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My researches are about the categorisation of social conducts and groups, the production of forms of life, the social and emotional regulation of conduct, culture. They follow an interactionist approach which considers the sensorial and material dimensions of the milieu. My work integrates also the question of the archives of the social science researcher and more largely the reflexion about the management, the sharing and the valorisation of the datas and the knowledges.

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Summary

Cultural policy was at the core of the decolonisation process, but it was at the same time based on western bureaucratic conceptions of culture. This situation may question any efforts of scientific deconstruction of these ethnocentric approaches. The domain of culture, in which anthropological research is engaged (among other subjects), adds another layer of complexity, because it blurs boundaries between science, politics, entrepreneurship and sovereignty. In this presentation, I propose to move the debate outside of colonial or domination relationships, to consider more broadly the process of categorisation and of the production of science. On the one hand, the bases of anthropology as a scientific discipline fit perfectly with some decolonisation of science programs from the point of view of the categorisation process: to avoid ethnocentrism, seize sensitivities towards the world¹, be aware of the language, the situations, the relationships. Ethnology is also a way of challenging conceptions: of relationships to the non-human, of kinship relationships, of economy, politics and so on. On the other hand, as a science that is socially and historically produced, anthropology conveys some of the conceptions and positions from the time of colonisation and the industrialisation period. Instead of opposing a “western” and “African” conceptions, I will rather question the relationships between academic and other systems of knowledge in any country.

Introduction

Some of the definitions of cultural practices and ethnological concepts as, *arbre à palabre*, *ethny*, *traditional culture*, have been used under colonisation (by ethnologists, administrators). Then they were questioned by some French ethnologist (among other), but these categories, are still used by current cultural and intellectual actors in Mali and Senegal. As Marie Huber presented in her paper a few days ago within the Africa Knows conference, but also Younoussa Toure in his PhD thesis about the cultural and artistic biennale in Mali (1962–1988), cultural policy was at the core of the decolonisation process,

¹ Expression chosen by Mignolo to avoid the notion of worldview, « privilégiée par l'épistémologie occidentale fait barrage aux affects et aux champs sensoriels par-delà la vision ». Walter Mignolo, 2013, « Géopolitique de la sensibilité et du savoir. (Dé)colonialité, pensée frontalière et désobéissance épistémologique », *Mouvements* vol.1 n° 73, p.181 à 190

but it was at the same time based on western bureaucratic conceptions of culture: heritage, institutions, cultural practice categories, and so on. As Fougere explains, 'In Mali, the restoration of culture is therefore reflected by the desire to integrate African traditions in universal culture, i.e. on an equal footing with the major colonising powers that sought to treat as inferior the civilisations of the black continent.' It can be the same for science according to Tonda², a gabonese Congolese and I sociologist graduated from a french university, 'To decolonise African social sciences, in this perspective, it seems to me, is to extricate oneself from the Global Knowledge Market.'

What should I do as anthropologist now? To be opposed to these european ethnocentric conception is it a new colonialist position, as these conceptions are used to be part of international cultural institutions as unesco ? The domain of culture, in which anthropological research is engaged (among other subjects), adds another layer of complexity to the decolonial debates, because it blurs boundaries between science, politics and sovereignty, the same actors being integrated in these different spheres. In this paper, I propose to move the debate outside of colonial or domination relationships, not to avoid it, but to question further its epistemological dimensions, within science, and more precisely, within anthropology in the domain of culture.

This first step of this ongoing reflection is based my own research in Mali since 2005 and my experiences in an international research programme based in Dakar for two years. For my Phd, I worked with ritual clowns, called the koroduga, in Segou, Mali. Both the region and these practitioners have been described by missionaries, colonial administrators, ethnologists, and today festival organisers, researchers, intellectuals and cultural actors, as well as UNESCO, as they were Inscribed in 2011 ([6.COM](#)) on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. Very quickly, I felt a gap between what I was observing and understanding when I was interacting with my koroduga interlocutors, and what I was reading about them, both in French ethnological and cultural litterature. A few years later, while I was working in Dakar and more in touch with the academic sphere in Senegal and Mali, I was made much more aware of the issue of science and colonisation. But another gap was opened, with the vivid opposition in between the west and the Africa, modern and traditional : oppositions in which I did not recognize myself, and that was very different from what I have experienced in my fieldwork in rural area of Mali : westerners may be associated to the rich and powerful people, I was nevertheless in position of apprenticeship and as a child in the first year when I was learning everything . It made me think that the academic domain was in itself a potential espace of hegemonic violence. To understand it, it is essential for me to move beyond big classifications and their preconceptions to see more in details what are the different situated issues.

