

# Etiological Model of War Psychotrauma in an African Cultural Context



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**Submission:** October 12, 2022; **Published:** October 18, 2022

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## Abstract

The article discusses the modelling of the etiology of war psychotrauma in an African cultural context. It starts from the clinical findings of a fear of the «mystical-cultural» among some soldiers engaged in the fight against terrorism against Boko Haram. The objective of the study was to understand the function of cultural signifiers in the emergence of psychic trauma in these soldiers. This is the clinical method that was used. Data collection was done from four psychotraumatised soldiers through semi-directive interviews. The results note that war psychotrauma in traditional black Africa originates in a complex of relationship conflicts. It is simultaneously an aggression of the Enemy-terrorist on the Ego-Soldier (macrocosmos pole), a repression of the Ancestor on the Ego (Mesocosmos pole), and a relational fission between the Ancestor and the Bio-lignager Family of the Ego (microcosmos pole). It is from these results that we have developed the etiological model of war psychotrauma based on cultural signifiers.

**Keywords:** Etiological model; Psychotrauma of war; Cultural signifiers; Africa

## Introduction

Laplanche and Pontalis [1], joining Freud [2], consider psychotrauma as a lived event which, in the space of a short time, brings such an increase in psychic life that its suppression or assimilation by the ways normal becomes an impossible task, which results in lasting disturbances in the use of energy. Psychological trauma is therefore due for these authors to a large flow of excitement that cannot be assimilated; consequently, traumatic neuroses emerge at the very moment of the traumatic accident. However, Freud [2] begins by distinguishing traumatic neurosis from war neurosis because for him the former can occur outside of any brutal mechanical violence. This is why Bokanowski [3] thinks that Freud [2] has a very dynamic conception of traumatic neurosis and it is certainly in this sense that he compares the psychic apparatus to a vesicle covered with a protective membrane, the barrier. excitations. But Vallet [4] joins this Freudian thought by calling traumatic, the whole of the in flows of external excitations, likely to break the protective barrier of the psychic apparatus which represented the barrier-excitations. Also, for Bourrat [5], psychotrauma would result from «an extensive break-in of the excitation barrier.» He therefore emphasizes once again the importance of the purely psychic

etiological factor that would be dread, as opposed to the physical concussion which would result from the action of a danger of death in combat for which one was not prepared by a state of prior anxiety. However, it is questionable whether in war trauma there is sometimes a combination of dread and physical concussion.

Indeed, for some authors such as Janet [6], Lachal [7] and Aljendi [8], the etiology of mental trauma appears to be purely economic and energetic. For Janet [6], for example, whatever the origin of the trauma, the role of emotion and associated feelings is paramount. Desroches [9] joins Ferenczi [10] in linking psychotrauma to regression in the infantile stage of self-love, revealed by character changes, and disorders of emotional control. However, unlike Bokanowski [3], he insists on the importance of the event factor by emphasizing that “No one is immune to traumatic neurosis since the narcissistic stage is an important fixation point for the libidinal development of everything to be human.” [10]. But Marcelli [11] like Barrois [12] departs from this etiological point of view, because for him, traumatic neuroses are the result not of an event, rather of an accident experienced as brutal and sudden, a disaster intimate, singular that leads man into the tragic. For him, therefore, it is not the horrors of war

that are traumatic, but the way in which the psychotraumatized soldier lived them. Chidiac and Crocq [13] consider traumatic neurosis not as the consequence of certain processes, but as a fictitious construction of the world, in a disruption of temporality, marked by the seal of the omnipresence of horrifying trauma. The realities of war are presented here as a test which constitutes for the soldier suffering from trauma a profound upheaval of being, in his relations with the world, and with himself.

These different works on the etiology of trauma have many common points. They recognize that the traumatic break-in that generates the experience of dread is paramount. They describe terror as those soldiers who did not have time to be afraid. The dread at the origin of psychotrauma would be an experience of lack of word, emotion and support for thought. For them, the trauma clinic is a clinic of an unmissed encounter with the real world of death. According to these studies, psychotrauma occurs because death does not appear in the unconscious; one wonders what could represent nothingness. Thus, we live as if we were immortal, and during the traumatic break-in, there is nothing to receive the image of death. For most of these previous studies, war psychotrauma therefore results from the dread of a missed death.

