficult for a criminal or tyrant who is a religious leader or ruler or both to prosper. Such rulers are invariably suppressed either by the gods or the people themselves. Asare's choice to spare Mzee Matata may be a strategy to show how politicians in the context use religion to manipulate their people. However, at his decision to reintroduce human sacrifice by offering Ngurumo and Seitu to the gods, things change dramatically. At this level, a new element embodied by Shabani intrudes in their habits and, like Ngurumo, questions their cultural practices. Unfortunately, the change has to occur through a stranger (Shabani). At first glance, one could be tempted to deduce that it was impossible to engender change from within, but when one considers the fact that Asare created Ngurumo to carry progressive ideas even before the intrusion of Shabani, it becomes amply evident that each society carries the germs of its own transformation even though there seems to be impulses of resistance to change. But it is important to state that readers should not try to dig anthropological facts from Asare's words as human sacrifices. Even though Mzee Matata wanted to institutionalize human sacrifices in *Rebel*, it should not connote that all African traditions were in favor of human sacrifice. On the contrary,

The practice of human sacrifice... was carried on in secret. And the fact that this ritual killing of human beings was undertaken in a clandestine manner and that all those involved were sworn to secrecy indicates that those who committed it knew only too well not only that the act was morally wrong but also that it was a criminal act, which would never receive the approval of the entire society (Gyekye, 1996: 30).

It should be clear from the foregoing, then, that the human sacrifice that Mzee Matata wanted to revive in Pachanga is a blatant violation of human rights and a serious threat to peace and well-being. This is the reason why the novelist has not allowed him to succeed. The murder of Omari and Old Bishara and his wife and three children was a secret assassination plotted by Matata even if he claims it was the gods who killed them; As a matter of fact,

the muzzling of public opinion and the arrest and detention of individuals for expressing opinions that may be opposed to those in authority are features of



postcolonial African politics, not of the traditional politics of Africa. These political abuses have no basis in the traditional politics (Gyekye, 1996:153).

It becomes evident from the discussions above that it is not fair to argue that “the traditional religious and cultural values have, all along, fostered peace and stable conditions” (Matiang’i, 1992: 17). Quite on the contrary, “in every religion and culture, there are some inherent weaknesses as well as strengths. The traditional religious and cultural beliefs and expressions had some of its negative elements that dehumanized societies” (ibid). In Pachanga, therefore, peace and harmony have been truly threatened by “the traditional religious and cultural beliefs.”

II- Cultural Practices at the Tribunal of Rationality: Ngurumo and Shabani or the Creative Destruction

The tribunal of rationality is meant to designate the judgment of the validity of any decision or action using reason as the most credible source of knowledge, and one’s only judge appraises. The projection of the rational thinking on the validity of the practices and the utility on these practices in the literary programming are the ethical measurement against which characters are appraised. This section, therefore, proceeds from the premise that some cultural practices such as those depicted in *Rebel* sometimes destroy the society instead of perpetuating it. The implementation of such practices does not rest on any scientifically verifiable facts. In other words, these practices among which the offering of sacrifices including human sacrifices to the gods in order to seek favors, have no meaning if probed by rational and independent minds such as those of Ngurumo and Shabani. Therefore, they engage in the deconstruction of the cultural practices and beliefs that impede overall development and welfare in Pachanga. Put differently, Ngurumo and Shabani do not challenge the established order for the sake of doing it; they creatively destroy the bad practices.

In fact, religion as practiced by Mzee Matata and his cabinet impedes questioning and logical thinking or criticism from which constructive peace may spring. At the onset, it is paramount to state that it is not religion as such which constitutes a problem, but the use of it by religious leaders such as Mzee Matata which is a real problem. It is in the name of religion that Mzee Matata demands things from his people whose welfare he should seek first. Any least criticism is viewed as a challenge and especially a threat to his authority and the author



is punished heavily in order to dissuade any potential rebel. Mzee Matata uses the cultural practices as an avenue for personal gratification.

