*Full Length Research Paper*

# "Madness" in the fields: Analytical mediations

## Monique Selim

Director of Research Unité mixte de Recherche, Développement et Sociétés Institut de Recherche pour le Développement Université de Paris. E-mail: monique.selim@ird.fr.

**This article focuses on the analysis of the relationships that the ethnologist forms during fieldwork. The author attempts to define the double logic that innervates all ethnological research, torn between the cross-cutting subjectivations of the communication partners and the objectivation of social relations. Research examples are used to illustrate the argument, which reviews the different relations between anthropology and psychoanalysis.**

**Key words:** Fieldwork, research, interpersonal relations, implication, listening.

## INTRODUCTION

The history of ethnology shows that fieldwork has been thought out in different ways. Ethnographers' accounts and anthropological textbooks enable us to define them. The centrality of the ethnologist's terrain - a feature specific to this discipline - is initially shifted into the background when contact is established with the other, whose difference is pointed up to justify the investigation. When colonies gained independence, ethnologists were repatriated; attention was displaced, refocusing on the nature of the relationships the ethnologist set up with the social agents he was studying, and making this a metho-dological singularity. The more the agents' social profiles resembled those of visiting ethnologists - people from urban milieus, linked to enterprises, associations, scien-tific laboratories, etc.- the more the reflexivity inherent in the discipline came to influence the way in which the ethnologist's own knowledge is built up. This orientation develops during the1970s. It still informs a lot of work that is setting the discipline on a new path, avoiding on the one hand the narcissistic subjectivism of researchers who try to avoid all possible objectivation of the spirit of their investigations, and on the other hand impersonal objec-tivistic rigor. To gain a clear understanding of the sort of relationship the ethnologist develops with the people he is studying, and to situate it correctly, one has to have recourse to a large range of notions. Authenticity is "out": we can no longer pronounce the word without a con-descending smile. The acceptable range extends today roughly from sympathy to empathy: the desire to feel, in the strongest sense of the term, the same things as one's subjects, but with a cognitive aim in view. This entails a whole range of nuances, all of them highly instructive.

Now that the excesses of globalized capitalism have brought a new lease of life to militant activism, an alliance has formed, linking researchers to the people they are studying. Young ethnologists who can no longer aspire to purely scientific tenured posts have to take jobs with various organizations, many of them NGOs. Ethnological militancy had been in abeyance since the wars of liberation, the great famines and the genocides. The new economic situation has revived it.

Within this speculative matrix, however, psychoanalysis which goes into the psychic foundations of relationships and its concepts are hardly used at all. Yet it was not so long ago that Georges Devereux had recourse to these epistemic resources in *De l'angoisse à la méthode* (1985). This is perhaps less paradoxical than it seems. Relationships established between ethnology and psychoanalysis involved for the most part theoretical writings. The confluence of anthropological and psychoanalytical theories has been applied to various problematical fields - immigration, colonization, etc. - and to a number of terrains (e.g. Senegal, Madagascar) in a long tradition of French thought; though never dominant, this current has been highly influential (Bastide, 1950; Memmi, 1965; Lacan, 1966; Ortigues and Ortigues, 1973; Juillerat, 2001; Zafiropoulos, 2001 and 2003; Assoun and Zafiropoulos, 2002, 2004). Encounters between field workers and analytical practitioners were more of an exception than a rule, despite the fact that a priori one would have thought that discussion of their respective practices would have been more fruitful than the unconvincing "dialogues" that have monopolized interdis-ciplinary conferences - on the universality or relativity of