However, our clinical practice on the care of soldiers victims of war trauma in the fight against Boko-Haram in Far North Cameroon, allowed us to make a different observation. During the consultations, the psychotraumatic symptomatology of certain soldiers was mainly colored by «mystico-cultural» elements. Indeed, soldiers suffering from PTSD revealed that their dreams, nightmares, flashbacks and hallucinations were overwhelmed by images of the terrorists who wore «gray-gray» on them; who disappeared and reappeared «miraculously» to strangle them; whose shots failed to reach them; whose bullets bounced off the bodies without penetrating them; whose bayonet knives did not pierce, which were buried and resuscitated; who killed their comrades just by blowing on their noses, in short terrorists with various mystical powers. PTSD in these soldiers seems not only to result from the horror of a missed death, but is more closely related to a mystical horror linked to cultural signifiers. Indeed, according to Sow [14], in traditional Black Africa, the mental disorder results from a violence undergone by Ego which is conceived as ordered totality, and constituted by a triple polar relation which locates it vertically compared to the Ancestor, horizontally in relation to the larger community and ontogenetically in relation to the bio-lineage family. The conflict of relationship within an antithetical couple is what defines the essence of the theoretical framework of African psychopathological thought. It is the anchor in the conception of the genesis and the meaning of mental disorder. The study therefore seeks to grasp the function of cultural signifiers in the etiology of war psychotrauma among soldiers at the front. We work on the assumption that, through cultural signifiers, war psychotrauma is understood to result from a breakdown in relational networks.

### Methods

The study is qualitative research. The latter is often intended to study human phenomena with a view to greater understanding. It is for us to understand the function of cultural signifiers in the etiology of war psychotrauma in a Cameroonian socio-cultural environment. It was the inductive approach that was chosen. We established the facts and made rigorous, punctual and repeated observations concerning the emergence of psychotrauma seen from a cultural angle. We made use of the clinical method, because it is defined above all by taking into account the singularity and the whole situation. We mainly relied on the case studies, because of their ability to provide an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon such as mental trauma and in a specific context, that of traditional black Africa. The research took place at the RAPHA-Psy Psychology Center. This structure often accommodates soldiers in mental distress, on their return from war missions.

As the research is qualitative, the use of a small, non-probabilistic sample was preferred. The participants were chosen on the basis of their ability to provide interesting and relevant data on the experience of the war and as understood by themselves. They were five Cameroonian soldiers, having participated in anti-terrorist missions against Boko Haram in Far North Cameroon. They were diagnosed with severe psychotrauma using the Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Checklist Scale. This scale has a threshold score of 44 for the diagnosis of PTSD, its sensitivity is 97% and its specificity is 87% [15]. It therefore makes it possible to effectively identify psychotraumatized individuals coming under psychiatric or psychotherapeutic care. As another selection criterion, participants did not adhere to hospital care. For their recovery, they only practiced the rites in their respective villages.

Data collection was done through semi-structured interviews. This technique allowed us to focus the participants' comments mainly on the etiology of war psychotrauma and the experience of war. We met each participant four times according to the saturation principle, where the continuation of the collection no longer gave us any new information. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each depending on the participant's availability. These voluntary participants, after signing the informed consent, were free to suspend the interviews at any time, so it was up to them to deliver only what they could say. As a data analysis technique, we used content analysis, which focused on identifying significant themes. In this context, we have used inter-coder agreements to ensure the relevance of the themes and sub-themes identified. The participants' speech fragments are used to empirically base the analysis.

### Result

The data collected in this study have highlighted three ambiguous relationships that are at the root of war psychotrauma among Cameroonian soldiers engaged in the fight against

terrorism in the Far North. It is the conflicting relationship between the Soldier and the Enemy; the disintegration of the relationship between the Soldier and the Ancestor; the relational fission between the bio-lineage Family and the Ancestor.