Incidentally, among the inhabitants of Pachanga, only a few people dare oppose Mzee Matata openly. Ngurumo is the only one to survive the tyrant's wrath. Unlike his contemporaries, Asare endowed Ngurumo with a sharp thinking. He thinks things through; he does not take all the happenings in Pachanga for granted. He doubts the fact that Old Bishara and his family and also Omari were killed by the gods. The discussion with Seitu, his wife, is revealing:

'I don't believe that the gods killed them,' he said. ...

'You musn't say such things,' she warned. 'You'll make Mzee Matata very angry.'

'I'm quite sure it is he who killed them,' Ngurumo replied. 'He had Bishara and his family poisoned.'

'But why?' Seitu asked

'Because Bishara defied him.' (5)

The capacity of reflection of Ngurumo is displayed in this dialogue when seen that he reflects seriously about events instead of believing blindly. On the contrary, he questions. But, Seitu is scared by her husband's attitude, for no one ever opposes Mzee Matata without consequence. Further, the narrator says:

But was it the gods who had acted against Omari? No one in the village was asking that question – no one except Ngurumo. The cobra made him suspicious. Had Omari dropped dead, without any obvious physical action or without reason, Ngurumo would have been as convinced as the rest that the gods had killed the youth. In this case it was a cobra that brought about his death. There was something in the situation that did not convince Ngurumo. Supposing Mzee Matata or his aides had secreted the cobra in Omari's hut? (14)

This excerpt shows that Ngurumo, unlike his countrymen, is rational and pragmatic. He questions the strange way in which Omari dies, especially when he is already threatened by Mzee Matata. Ngurumo even goes further by declaring the following to his wife: 'Mzee Matata,' he told her several times, 'pretends to protect the people. What he really does is to rob them. Look how short we are of food, but he doesn't go short. And he lives well' (9). Ngurumo criticizes the way Mzee Matata uses his position to exploit his own people at the time they are in real need. In fact, hunger strikes and people of Pachanga are starving while their ruler is asking about sacrifices to the gods. His open-mindedness drives him to go beyond what the common Pachangan perceives and to link their lot to the cupidity and stupidity of their powerful ruler and fetish priest. For example, the maize that is required from



Old Bishara by Mzee Matata is not and cannot be for the gods unless one anthropomorphizes them. They are not human beings and consequently do not eat maize. It is a fact in most world traditions that human or animal blood can appease the gods, but the maize here seems to be destined to Mzee Matata and his family, which is why Ngurumo talks about robbery. In fact, while many people go hungry, the ruler and his family wallow in abundance. This blatantly constitutes an “easy means of earning a livelihood.” (36) This state of affairs does not guarantee peace because, as is commonly believed, a hungry man is an angry man. Moreover, the ruler’s attitude contrasts sharply with the spirit of solidarity of the African cultural practices. It is not morally acceptable to amass wealth while one’s fellow humans lack the basic necessities of life.

Ngurumo embodies the rational African who is critical of the traditional practices which consist of solving nearly all the society’s problems by offering sacrifices to the gods. In spite of the scarcity of food in Pachanga, Mzee Matata tells his people that “the gods require sacrifices of goats and chickens. Ten goats and one hundred chickens. They have to be brought to the shrine by tomorrow when the sun is at its height.” (17) “Attributing human characteristics to nonhuman phenomena” (Guthrie, 1993:6) is precisely to anthropomorphize. Ngurumo disapproves of this attitude of the ruler who, in spite of the scarcity of resources, mainly food, demands such huge sacrifices to his people he is supposed to care for.