I take the opportunity of this panel to think more about this position. I will not enter in the general debate of decolonising sciences, but question my own discipline and practice at two different levels: the practice of anthropology as a scientific discipline could fit perfectly with the decolonisation of science and of mind programs, and in particular Said idea of *traveling theories* ("théorie voyageuse") as presented by Boulbina³ from the point of view of the categorisation process: to avoid

² Joseph Tonda, 2012, L'impossible décolonisation des sciences sociales africaines, *Mouvements*, vol.4, n° 72, p. 108-119

³Seloua Luste Boulbina, 2013, La décolonisation des savoirs et ses théories voyageuses, Collège international de Philosophie, vol. 2, n° 78, p. 19 à 33

ethnocentrism, seize sensitivities towards the world⁴, be aware of the language, the situations, the relationships. But On the other hand, as an academic science that is socially and historically produced, anthropology conveys political, ideological issues of hegemonies.

1/ Categorisation process and iconic taxonomies - a Case study.

I will start with a case study from my long-term fieldwork with korodugaw, which designate individuals, a social categorie, dance and songs repertoire, and more broadly a practice I call ritual clowning or buffonery.

In between local and ethnological categories, a praxeological or taxonomical approach of categories

When I started to write about the koroduga, the first choice I had to make was about transcription. My interlocutors in Mali say koroduga, with an O. But in the literature, they are more often known as korèduga, with an E. One of the reasons is that the term korè refers to a secret initiation society studied by an ethnologist called Zahan⁵, in a book published in 1960. It is also the basis of the transcription and the definition used on the UNESCO website, which presented kôrèduga (without respecting the transcription system adopted in Mali) as a secret society. Two cultural centres created in Segou in the 2000s use the word Kôrè in their names. This initiation society, became the icon of precolonial cultural traditions, as regional folklore, and nowadays as a reference for local cultural entrepreneurship. It is or it was an important institution the region, but not the only one of its kind and koroduga was members of very different initiation societies.

For the koroduga themselves, these variations in pronunciation, kôrɔduga or korèduga, do not pose any a problem. They also use different definitions, without feeling that there are contradictions. This fluidity is part of their organisation which adjusts to the history and actual organisation of each locality (within the different initiation societies, social categories, and so on). It is also part of a general speaking manner in Mali that emphasises language ruses such as indirect speech and proverbs. But it is very different from the bureaucratic unique taxonomies of science and cultural international institutions.

This position, of fluidity, was integrated in my research, but I still had to choose one transcription for my work. I also had to weave the links between my predecessors and my research, as previous literature defined these people as members of initiation societie, whereas during my two years in the field, I observed them mainly outside of these initiation societies.

To explain the difference in categorisation (inside or outside initiatory societies, using E or O) a first solution would have been to postulate a change over time: Initiation society events are becoming rare, and less and less public, so the ritual clowns have therefore organised themselves as independent entities. Indeed, they did, and fin new ceremonies for their practices. However, this explanation would have left aside many authors before and after Zahan who have shown that these characters can intervene at any time and have their own organisation outside of these ritual societies. Those authors also use the transcription with O, as they hear it. By focusing solely on secret societies, Zahan had not

⁴ Expression chosen by Mignolo to avoid the notion of wordview, « privilégiée par l'épistémologie occidentale fait barrage aux affects et aux champs sensoriels par-delà la vision ». Walter Mignolo, 2013, « Géopolitique de la sensibilité et du savoir. (Dé)colonialité, pensée frontalière et désobéissance épistémologique », *Mouvements* vol.1 n° 73, p.181 à 190

⁵ Zahan, Dominique, 1960, *Sociétés d'initiation Bambara. Le n'domo, le korè*. Paris, La Haye, Mouton (Collection: Le monde d'Outre-mer passé et présent. Première série. Études. 8).

only excluded a large part of the activities of ritual clowns, but had also concealed a large number of its members, including the Koroduga women mentioned by other authors before him (Tauxier 1927:313,323; Leiris 1996 [1934]: 189)⁶.

In my thesis, I chose the transcription based on the pronunciation *koroduga*, and a completely foreign ethnological concept, *ritual clowns*, rather than trying to forge a local-global concept. In other words, I choose a praxeological conception of categories, which considers the vernacular and ethnological uses.