### **The conflicting relationship between the Soldier and the Enemy**

For Sow [14], the mental disorder is Ego “abused” by the rupture, provoked by an aggressive otherness, of one or the other of its bonds, resulting from the fundamental constituent poles. It is a question of highlighting a conflict field among the many fields available in culture. In this study, the first area of conflict that is highlighted is the conflict between the Soldier and the Enemy. We can emphasize this in Soldier Afana: *“We had arrested a terrorist with barks tied all over his body. And we understood why our bullets did not penetrate it. Except that they are more dangerous because they mystically reach us.”* The mystical attack of which this soldier speaks defines the conflictual relation between the Soldier and the Enemy, that which summons the etiology. Etiology consists in the elucidation of the cause, which is at the same time the meaning in African cultural context. At the most general level in Africa, the recognized etiology of a mental illness is, at the same time, the indicator of a determined conflictual relationship. For Soldier Afana, it is therefore the mystical attack which explains the psychotrauma from which he suffers.

This basal conflict of relationship is also noted in Soldier Bama: *“The Boko Haram are great fetishists. A BH mystically appeared before us like this, and stabbed a comrade, wanting to shoot him, all of our weapons got mysteriously blocked. I had a week of nightmares about this guy and I always woke up paralyzed.”* The traumatic conflict here is exclusively external to the subject. Therefore, it is not internalized as a break-in of the psyche, albeit in intimate, deep and constituent connection with it. It is a current conflict insofar as it is to be sought in the vicissitudes of the current basal relational configurations of the subject. According to traditional African thought, it is indeed a dynamic conflict whose intelligibility is located, and is analyzed in the same way, in the current relations of the subject with one of its constituent poles which here is a “Fetish enemy”.

African psychopathology is thus dominated by the notion of relationship of otherness in its conception of the genesis and the meaning of mental disorder. The Enemy is pointed out here as being part of an active negative in the constitutive structure of the person-personality. This aspect is highlighted in the traumatic symptomatology in Soldier Dewa who declares: *«I was haunted by night and by day by this image of a terrorist who eliminated a comrade who searched him to remove his gray-gray, just by blowing in his nostrils.»* This persecuting violence suffered by the Soldier is conceived as external to him. This is the theme that allows the psyche of Ego to maintain and strengthen its internal consistency. This is why the persecutory object relationship is an important

psychological modality in Black Africa on the triple plane of the imaginary, the real and the symbolic.

It appears that it is a question of choosing from among the various probable fields of conflict, the one from which the cause of the disorder must be attributed. The main part of the interpretative moment consists in revealing the «critical» dimensional axis of the subject affected by the aggressive violence of a named otherness, at the level of one of the fundamental relational poles. This prospective step is sometimes difficult and long. But in the case of war psychotrauma, it is easy and short because the enemy, that of the field of war is quickly pointed out by all. This is what Soldier Chimbo and his treating marabout did: *«I knew who had done this to me and the marabout confirmed it to me. It was this woman responsible for equipping terrorists in gray-gray that I had eliminated during an offensive operation.»* Soldier Chimbo’s Psychotraumatic Syndrome is nothing more than a spell cast by a Boko Haram woman. She is the named conflict pole.

We note a remarkable stability, a constancy of «imaginary» representations concerning the conflicting dimensional axis, characterized by an Enemy of the front who attacks the Soldier with fetishes. In terms of productions, we are struck by the similarity of the content offered to us by the participants. There is no doubt that we grasp one of the constitutive sources of the individual imagination which, in highly structured traditional African societies, differs very little from one combatant to another. However, the conflicting polar field may not be exclusive of others. It sometimes happens that two problematic relational fields are updated. Beyond a head-on conflict, it may simply be the breakdown of a relationship.

### **The Disintegration of the Relationship Between the Soldier and the Ancestor**

The breakdown of the Soldier-Ancestor bond was born out of the Soldier-Enemy conflict. War is a field ruled by the Ancestor. Within it reign laws, precepts, rules, prohibitions defined by the Ancestor since ancient centuries. Also, there are a number of actions to be taken before the battle, but also afterwards with this Entity [16]. The combatant who goes to war must therefore master and apply this sacred regulation at the risk of seeing his vertical relationship deteriorate. The participants in this study say they have failed in various aspects of this cultural system.