the Oedipus complex, on the castrating vagina or the different architectonics of masculinity and femininity. It is regrettable that all that has been done is to force some ethnological data into psychoanalytical theory; other possibilities have been left unexplored. As a corollary, psychoanalytical research into the archaic underpinnings of certain themes based on hypothetically radical differences has usually merely consolidated established misconceptions. Inter-disciplinary borrowing has invariably followed the same method, selecting elements, concepts and thematic fragments with a view to bolstering the borrower's theoretical presuppositions. The relationships between economics and anthropology, for example, have often followed the same patterns as those between ethnology and psychoanalysis. The present time has been disregarded, both as an experience to be interpreted and as the practice of a discipline, in the field or on the couch. It is all as though the present were essentially less interesting than the past, still inhabited by its heroic founders: Freud, Geza Roheim, Levi Strauss, Boas et alia. In this article we will focus on the present, and we will do so in two stages. First we will look into the interpretation of the role of the ethnologist and the relationships he sets up on the terrain in producing ethnological knowledge. Next we will review a number of ethnological situations in which violence of the State perturbs the agents involved and (as a corollary) incites the ethnologist to engage in analytical reflection. The ethnologist is obliged to take into account the various arrangements (inter alia political) that frame his investigations. This problem has been dealt with by political anthropologists, in particular in Britain and also in France (Balandier, 1972; Kundid, 2004; Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008). The writer of this article, a senior researcher in IRD, the French governmental Institute for Research on Development, carried out the research on which this article is based as part of an official mission: the study of transition towards globalisation. She chose Laos and Vietnam because they were moving into a market economy and Uzbekistan because it exemplified another form of globalization: de-sovietisation. She subsequently pursued her research in China, where the transition to capitalism under the dictatorship of the communist party brought her a further insight into the nature of the overall process. Her overriding intent is to update anthropological research, instead of leaving it locked in a past that will no doubt soon be purely mythical.

## METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE POSITIONS, POSTURES AND FIGURES OF THE ETHNOLOGIST.

The notion of "native informant", central to the ethnologist's setup from the beginnings of ethnology, is still in current use today. Invoking it supposedly certifies the scientific nature of fieldwork hypostasized by the adjective "ethnographic". Though the notion has often been appraised critically, this has not prevented budding ethnologists from using it nonetheless to legitimize their work; older colleagues also do so, out of habit. This carries with it a number of implications. The notion of informant gives a hierarchical character to the relationship between the ethnologist and his the people he is "working on"; it creates a gap between him and the "exotic" Other. Knowledge is assumed to be located in a metaphorical "black box" that the native informant, as representative of the group being studied, agrees to open up or hand over to the investigator. In high colonial times the colonizer's domination -accompanied by a few sharp cuffs, as Michel Leiris has reminded us - sufficed to ensure that this transmission took place. Subsequently money was brought in and "given" in exchange for the "gift" of genealogies or the recitation of founding myths. The conception, implicit in the idea of the "native informant", of knowledge as "information", is apparently part of an episteme that still ignores the effects of the observer on scientific experiments, and the impossibility of insulating from the latter's subjectivity an objective "reality" and/or "truth". It was only in the later 19th century that scientists became aware of the frames in which experiments take place, and in many cases ethnology has not got that far yet. On a different level, the idea that an individual could concentrate within himself the knowledge of the group to which he belongs seems very old-fashioned in this day and age; it is pre-sociological, a implicit denial of the effects that social relationships and the exercise of power inevitably have on the construction of group images. Though it is no doubt still possible, at a push, to overlook these underpinnings, it is nonetheless absolutely clear that the notion of "native informant" crystallizes a state of knowledge that is incompatible with current practice.

For almost four decades now, attention paid to the social role of the ethnologist on the terrain and of his position as a social actor has revealed the dynamics of social relationships internal to the group being studied (Althabe 2002; La Pradelle, Selim 1988; Barthélémy, Selim 1993; Bazin 2005; Hernandez 2005). This analytical stance has brought about an epistemological break, showing up structural ambivalences in social arrangements and shedding light on some of the darker fissures left by political developments. Identifying the ethnologist with the former colonizer, Malagasy rituals in the 1960s and 1970s revealed the imaginary permanence of former modes of domination. This was still happening 30 years later: in a business enterprise in the Ivory Coast, the ethnologist was seen as an updated version of the "white" dominator (Bazin 1998). This forced young ethnologists to reflect upon their own position - a valuable habit, indispensable to valid fieldwork. In the late 1980s, working on the subsidiary of a multinational in Bangladesh, I found myself in a difficult position: I had to avoid involvement with management on the one hand and the workers' union on the other. Management staff was seen as having "collaborated" with the former Pakistani authorities; while, during the war of independence, the unions had aligned with the general manager of the company to defend the plant and fight for the "liberation" of the country (Selim 1991). Failure to maintain communication with both sides would simply have put an end to fieldwork and my survey. For the ethnologist to become aware that he is also implicitly playing a social role he has to make his "take" on the situation as productive as possible, and prevent it from becoming irreversibly fixed. In general, as a social agent he records on the micro-local field, as in a mirror, past and present political relationships. He evokes the ghosts of former masters, blurring interpretations influenced by the situation prevailing at the time. Unless he is careful, in "exotic" locations he can easily be identified with former masters. The fact that he is an outsider and that he is different can lead him to adopt the line of least resistance. Once on this primrose path, it is difficult for him to retrace his steps. He will fall into traps that block the progress of his fieldwork and create false images. In less "exotic" situations – in which the ethnologist has the same nationality (or supra-nationality, as in Europe) as the group he is studying and shares other parameters with it - social integration is simpler. He tends to a certain extent to become an insider witness to inequalities and suffering, and can act as mouthpiece, expressing local grievances. This aspect – that of witness, insider or outsider – is never wholly absent from the part the ethnologist plays