Indeed, 'categories and concepts are methods, procedures or formulas for operations of configuration, determination or individuation of phenomena' (Quéré 1995:12)⁷. There are two conceptions: The first, according to Quéré, is a taxonomic conception, where categories work as labels, definitions, as a classification of the world, which prevailed in the bureaucratic conception of heritage. The second is a praxeological value: Categorising is a situated activity, which invites variation according to who is talking, according to the situation of interlocution (who is here, where, ..) .

When I worked on this question of definition and transcription about koroduga, I wondered why some authors use the definition of Zahan, *Koreduga are a class of the initiatic society of kore*, but add elements to show that his definition does not fit what they have observed. I called it the **quotation effect**: scientists need to quote, but also to give a concise and containing definition that encompass the subject in one sentence. It's not totally inaccurate, koroduga do represent the core of what is a secret society and I do call them ritual clown. What issue in my sense is to tends to confuse vernacular categories and ethnological concepts. In the cultural sphere, the complexity of the koroduga practice has been considered in it's twofold dimensions, both ritual and clown, but produce iconic classifications, like kore;

The Decolonised Potential of the Discipline of Anthropology

The discipline of anthropology had serious critic about its links to colonisation, but its members did consider this bias and try overcome it. The discipline's colonial history has been written about⁸, new domains have opened up (Balandier)⁹, concepts forged within colonisation have also been criticised (Amselle)¹⁰, perhaps sometimes too much. I was attending a conference entitled 'l'ethnie bwa n'existe pas' (the bwa ethnic doesn't exist), given in Bamako in 2005 by Joseph Tanden Diarra which was based

⁶ Tauxier, Louis, 1927, *La religion Bambara*. Paris, Librairie orientaliste P. Geuthner (Collection : Études soudanaises). Leiris, Michel, 1996 *Miroir de l'Afrique*. Paris, Gallimard (Collection Quarto).

⁷ Quéré, Louis, 1995, « La valeur opératoire des catégories », *Cahiers de l'URMIS*, 1, p. 6-21

⁸Emmanuelle Sibeud has writtend different paper and book among : Sibeud, Emmanuelle, 2011, « Des « sciences coloniales » au questionnement postcolonial : la décolonisation invisible ? *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences Humaines*, vol. 1 n° 24, p. 3 à 16. Laurière, Christine et Mary, André (dir.), *Ethnologues en situation coloniale*, Paris, Carnets Bérose, 11, 2019.

⁹ Historic, urban, politic and dynamic anthropology of Georges Balandier influenced by decolonialist movements in the 1950's, and in a break with "griaule's school" of African studies. Cf. Jean Copans, 2001, La « situation coloniale » de G. Balandier : notion conjoncturelle ou modèle sociologique et historique ? *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie* , vol. 1 n° 110, p. 31 à 52 ; Jean-Hervé Jézéquel, 2011, Les professionnels africains de la recherche dans l'état colonial tardif, Le personnel local de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire entre 1938 et 1960, *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences Humaines*, vol. 1 n° 24, p. 35 à 60

¹⁰ Jean-Loup Amselle, Logiques métisses. Anthropologie de l'identité en Afrique et ailleurs, Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Jean-Loup Amselle, 2018, *En quête d'Afrique(s). Universalisme et pensée décoloniale.*, Paris, Éditions Albin Michel, coll. « Itinéraires du savoir » ; Étienne Smith, 2006, Entretien avec Jean-Loup amselle, *Raisons politiques*, vol. 2 no 22, p. 203 à 212

on Amselle critics about the notion of ethny used during colonisation. Bwa people came to the event dressed in their traditional finery and performed their musical repertoire as soon as the speaker had finished. I remember they asked the lecturer: “The Bwa ethnic group does not exist, so what is this, our ornaments, our music?” The gap between the two stories; coloniser using ethnic categories for its purpose of bureaucratic regulation and more generally the situated use of categories, and people referring every day to social categories is possible to reconcile. I tried to do it with this same concept of ethnicity on the basis of the analysis of use of vernacular categories within interlocution situations.

The science of social anthropology, moving, has the flexibility to develop concepts at the intersection of different point of view. The question is what are the limits, and the appropriate conditions to stay in the conditions of the traveling theories?

In the way other, beyond colonialism

I will just present a number of areas for further discussion in order to find a way to deal with this with the decolonial colonial issue and potentials conflicts of interests.