Soldier Bama admits that he did not carry out the traditional pre-war prerequisites. He regrets: *«The uncles blamed me a lot for the fact that I went to the Far North without first going to our place. And that it did not please the “Mvamba” (Ancestor among the Betis)».* Soldier Chimbo, he feels sorry for the instructions violated during the war *«In the village, it is said that the curse pursues you more when you have done something other than the orders you have been given. However in this dirty war, it is very difficult to scrupulously respect orders. How could I do it? «.* Soldier Dewa also

speaking of the precepts not respected on the battlefield declares: «My only error is that in coming into contact with the blood of the killed people, there are certain words that I had to say, but I did not do». As for Soldier Afana, he admits having violated certain prohibitions after the war: "... the old man from Simbo told me that my suffering had worsened because I had continued to wear the outfits that I put on the front, so I 'had broken a return from war rule". All these acts and omissions for them are not without consequences. Indeed, the transgression of the Word, Law of the Ancestor generates the rupture at the deep level of the cultural bond. This leads to a state of disorder, heartbreak and insecurity characteristic of war psychotrauma. Because, it is recognized that it is the Ancestor founder of the lineage or of the clan who is the only one who can totally and fully guarantee the subject in physical and mental being [14].

However, it should be noted that apart from direct action, according to which at any time the Ancestor can exercise on each of the constituent dimensions of the Soldier, traditional culture has created vertical antithetical doublets of oneself such as wandering spirits, geniuses, who had privileged relations with the Ancestor, which underlines their relations with the problems of traditionality. Soldier Dewa says he experienced the action of one of these spirits in his village after returning from the front:

*It's a spirit that claimed the rite He came, he was crying, he was shaking the houses. It was something real. He turns into a bird, he shakes the houses, he puts himself on the roof, he cries, he shouts, he expresses his anger, it was terrible. It was the concession insiders who discerned what angered him and what he demanded. I was told in the morning that the problem was some of my failures on the battlefield. And that we had to go directly to the Mfossie tree or else some serious madness would catch me.*

It therefore turns out that any member of the community, if he transgresses the prohibitions ensuring the cohesion and homogeneity of the group, he is likely to be the target of the ancestors of the Ancestor and to be affected by a mental disorder such as PTSD in the case of the study.

From the point of view of traditional African culture, the evil which in the fight against terrorism is murder, represents the threat of a resurgence of ancient chaos, prior to creation, therefore to culture, to socio-cultural ties, that is, to humans [17]. This is because it challenges not only the freedom of man, but the very existence of man. This is why man must endeavor to circumscribe this threat by identifying areas where the Sacred does not tolerate intrusion and by defining prohibitions whose violation results in misfortune. Now we see that during the war, there is a conscious or unconscious violation of several prohibitions. The meaning of the prohibition is defined here as respect for the ancestral law and the avoidance of confusion, that is to say, basically the formal prohibition of any exercise which would be a reissue purely deprived of violence, because it would bring the community

together to the pre-cultural situation and dissolve the existence of all in total confusion. This is why the prohibition violated during the war not only affects the relationship between the Soldier and the Ancestor, but it also generates a fission in the relationship between the bio-lineage family and the Ancestor.

### **The Relational Fission Between the Bio-Lineage Family and the Ancestor**

Apart from the Soldier, the vertical axis also articulates the Ancestor with the unity of all: individuals, family, lineage, clan between them on the one hand and, on the other hand, of all with the whole of culture. This axis gives all Existing the fundamental dimension and consolidates their phylogenetic continuity at the triple plane of Being, Existence and Culture. Verticality can experience upheavals linked to the behavior of one or more family members. In this case, it is because of one of the members (the soldier at the front) that the ancestor-family bio-lineage relationship is affected. The disintegration of this relationship is highlighted by the risks faced by family members. This is the case with Soldier Bama who says: «I was also told that I absolutely had to do "Tsó", not only for my own good, but also for my offspring, and that my fate would contaminate the family in general, that is to say my parents or my brothers and sisters". This clarification classically known as "transgenerational trauma" in the case of ascendants and descendants, and "diffusion trauma" or "vicarious trauma" in the case of siblings, marks in traditional African thought the feverishness of vertical relationship between the Bio-lineage Family and the Ancestor.