To prove the ruler’s choice irrational, i.e. based on no evidence, Ngurumo says to Seitu: ‘The people are underfed... To destroy so many chickens and goats means still less for the people to eat. If the gods wish the people well, they would have saved them from the illness which killed so many of them.’ (18)

Ngurumo argues that the sacrifice demanded by Mzee Matata is a waist because it will only worsen the case of the people of Pachanga who will end up having literally nothing to eat. He also doubts the efficacy of the sacrifices they offer since there still exist diseases which decimate ‘more than a quarter’ (17) of the population and declares that ‘something has to be done.’ (20)

What really angers Ngurumo is the fact that, even though the villagers are in real danger, they persist in their follies to the gods and admiration of Mzee Matata (22). This attitude cannot and should not be interpreted as consent but rather as a blind submission to their ruler and fetish priest and especially the fear of undergoing the wrath of the so-called gods. People of Pachanga, in the name of religion, are “inclined to accept everything fatalistically.” (23) Like every activist, Ngurumo decides to ‘challenge the fetish priest. He



would pit himself against Mzee Matata.’ (23) That Ngurumo makes up his mind to go against the established order does not mean that he is unaware of the dramatic consequences that await him. Ngurumo, no doubt, appears to be “signaling a new revolutionary spirit” (Chinaka, 2019:154) at the very expense of his own life simply because “all the people of the village will perish unless someone saves them” (20) and especially because “desperate situations require desperate measures” (Chinaka, 2019: 155). Pachanga is already under the spell of the gods and the ruler and fetish priest. After having thus decried the blatant inhuman living conditions of his co-villagers, Ngurumo finds a solution to their problems:

He saw this fertile reach of territory as the answer to the problems of his people. Soil that would support grass of such richness would also produce fat crops... Here large herds of cattle could graze and the grass would replace itself almost as quickly as it was eaten. It would be possible to do more than grow maize... Here was abundance. Here was life-giving land. (28)

Ngurumo shows that the problem of Pachanga is the lack of fertile land and Mzee Matata and the gods can apparently do nothing about it and so the solution to this problem is to move to the east where the land is more fruitful and the harvest likely to be bountiful as is shown in the above excerpt. If they move to the new land, not only will they practice agriculture, but they will also be more successful in animal husbandry, fishing and other agricultural activities. Through Ngurumo, the novelist suggests that certain situations of life such as the cruel lack of food in Pachanga, can be settled by man’s ingenuity and intellectual depth instead of the constant reference to the gods. But when human beings fail to understand something, they tend to anthropomorphize. Therefore, “anthropomorphism ...may look like a shortcut to understanding, and one with a hidden agenda, at that” (Guthiere, 1993: 90). It follows that “extra land gives a one-time boost for food production and provides more food per person. People become heavier and the death rate falls” (Colson and Deirdre, 2018: 68). Even Shabani has pointed out that they “have to learn how to make the land yield without exhausting the soil... That calls for rotation of crops as we call it... You also have to fertilize the soil” (100). In other words, Ngurumo and Shabani see the prevailing situation in Pachanga as an outcome of the growth of the population and the subsequent “malnutrition and disease caused by a more limited supply... (which) lead to increased mortality.” (Colson and Deirdre, 2018: 68). In fact, “as more people work on a fixed amount of land, less and less output is added. The result is an ever-widening imbalance between the number of people and the supply of food.” (Ibid)



By refusing to move to the new land as proposed by Ngurumo, the attitude of Pachangans is synonymous with self-torture. They have a solution yet they persist with the dictates of Mzee Matata to cling to their barren land with the claim that “the gods don’t wish the people to move” (34). Mzee Matata even goes further and threatens those who, like Ngurumo and Seitu who have finally moved to the new land, will dare move in their turn, in these terms: “... the gods will punish most severely anyone who goes to live on it” (Ibid). If Mzee Matata still clutches to the religious practices in these dire straits, the question that is worth asking oneself is whether human beings are created for religion or religion for human beings. Indeed, the answer is obvious. Religion is not and cannot be an end in itself. Kwame Gyekye has a similar stand when he posits:

The prayers are aimed at using the powers of the supernatural beings for the promotion of human welfare and happiness. There is much evidence to indicate that should a deity fail to deliver on a request sought in prayer, that deity will be censured, treated with contempt, and ultimately abandoned by the people. This means that, as far as the followers of the religion are concerned, the deities exist, and are to be called upon, to supervise and enhance the well-being of human beings. This fact underlines the perception that religion is founded on morality and must have a social relevance. Religious faith is, thus, perceived as utilitarian and practical (16).