on his terrain, even in the most distant fields, though it varies in extension and intensity. In the later 1970s in a municipal housing project on the outskirts of Paris, what was voiced was an endless protest against having to live with "barbarian" strangers as one's neighbors; the ethnologist was constantly being asked to legitimize and publicize this xenophobic lament.

These "sociological" interpretations of ethnological fieldwork can be highly profitable. They also happen to be indispensable. If he is to have his constant presence and questioning accepted, the ethnologist has to be vigilant; he has to be constantly aware of his posture as a social agent if his fieldwork is to continue. Further-more, he should not limit ongoing analysis of his involvement to the decisive social processes that frame his work; a host of other factors influence communication with the group and have also to be taken into account. There can be no slackening in this effort; the same exercise as social agent cannot simply be rerun indefinitely in each new context, as this would impoverish and rigidify his thinking (though this rule should not preclude comparison). Immerging himself in a micro-group - or in several micro-groups that fit into one another – it is from the nature and content of the personal relation-ships he sets up with the other social agents that he gains insight into social relationships on a more general level. His perception of the nature of these relationships is intimately linked to his recep-tiveness, to the amplitude of his questioning and to its aims. "Confidence" is the term traditionally invoked in this respect - together with a few other key terms, such as "ethnography" and "informant"- it is supposed to define the contours of the discipline and at the same time, as if by magic, to dissolve its ambiguities. In many publications, however, this "confidence" would seem to be at best a sort of screen that guarantees the ethnographic validity of the study while at the same time persuading the reader to suspend his disbelief. Alternatively it can be seen as a skeleton key to ethnographic insight. The anthropologist acts on his own authority, one might say, paraphrasing Lacan and designating one of the specific differences between ethnology and the other social sciences. The ethnologist is committed to a solitary encounter with another that he selects and who accepts him, in accordance with rules (set out in textbooks) that leave him very broad freedom in selecting his objects, interests and methods. What he collects, however, is not exactly data, in the usual sense of the term. All his material comes to him through his own selective observation, and in particular from stories told by individuals whom he has oriented towards certain fields, of which there can be a large variety. In ethnology all of this is obvious. As a result, the ethnologist's psychological investments in and on his field weigh heavily on the communication setup that connects him to the social actors, conditioning its amplitude. Listening and hearing constitute a practice that demands an almost unlimited availability to other people, and the ability to attune oneself to them and to their talk. As a corollary, it also involves controlling one's own feelings, the sympathies and antipathies that inevitably emerge. It carries heavy psychic costs. This is why the ethnologist can be led to censor his own inputs, out of fear of the effect his interlocutors' reactions might have upon him. Self-imposed restrictions could in this case be justified by a deontology safeguarding the interests of "science" and / or ethics, and preventing the investigator from intruding into the private sphere of his interlocutors, from taking an interest in stories that delve into their personal intimacy, e.g. offending an inter-locutor's modesty in the course of a "non - directive" conversation.