The cracks in the ancestral relationship can manifest themselves directly or after a certain number of years. This is what Soldier Afana explains:

*With us, when you go on a mission where there have been killings, such as that of the Far North, when you return, if you do not go to the village «wash», which even if you do not 'do not have the fallout there, in the long run, not only yourself will you have the fallout, but also the children you had after this mission will have fallout, because the ancestors always hold you grudge.*

Here, it is the resentment of the Ancestor which explains the occurrence of transgenerational trauma. Soldier Dewa going in the same direction confirms that: "If you even have a child with a woman on the return from such a killing mission, you pass this on to the child. That is why it is necessary at all costs to appease the spirits to ward off unhappiness in the family". The resentment of the Ancestor, in turn the quality of the relationship between the Bio-lineage Family and him would be decisive on the understanding of the etiology of war psychotrauma.

Indeed, the Ancestor is the reference, the ultimate recourse of the person-personality; recourse to his Being, his Law, his Word and his Order. He is at the same time: the foundation, the guarantor, but also the founder of the community and of the

current cultural order. The veiled meaning of an individual's mental disorder, which here is soldier's psychotrauma, is always ultimately, and ultimately, a warning; which means that violence, a latent state of aggression, is a symptom that threatens the whole of community balance. The disease sign reminds us that if there is private violence, it risks being a harbinger of pre-cultural chaos. The disorder thus «repeated», and which is counter-order, calls into question the cultural relational structures, created by the Ancestor, which guarantee the place and the security of all. This suggests that members of the psychotrauma soldier's bio-lineage family are being asked to strengthen their troubled relationship with the Ancestor.

Indeed, the untimely questioning of deep anthropological structures, risks putting everyone and everyone in a state of mental disorder, since there is continuity of links, at the structural level, between the intimate structure of the person-personality of the soldier psychotraumatized of war and those of socio-cultural relations. Hence the emergence of diffusion trauma and

transgenerational trauma. On the other hand, through the notion of victim, from the African perspective, it is the entire community, acting and updating the crisis of origins, which is affected and which sees the order and structure of the institutional relational complex falter. is the culture implemented by the Ancestor.

These different results allow us to understand that the etiology of war psychotrauma according to the theory of relationship conflict gives rise to a «symptomatic» reading. That is to say that PTSD alerts the existence of discomfort in the relational poles of the psychotraumatized soldier. In this African cultural context, the war trauma is therefore themed as a complex of relationship conflicts. These include an assault suffered by Ego (Soldier) on the part of the Enemy, a repression of the Ancestor on the Soldier, and an altered link between the Bio-lineage Family and the Ancestor. This etiological model of war psychotrauma, focused on conflictual relationships and anchored on cultural signifiers can be represented by the diagram below (Figure 1).

