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ABSTRACT

The present paper is a review of ‘The Lele of the Kasai’, An Anthropological research made by Mary Douglas in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Africa in 1963. The fieldwork about The Lele of the Kasai is one of the most significant monographs which were consecrated to the Bantu society of the Congo-Leopoldville. Mary Douglas dedicated her research to the social structure, social organization, Social cohesion, and kinship, the economy backward, family members roles (the division of labor) from the traditional and modern perspectives (i.e. before colonization and after colonization). However, M. Douglas’ research has similarities with this paper presented on ‘Social structure and Economic Market of Yakoma ethnic group’ in Bangui, Central African Republic (2009). The main purpose of the review is to carried out her fieldwork methodology approaches and theories, objectives, analysis, her engagement as social anthropologist, examine the types of study she undertakes, the important of her research to anthropology study and describe similarities between “The Lele of the Kasai” of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Yakoma ethnic group in Central African Republic (CAR).

Keywords: REPUBLIC DEMOCRATIC OF CONGO, BANTU, COLONIZATION, SOCIAL STRUCTURE, ECONOMY, TRADITION.

1. Introduction

Like many other followers of Émile Durkheim, Mary Douglas the British anthropologist, specialist of culture anthropology born (Margaret Mary Tew, 1921-03-25) in Sanremo (Italy) and died on (May 16-2007) in London, received a Catholic education at the convent of the Sacred Heart in Roehampton, then studied at St Anne’s College, Oxford from 1939 to 1943. She has been inspired by the sociology of (Émile Durkheim, 1858), and took position in favor of structuralism analysis in anthropology. However, she is more particularly known for her work on the anthropology of religions and philosophy of the institutions.

Mary Douglas is the author of several articles, of eighteenth (18) books published in the journal of a French
sociologist (Marcel Mauss, 1887), including “The Lele of The Kasai”, which caught our attention here. However, the intention is analyze her ethnographic methodology, the approaches, theories that she adopted as well as her engagement as a social anthropologist in her research to explained how and why her research was crucial for anthropology study and describe similarities between “The Lele of the Kasai” with the “Yakoma” society research findings.

Mary Douglas, described ethnographic research in all discipline of anthropology from socio-cultural anthropology, economic anthropology, medical or biological anthropology and religious aspects of a large Lele’ village. The practice of M. Douglas’ fieldwork can be done in a variety of different settings such as small tribal community, cultural institution, economical activities, or a primate conservation area. The research findings can be view in many different forms, considering the factors such as: the research topic, the research questions, the geographical location for the research, the external and internal political factors, structural and socio-economic factors, the age set and gender.

2. Materials and methods

The objectives of the research is more circumscribed and mainly to explain how a social group can create their own vision of the world and defines the style of thinking who governs as well as the patterns of interaction. The social structure of the Lele and the families’ link was based on traditional and modern values. To analyze the effects of colonization as well as the effect of economic status (money) on the social organization, social structures ‘The Lele of the Kasai’ society. In other words, what were the negative impacts of economic on the traditional modes of organization (autonomous, traditional education) of Lele’ community.

The engagement of Mary Douglas as social anthropologist in her fieldwork came to be considered as part of the practice of social anthropology as well as an economic anthropology with the work of one of the founding fathers of British anthropology, (Brownislaw Malinowski, 1884). Malinowski conducted a series of fieldwork research to study people instead of studying other people and research documents comfortably from the university libraries, for example he live with the people, eat with them, work with them, learned their language, and taking part in their everyday life.

Since Malinowski’s fieldwork has been regarded as an essential and necessary part of an anthropologist’s professional training, although this is traditional, it is still the same model applied by M. Douglas for her fieldwork in the Lele community and this is what distinguishes the discipline from other social sciences. Today, some anthropologists other than M. Douglas still consider that doing fieldwork in the traditional Malinowskian sense is an essential and distinguishing aspect of anthropological research. Others see fieldwork as encompassing a wide variety of practices in different settings, and as one of many different methods by which anthropologists can gain intimate knowledge of a community.

Mary Douglas used a variety of approaches, theories and methods for her study. Which were the
Structuralism approach, Functionalism theories, methods as participants’ observations, descriptive, comparative anthropology, and Life stories method were also used. She did what can be considered as a Fragmentation research from 1949-1950 and 1953. The Participants observation for example, enables Mary Douglas as a social anthropologist to undertake detailed, lengthy and often complex observations of social life in fine detail manner. She was faithful to the smallest nuances of Bantu thought, with a sociological view that unveiled structures latent and the book witnessed it.