These explicit motives could, in uncritical analytical terms, be likened to "resistances", or in ethnological terms to symbolic defen-sive rituals. Nonetheless, beyond these hermeneutic metaphors, we can make out a conception of anthropological research that can be positioned on disparate, unconnected planes ranging from family structure to what is known as "technical and material culture" and "traditional representations" of the person, the body, and so forth. According to the ethnologist's focus – the intellectual maturing of focus can also be linked to his personal profile – he will be  more or

less attracted to the prospect of extending the range of voices to be heard, and of mobilizing individuals in greater depth. To the anthro-pologist who focuses on the political and economic organization of domination, understanding how this organization is incorporated into the particular logic of each individual will obviously be of primordial interest. In a certain sense, examining domination calls immediately for introspection in the person dominated. The problem of servitude and alienation cannot be solved using naturalistic and essentialist postulates. This introspection engenders in its wake an examination of himself by the ethnologist. Understanding the modes of subjectivation implicit in social configurations can shed light decisively both on social mechanisms and the development of idiosyncrasies. This perspective, however, can be reversed: one can also ask what profiles of subjectivity are engendered by this or that type of social context. To put this more precisely: when histo-rical, political and economic ruptures take place, the intertwining of objective and subjective crises constitutes *in vivo* a crucial lesson in anthropology.

## EPISTEMOLOGICAL REMARKS

If the anthropologist manages to listen until his inter-locutor has said absolutely everything he wants to say, and actually to hear him, though this is highly productive for the anthropologist, it does not transform the ethnological situation into a psychoanalytical one. Firstly, because the ethnologist's aim is not therapeutic; and secondly, because interruption and sequence lie at the heart of psychoanalysis. In order to give the subject greater freedom in thinking and speaking about himself, psychoanalysis guides the dialogue towards neutra-lization of the social parameters of the relationships being dealt with. It derives its dynamics from vanishing points glimpsed when current constraints are momentarily deactivated. Analysis, very much like Husserl's epoche - a suspension of judgment - makes it possible to heighten awareness of the subject's implication in collective and social fields. The ethnologist, in his heart of hearts, is a stranger who tends to set aside his own social habits, establishing a matrix of reflectivity that he shares with his interlocutor; this matrix serves as the basis for a reconstruction of the subject's history, or more precisely of the intelligibility of the latter to the subject himself. This "extra - territorial space of enunciation" (to borrow an expression from psychoanalysis) is also a virtual locus suggesting an imaginary encounter in the form of indeterminate echoes that reverberate between the two participants. Awareness - in Sartre's French, conscience - emerges triumphantly and blossoms in this element and as a corollary marks the basic difference between the situation of the ethnologist and that of the psychoanalyst: for the latter, the unconscious has (ideally) to remain predominant through an interplay of associations, where-as in anthropology it is the conscious content that counts. As to listening, the difference between the two forms of practice is thus considerable – all the more so as from a psychoanalytical point of view it is the act of enunciation itself and not its content that is primordial, being more powerful as a liberating force. The Chinese psycho-analyst Huo Datong (Huo  Datong, 2008), who  undertook

an analysis with the French psychoanalyst Michel Guibal without being able to express himself properly in French, stresses the "remarkable effect of expression" itself, basing his view on Lacan; as to anthropologists, it is obviously the act of enunciation and not that of expression that provides their main material. This being said, there is nonetheless a certain resemblance between psychoanalytical and anthropological practice: the attention paid by the psychoanalyst to his patient is not unlike the immersion of the ethnologist who responds to explicit or implicit calls from the people he is trying to understand. The ethnologist can be led to open himself in order to help people out of personal dramas to which the conversation has given rise, and to make use of parts of his own life to help them. "Decompositions" of this sort frequently occur when the ethnologist's action in an authoritarian political situation amounts to lifting a ban on speech, setting up a chain reaction between the individual's life and its political context. This often results in an outburst of tears.