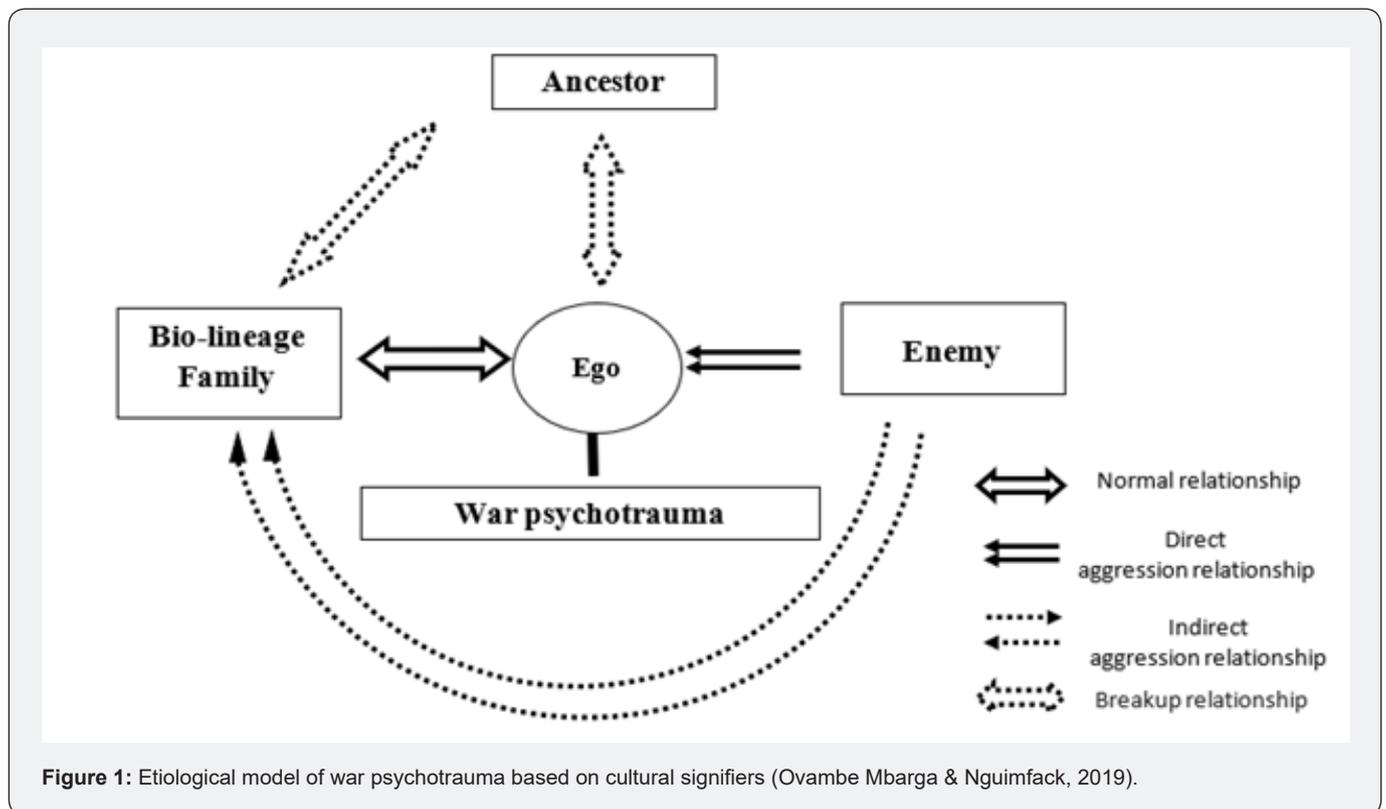


Figure 1: Etiological model of war psychotrauma based on cultural signifiers (Ovambe Mbarga & Nguimfack, 2019).

**Discussion**

The explanations for the etiology of war psychotrauma that results from the dread of a missed death are quite illustrative. However, Sow [14] notes that they failed to specify that these schemes, the common fund of their theoretical knowledge, were constructed not only in a certain intellectual framework, in a certain language, but also according to a horizon. implicit

anthropological, necessarily implying a certain conception of the concept of mental illness, according to a certain theory of the organization and dynamics of the psyche. Indeed, it questions whether we can seriously grasp in depth the problem of mental disorder which here is the war psychotrauma of African soldiers using general, abstract, rational, universal categories, which would be external to the system of who produces them. This is why he wonders if one is not condemned to interpret the

patient's interpretations, his psychic facts using the same system of interpretation as him, the system in which he was built. Moreover, for Miollan in Tsala Tsala [18], the subject is necessarily constructed by cultural mediations and it is within these that he expresses his suffering. Thus, for this author as for us, a better understanding of the etiology of war psychotrauma here would be made in the cultural system of the patient. This understanding becomes all the more coherent, heuristic and valid when it refers fundamentally to the thinking systems of the African patient.

Sow [14] went further by hammering «that unless we privilege, under a postulate imposed in a purely dogmatic and generalized manner, Western psychological and psychopathological knowledge because it is currently the most systematized, at least within their validity boundary; there is, strictly speaking, no serious reason for transferring his theoretical constructs and schemes to the study and understanding of the raw psychic facts produced by non-Westerners. « This suggests both for him and for Nathan [19], that each anthropological system understands the emergence of trauma through a doctrine and a thought that are consistent with the facts of real and imaginary behavior of a total psychic order. In this sense, we agreed with them to grasp the etiology of war psychotrauma via the traditional African theory of personality in an ethno-psychoanalytic context. Since it can be noted with Govindama [20] that (Western) psychoanalysis as a general theory of man is certainly effective as producer and interpreter of raw psychic facts in his anthropological system, but cannot be everywhere. It is therefore in the Western anthropological universe that doctrines, approaches, theories, and etiological models of trauma by Janet [6], Freud [2], Ferenczi [10], Barrois [12], Crocq [21]. and de Lebigot [22] do indeed find their greatest coherence. Thus, we believe that their best applications will hardly be found in the fabric of African history and culture. Besides, for Zempleni [23], any formalization however skilful it may be, of African thoughts and practices that do not start from the very interior of African structures, can only, in the final analysis, be arbitrary.