Having participating in the fabric of daily life as well as attending formal and rituals ceremonies where she discussed her motivating ideas with willing members of the Lele community (sometimes termed ‘informants’) she met to builds a progressive deeper understanding of what is happening in the Lele society. Her results provide the keys elements of comparative in the field of anthropology that contributes significantly to develop and systematize for the general wellbeing of the community. That is supporting social structures and institutions.

The researcher might have assembled her data in numerous ways as she collected quantitative information. Although the quantitative data is often useful for biological anthropologists in mapping physical traits within a population, or making cross-population comparisons but she found it necessary as a method to make comparisons between Lele’ village, economic, social structure and their neighbors Bushong community by noticing in (p.49) that “nothing in Lele culture corresponded to the Bushong striving for riche”. The Lele and the Bushong are separated only by the Kasai River. The two tribes recognize the common origin, their houses, clothes and crafts are similar in style their languages are closely related. Yet The Lele people are poor, while the Bushong are rich. This quantitative information is useful and necessary in this research because for the most of social anthropologists concentrated on gathering qualitative data. They do so by conducting individual and group interviews, by undertaking oral histories, through online discussion forums and, most importantly, through the Malinowskian tradition of ‘participant observation’. But my analysis this paper has been so transforming experience.

The other approach used by Mary Douglas was “The Life Stories” or “practice of life stories” as a research method for her study which is found in different pages of her book. It is therefore identified that the context in which she called on participants to explain their life stories or biographical approach makes her work to be so comprehensive and crucial for the study. The same steps used by Douglas were also deployed by the researchers of human sciences. Ethnologists such as (Morgan L. Henry, Descola Philippe, 1949), (Huáng Xiànfán, 1899-1982) is among the first to use this method and their work were made known to the public through some popular stories.

However, M. Douglas took in account these methods to describe the life stories of the Lele of the Kasai. As some keys authors like (Don C. Talayesva, 1942), (Lewis, Zins, 1978), (Pierre Jakez Hélias, 1975), (Jean-Marie Déguiignet, 1834) [2,3,9,12,13] referred this method of description of the women, men Children, life conditions of specific culture, specific group, and specific place at some point in their history. The above authors for example, in the case of the first two [2, 3] in their segments have a horse pride and strong heuristic
value for authenticity and complexity in public view. As a matter of facts, Researcher highlighted a set of concepts showing the paradigmatic character of the knowledge produced by the biographical approach in the human sciences [11]. The traditional opposition between individuals and collective, subjectivity and objectivity, interiority and exteriority, experiential and experimental, for example, is integrated in the paradigm of the singular plural.

3. Conclusion

This ethnographic research is important for anthropology study as well as for those who will be willing to do such research in socio-cultural, economic as well as in religious anthropology. Mary Douglas’ fieldwork is among the most distinctive, clear, and simple practices anthropologists who bring to the study of human life in a specific society or community through her research. This paper seeks a detailed and intimate understanding of the context of the Lele of the Kasai social action and relations in Democratic Republic Congo (DRC).

In her fieldwork the previously unfamiliar setting among its aims has deep understanding that encompasses as much as possible of an ‘insider’s’ perspective. Conducted in a more familiar setting, it can lead us as a future anthropologist for whom she wrote, to look at everyday social reality in new and unexpected ways. “With a very British humor, she gives a stimulating vision of the group decision-making process that goes through an analysis of the notion of institution”. Mary Douglas work also reminded me of my own ethnography research some years ago in Central African Republic (CAR). The research was conducted on “Yakoma ethnic social structure and the economic market”. The Yakoma ethnic known as Ngbandi is among ethnic groups in Central African Republic (CAR). These people Resides from the both sides of the River bank in Central African Republic and DR. Congo (formerly known as Zaire) of the Ubangi. They are also known as people of the river for the live alongside the River.

The Researcher has situated the kinship in the field of socio-economic activities; she briefly gave three pieces of additional analysis that elucidated the effects of the colonization and economy on the socio-structure of Lele’ kinship. In comparison to the Yakoma society in Central African Republic (CAR), it is worth mentioned that the two communities (the Lele and Yakoma) share most cultural aspects and the second chapter of her book called “The Productive Side of the Economy”, considers the resources available to the Lele, and Research exploitation mechanism or methods like hunting, fishing, slash and burn agriculture, and craftsmanship, primarily the production of raffia cloth. The second chapters focused on the Lele social structure and it’s similarities with the Yakoma.

Colonization on the other hand has caused a lot of changes on the cultures, most of the young people who grew up in towns know little about their cultures hence resulted in cultural erosion as a lot of negative impacts among the Lele of the Kasai’ in DRC social structure, social organization or kinship, also it has the same negative impacts on Yakoma social structure, economic. Today with the international cash there is no need to use raffia. It’s the same what happened in Yakoma community, everything have changed. Older men’
disadvantages in production and consequent disharmony with their high place in status pattern.

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