How, in any case, can the ethnologist avoid responding to his interlocutors' questions about himself when his own position is based on his questioning of them? A horizon of mutual commitment to "truth" (I use this term as a metaphor for communicative exchange) is a necessary though not sufficient condition for anthropological activity. Thanks to these similarities, fruitful exchange can take place between the two disciplines. They also clearly show, however, that analogical arguments can obstruct intellectual intercourse if they are pressed too far. This occurred when some ethnologists attempted to build up a meta-theory commanding all fields of knowledge by drawing on the work of Lacan, migrating from Lévi - Strauss' structuralism to a new Lacanian version. Taking a more synthetic view of the forces concretized in ethnological communication, we find that the ethnological theatre is intrinsically dual in nature. On the one hand it is driven by figurative engines: the hierarchies, entanglements and closures to which the ethnologist, both as a figure and a social symptom, gives concrete shape and form. On the other hand, this theatre has to be detached in imagination from its terrain if the investigator is to reach the deeper levels at which the conjugation of subjective and objective processes can be understood. The whole relationship between the ethnologist and his interlocutor is developed in a field of tension between these two poles. The interlocutors alternate between an over- involvement in the social context of the study and placeless co-existence with someone from outside his or her society, family and life- the ethnologist, an incarnation of otherness. Cross- referencing projections and transfers of all sorts permeate the ethnological theatre. It is colored by subjective "truths" destined to become objects in the anthropologist's mind. On both sides of the inter-subjective relationship, the epistemic urge and attraction to otherness are its driving forces. This is why it is better for the ethnologist to keep these two supports of his investi-

gation together: the hyper-social mirror and the horizon of the imaginary. For both partners these are inevitably the two sides of the situation. The dual nature of the ethnological field thus calls for an epistemology that is both critical and clinical, tending towards the sort of sociology of knowledge that Karl Mannheim wanted to develop (Mannheim 2006). In the brief survey that concludes *Ideologie und Utopie*, Mannheim cites, as precursors of his enterprise, Marx, with his "luminous incursions" on the subject of ideologies of which social classes become vectors; Nietzsche, whose "flashes of insight linking concrete observation to a theory of the organization of urges and to an epistemology that is not unrelated to pragmatism"; and Freud, who "perceives thought as a disguise devised by the mechanisms of compulsion." We will now illustrate this interpretation of the ethnologist's fieldwork as the articulation of two levels - a suspension of and immersion in social relationships - with examples in which political ills bring out this duality particularly clearly. These remarks are a synthetic re-working of various analytical experiences that were classically ethnological, entailing immersion in a milieu, construction of close interpersonal relationships, observation, non-directive interviews and informal conversations.

## DICTATORSHIPS, FEARS, ANXIETIES, TERROR: SOME ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESULTS

Except for my urban terrains in France (1975 - 1984), all my studies have been carried out in countries struggling under dictatorial regimes. State violence (Puget 1989) puts the ethnologist in a peculiar position, obliging him to be cautious in his acts and firm in his convictions: his interlocutors and their words have to be protected, not only in concrete fact but also on a symbolic level. The violence of the State penetrates each subject's interior life through and through; implanting forms of fear that are always specific, it reconfigures both individual and collective behavior. Terror destabilizes very deeply indeed, amplifying individual and group phantasms, and creating zones in which it is difficult to distinguish the imaginary from the real. Three significant terrains illustrating these disorders – in Laos, Vietnam and Uzbekistan – will be dealt with below. The focus will be on key actors who reveal socio-political contexts, involuntarily "analyzing" them: mediums in Laos and in Vietnam, and researchers in Uzbekistan. After that, in conclusion, I will describe parents' representations of children officially characterized as "autistic" and of adults who have been declared "schizophrenic" in China, where they were brought together by NGOs.

Laos has been under Communist government ever since 1975. In the early 1990s, however, the authorities opened it up to "market socialism" (Selim 1995) in an attempt to rebuild the economy, which had been devas-