Indeed, with regard to the problem of the etiology of trauma in principle, as Côté [24]; Bernet [25] and Marchand et al. [26]. we accept the possibility of a diversity and an etiological mix. But in everyday African practice, Sow [14] points out that what matters above all is to identify the break in the link in the patient's personality structure, much more than to detect the objective cause. To Tsala Tsala [18] to say that this link can be affected by guilt towards ancestors or fidelity to traditions as we have seen in this study. However, beyond the multiple reasons which can explain relational affection, the breaking of the bond is more approached from the angle of a conflict [27], very often between an assaulted person and an assailant. Can be considered as aggressor, any person, any reality, any act aiming to destroy, to separate the relations of Ego with one and / or the other of its essential constituent dimensions. It is in this context that Collomb [28] then Corin and Bibeau [29] assert that the concept of current

conflict is at the basis of all traditional African interpretations of mental disorder. This conflict, current, instead of being, strictly speaking, intrapsychic in the analytical sense of the term, is polar. Also, the persecuting bodies, either, as such, are not conceived as internalized. Thus, we are of the opinion with Ortigues [30], and cannot say, in all rigor that the aggressive Enemy, the executioner Genie or the punishing Ancestor as persecuting instances of the traditional thought, constitute models of aggression internalized or integrated into the personality of the Soldier according to the Freudian conception. However, contrary to this reflection on the link and the entities concerned, Mayi [31], leans rather in the principle of vitalist ontology where the disorder is essentially linked to the reduction of the patient's vital energy. This thought can be corroborated by the general blunt syndrome that we observed in psychotrauma soldiers in this study. For him, this vital energy may be linked to the subject's idiosyncrasy and / or come from external sources which themselves may be totemic.

Indeed, these realities evoked by Collomb [28] and Nguimfack [27] exist by themselves, so to speak outside the subject and, more precisely, they are negative entities of the elements of personality. These are not, strictly speaking, fully integrated realities recovered by the subjective body; but rather, because they are universal in the same society. They can be named, manipulated literally, and consequently neutralized. You could say that they have a full objective reality insofar as they impose themselves massively from the outside, on the subject. This is the reason why, Makang Ma Mbog [32] insists that in a traditional environment, individuality is the victim of an attack: «attack», the result of which is constituted by a conflict of relationship with one or the other. other of the polar instances. The persecuting authorities are not just subjective self-productions, simple narcissistic fantasies as Ferenczi [10] shows; rather, it would be more positively realities, "objective" entities, cultural "constructions", making it possible to diagnose, more fundamentally, the conflict dimension of the psychotraumatized soldier. For Nathan [19], they do not come from individual creations and needs but, rather, constitute patterns of response in which comes to flow, so to speak, the anxiety of the individual. At this level, the problem no longer arises, in terms of a truth or a falsity of the interpretive scheme of the persecuting systems as Beck [33] does, then Vanderstukken, Menghini and Willocq [34] speaking of cognitive distortions. What we are talking about here is a real culturalization of the absorption of individual anxiety. What can be said is that the scheme is valid if it is operative and to the strict extent that, from the point of view of therapeutic results, it is validated and effective. And that's what happened in this study.