Amselle who did questioned colonial roots of some ethnological concepts, as ethnic, is really not found of the decolonial studies that in his opinion reified cultures as the colonisation did. However, his approach does not answer another important question: **What are the conditions of the production of traveling theories and the deconstruction of hegemonic categories?** Copans¹¹ blames science consultancy that prevent researchers of thinking about epistemology, he blames also the hegemony of political scientists who conveys ‘a vast metaphor of commonplace’¹². Tonda¹³, wrote about the ‘impossible decolonisation of African social science’, because African researchers reproduce the colonial violence in which African academic social science was born, and because as I already quote ‘To decolonise African social sciences, in this perspective, it seems to me, is to extricate oneself from the Global Knowledge Market.’ This is the point : who is this global knowledge market, and what ideology it conveys. I’m as a researcher also confront by the standardisation of science, the question is what ideologies do they convey and what can we do.

A first point is to go **beyond colonial relationships, to questions the different sources of subordination position**. In the fieldwork, in my opinion, the ethnologist should be in position of apprenticeships (my interlocutors, which I don’t call interviewers, were my ‘*karamogow*’ (masters) in Mali). What does prevent this relationships? It could be the social position of the scientist in society, the time, the possible misunderstandings, or the way the researcher conceive fieldwork and his or her desire to participate in it’s interlocutor’s activity. This should be part of methodologies, instead of using scientific methods as legitimations. Another potential source of subordination, is in between a urban

¹¹ Copans, Jean, 2010, Un demi-siècle d’africanisme africain. Terrains, acteurs et enjeux des sciences sociales en Afrique indépendante, Paris, Karthala,

¹² Copans, Jean 2001, « La ‘situation coloniale » de Georges Balandier : notion conjoncturelle ou modèle sociologique et historique », *Cahiers internationaux de Sociologie*, Vol. CX, p.31-52. les friches de la nouvelle modernité aux sciences politiques et économiques qui se permettent de bricoler, avec arrogance, un regard mondial soi-disant sociologique (en complément de leur démarche propre) qui n’est de fait qu’une vaste métaphore de lieux communs

¹³ Joseph Tonda, L’impossible décolonisation des sciences sociales africaines, Mouvements, 2012/4, n° 72, p. 108-119

perspective valued as modern where academic science are born, and that an idea of a rural traditional. It was the foundation in the beginning of the institutionalisation of the discipline¹⁴. This disconnect has been questioned in France through the development of museums rooted in the living culture of the inhabitants¹⁵ called ecomuseums¹⁶? In Mali Salia Male, ethnologist working at the national museum in Mali has found a way to satisfy both the needs of the villagers that use religious artefacts and the purpose of a museum that still has to be reinvented¹⁷ (Cf.) The very notion idea of museum being questioned now by Felwin Sar who claim during a conference in Dakar about his study on restitution of objects, that he is more concern with the future and the reinvention of museum, than in the question of “reparation” of the ancient colonizer.

The position of the scientist itself in the society is to be questioned, in a time where experts are. As I learned with the French ethnologist Eric Jolly, after fieldwork, ethnologists are not a spokesperson for their interlocutors. I will add nonetheless it is their work to respectfully report their words relationships, practice, organisations, rules. The scientist integrates what they have learnt during fieldwork, into existing academic discussion, in order to both introduce new material in the debates, and guide the scientific debates with different conceptions, as we previously discussed.

This position is also induce by the economic and political orientations within the academic and research fields. Copans highlights the bias inherent with the dominance of science consultancy as I said earlier. I propose that we should question more broadly any funding of research and it’s funders in any given country, as it necessarily shapes research *and* academic training programs. In the 2020s researchers from African countries are well ahead in handling the funding of short-term research projects, and in handling the bureaucratic dimension of academic evaluations any researchers now faces.

This discussion puts into question the very idea of science in its politics, historic and ideological dimensions. But it also questions **the systems of knowledge in which it emerges** or in which it is embedded and it’s relationships to other systems. How have academic sciences been imposed within other systems of knowledge? The answers, and the more diverse systems of understanding that come with them, will allow us access to the processual, historical, and complex dimensions of knowledge. In other word, The search for new ways of funding research, for anthropologists worldwide, is also a way of questioning the legitimacy of social sciences.

Conclusion

As some of my colleagues have proposed: Working together is probably the most to forge universal from diversity. And I thank you very much the organisers of this conference and panel to give this opportunity to think about it.

¹⁴ at the Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires, the French section of the Musée du Trocadero created in 1937 by George Henri Rivière.

¹⁵ Thierry Bonnot, « Recherche anthropologique et écomusées : une utopie assumée », e-Phaïstos [En ligne], VIII-1 | 2020

¹⁶ Thierry Bonnot, *La vie des objets*, Paris, éditions de la MSH, 2002.

¹⁷ “La présentation des objets de cultures vivantes : le cas dy Musée national du Mali”, *Journal des africanistes*, 1999, 69(1), p. 29-52