In other words, Gyekye condemns the passive use of religion by having some characters rebel against the dictates of Mzee Matata and highlights the active interaction that should exist between it and its followers. Cultural practices are made by man and so they can be unmade if they are no longer useful to the people. But in Pachanga, things happen as though religion were an end in itself. Ngurumo tries to tell his compatriots that this is not normal: “the people are underfed... To destroy so many chickens and goats means still less for the people to eat. If the gods wished the people well, they would save them from the illness which killed so many of them” (18).

Humans are endowed with the rationality that allows them to make choices in order for their race to be perpetuated. But the situation which prevails in Pachanga is that of extreme emergency: people are dying and steps need to be taken in order to save them from the worst and safeguard peace for everyone. Quite unfortunately, the ruler engages his people in a static and blind compliance and reliance on the supernatural for their daily needs even when this is proven to be unsuccessful. This is why Ngurumo has decided to “champion the struggle for the community’s survival rather than individual person’s aggrandizement” (Na’Allah:73).

This activism nearly costs him death. But Shabani’s intervention by shooting down Mzee Mata saved his life and that of his wife. For the latter, the suffering of the people of



Pachanga is mainly due to superstition and ignorance. Asare writes: “Your crops haven’t been growing well anyway,” he reminded Fundi. ‘Don’t blame the gods! ... you must blame yourselves. Men have always blamed gods for their misfortunes. That’s so much easier than trying to find the real cause of the trouble and then working to set things right’ (92). For Shabani, the people of Pachanga, with the exception of Ngrumo, do not really work to uproot the real causes of their trouble. Shabani compares Moses to Ngrumo and emboldens him to save the people of Pachanga. Shabani explains: “He led his people out of bondage,’... that’s what you must do for your people. They’re not the slaves of a nation or people; they’re the slaves of ignorance, superstition and outworn ideas and beliefs” (104).

Shabani’s call works as an extra catalyst that causes Ngrumo to lead his people to the Promised Land. He becomes the messiah who helps his people get rid of their superstitious beliefs. But it must be emphasized that “African traditional religion was not a house of cards that collapsed at the instance of change, but it has the potential to adapt on its own, in response to changes that take place around it.” (Olukpona, 1991: 26). I concur, therefore, that Shabani has been simply used as a further spur to the dynamics of change incarnated by Ngrumo.

Conclusion

In this examination of the role of cultural practices in the process of peacekeeping in Bediako Asare’s creative world, I have argued that under normal circumstances, religion is a means to enhance peace and together living among communities. But from the study of *Rebel*, a number of conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, it is obvious that Bediako Asare condemns the selfish use of religion by characters such as Mzee Matata, the ruler and fetish priest, and his accomplices Fundi, Zamani, Salifu, and Abedi. Secondly, it is evident that African traditions, customs and cultural practices have not always been the main sources of destabilization of peace even if some characters have used religion as a spectre to submit the people of Pachanga. It has been demonstrated that Bediako Asare has a few characters among whom Bishara and Ngrumo, retain their sense of criticism and thus of humanity and with the help of Shabani, the stranger, have succeeded in throwing the basis of change and rational thinking in their community especially by moving to a more fertile land which symbolizes a new era of new paradigms. It was also established that, although, there were some noticeable flaws from the religious and cultural practices in Pachanga, it would sound unfair to try to understand African politics by considering the happenings in *Rebel*. It can, therefore, be concluded from the study that Bediako Asare’s stand on the cultural practices is that communal life would



sound peaceful if some African customs and cultural practices among which human sacrifices, the sanction of the freedom of speech and opinion and the blind reliance on the gods could be discarded. In the final resort, it appears that Ngurumo and Shabani are the mouthpieces of Asare and the symbols of the progressive ideas, for change is inherent to each human society.

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