However, concerning the problem of witch-terrorists in this study, Sow [14] clearly states that «the action of the sorcerer is in no way a diurnal, physical, direct and immediate action, the action of the sorcerer is essentially conceived like a nocturnal action in the double sense of the term, that is to say an illicit, hidden, marginal action, but also taking place in the darkness of

the night. «. To Mengue [34] to join Zahan [35] by adding that the action of the sorcerer can only be carried out within the family and the lineage in general. Witchcraft is thus an essentially intra-community conflict. Consequently, these fighters endowed with mystical powers, would be none other than gray-gray-terrorists or terrorist-fetishists, therefore the aggression would be essentially that of the Enemy as conceived in the relational network of the person-personality. However, Nguimfack [27] points out that in certain African societies such as the Mandari, the witchcraft system also takes into account foreigners. Only, in this context, these are integrated foreigners, and the soldiers engaged in Far North Cameroon for the anti-terrorist war cannot be considered integrated. Indeed, there is reason to wonder whether it is necessary to tackle the explanatory rigor of Sow [14] and Mengue [34] to exclude witchcraft as a cause of war psychotrauma? Or simply accept the anxiety of bewitchment as it has arisen here in some psychotrauma victims of war, as recommended by Nguimfack [27] because for him, it is a very complex phenomenon. As far as we are concerned, the main thing is that the cause involved achieves consensus in the cultural group of the suffering soldier. This is because here, etiology like all presumed etiology, has a psychological consequence from the moment it is accepted by the protagonists.

In any case, this debate highlights the clear articulation between the individual, the signifiers and the signified in traditional surroundings. According to Biadi-Imhof [36], this articulation is presented as a dependence consented to the order of the Ancestor, that is to say, to his spirit and to his Word. It is also a consolidated continuity of individuality in its constituent and constituent dimensions. In these conditions, the mental disorder can only be a break in ties and a conflict of relationships in one and / or the other dimension which, at the same time, is a break in order made tangible and perceptible. The conflict is indeed a «Break» between individuality and the constitutive and / or constitutive below. It is in this sense that Koyatte [37] joins Sow [14] and Dorvil [38] in speaking of conflictual disjunction to evoke a break in bond which would be the result of a conflict of relationship. It is therefore a question of describing the action of the third persecutor (the terrorist) whether he is a sorcerer or not. For Abega and Abe [39], this external action is conceived as a disjunction of the links between constituent elements constituting individuality. Tsala Tsala [40] directly prefers to speak of mental disorder in Africa as the manifestation of a cosmic disorder. It is up to Sow [14] to locate this disorder precisely in the mesocosmos, place of the conflict. Then he explains that if it happens that a more or less complete break occurs between the common lot of the structured collective imagination and an «inside» which would only be that of a singular subject, cut off from the whole cultural, such a transformation of the structure of individuality would be of capital importance. In this case, instead of being an ailment, the mental disorder becomes the mental illness itself. According to this reasoning, we will therefore say in this study that when the

cosmic disorder turns out to be serious enough, the psychotrauma of war passes from the traumatic crisis to the traumatic disease. It is precisely this traumatic illness, as a deep decompensation of which the participants spoke in these terms: «on the return from the front, some of our comrades have gone mad» [41].

### Conclusion

The classical conception of psychic trauma links it to a large flow of excitations which cannot be assimilated by the psychic apparatus. This flow of excitement in the case of war psychotrauma has often been seen as a result of the experience of a missed death, in which the soldier was an actor or witness. In addition, clinical observations with certain Cameroonian soldiers psychotraumatized during the fight against terrorism against Boko-Haram rather highlighted soldiers engaged in a dread of the «mystico-cultural». Hence the questioning of the function of cultural signifiers in the emergence of their psychotraumatic suffering. The results obtained through semi-structured interviews with four participants were interpreted through the prism of Sow's relationship conflict theory (1977, 1978). At the end, an etiological model of war psychotrauma anchored on cultural signifiers was developed. It stipulates that war psychotrauma in an African cultural context results from a complex of relationship conflicts. It is an aggression suffered by the Soldier on the part of the Enemy (terrorist-witch doctor), a repression of the Ancestor on the Soldier, and a damaged link between the Bio-lineage Family and Ancestor. Cultural signifiers therefore apprehend the psychotrauma of war among certain Cameroonian soldiers as the result of a breakdown in relational networks. This disorder in traditional black Africa is therefore the expression of relational discomfort both horizontally and vertically.

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DOI: [10.19080/PBSIJ.2022.19.556019](https://doi.org/10.19080/PBSIJ.2022.19.556019)

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