tated by revolution and the ensuing political isolation. Traditionally the mediums had formed an integral part of a political and religious system, the Buddhist monarchy. At first they had been severely repressed by the Communist Party, which saw them as vectors of harmful superstitions. Subsequently, however, the Party adopted a policy of tolerance. This unexpected concession set off a wave of enthusiasm for the revival of traditional ceremonies. These consisted of marriages between mediums and genii, accomplishing the desires of men and women who saw in these unions a way of restoring beliefs that had been repressed and forgotten; this restoration was seen as opening the way to a more peaceful and prosperous future. Experienced mediums were the central figures in these ceremonies. They were usually elderly women with strong personalities. Invariably, before becoming prophetess-therapists each of them had been through an episode of delirium, entering the universe of the genii. Each had immediately married a genie. As in many other shamanistic situations of this sort, grateful acceptance of the genie's advent and subsequent adoption of the profession of medium has enabled them to overcome a "sickness of the soul". Under normal circumstances, some of these elderly mediums found it very difficult to move physically. No sooner had the genie possessed them, however, than they became spectacularly lithe in their dancing. Throughout the harshest years of the revolutionary period they had clung firmly to their symbolic equipment, whereas the rest of the population had retreated, overwhelmed, panic in their hearts. Firmly established in the parallel world of the genii, these women showed remarkable clairvoyance and strength of mind, guiding with remarkable tact and common sense everyone who came to them tormented by symptoms and lost in infernal visions, seeking a way out of their psychic ills. I gained an entry into their world fairly easily. I went to the ceremonies and took photos that I subsequently interpreted with the help of the mediums. They explained the profiles of the various genii, and talked at length about the course of their own lives, giving their own interpretation of the political and economic sequences that their country had been through. Communication was intense. The main subject was the genii of which they were the receptacles and who in a certain sense presided over the ceremonies. With these women I found myself navigating on two different levels. I followed them in their particular way of thinking, at times overwhelmed by their flashes of insight and shaken by the violence of the ruptures between reality and imagination. One day, one of the mediums, a very old woman who was talking to me about some social matters, gave me a piercing look, broke off her conversation, and put a question to me: what would happen if her genie were suddenly to take possession of me? She would be curious to see what would happen, she said. Speechless, I nonetheless accepted this digression - just as I had agreed with pleasure to take part in their dancing. What I was doing in fact was dancing with

their male genii, who would sometimes hum for my benefit snatches of French songs from the 1960s.

The dreamlike dimension of this study made it something of a game for me; I enjoyed this immersion in the multiple dreams of my interlocutors and in their fictions, which were packed with symbolism. Carried away by the power of the marvelous chimaeras that were so germane to my research, I allowed them to take over the ethnological theatre. They reciprocated on their own behalf and that of the genii, tirelessly lending themselves to long sessions of questioning. Ten years later, when I met some of them again, our conversation resumed, as affectionate, familiar and gratifying as ever, as if it had never stopped. Communication with these mediums went a good deal further than my own role-playing implied; my interest and personal involvement restored legitimacy to this minor cult that had fallen into disrepute because of official disapproval. An alliance was formed under the aegis of the omni-present genii, who blessed it by giving recognition to the "folly" inherent in the ceremonies. This madness sometimes became poignant when, for example, younger mediums became confused and, less self-controlled than their elders, slithered towards the other world. Thanks to this alliance in the imaginary world, I was able to discern as a corollary symbolic patterns in political and economic change. In Vietnam my relationship with mediums and soothsayers of all sorts was very different (Selim 2003). There the Communist authorities opted far more determinedly for capitalist growth, which in the later 1990s was already well under way. Here too, my being present at the ceremonies added social value to them for the officiants. This was not risk - free, however, as political and police supervision was strict (the police, incidentally, also took payment), and social surveillance had not slackened, as it had in Laos. Mediums were in many cases younger women, and sometimes men. One of their main tasks was to locate the casualties of the long Vietnamese wars. People had not been able to mourn their near ones in accordance with proper custom. The desire to set this right was general. Rituals were violent, mirroring the violence of the State,. Shamelessly, mediums predicted misfortunes of all sorts to their clients - sickness, death, financial ruin - multiplying threats to extract money. It was a harrowing sight: intense suffering on the one hand, and on the other pitiless probing of open wounds, with incessant blackmail and manipulation of anguish. Insults would rain down on the crowds of desperate petitioners, with sexual coarseness and obscenity making older people cower in shame. Some mediums tried to involve me personally in the proceedings. I found myself getting caught up in a perverse game, forced into a role devised by the mediums to enhance the demonstration of their power. I submitted passively to be able to carry on with my study, trying to make out the grammar of this public staging of symbolic flagellation of the foreigner. How it all was received? I tried to track the behavior of the assembly. My endurance was rewarded. It enabled me to multiply conversations at the

homes of a variety of people who had been in the audience, from ranking officials to humble peasants and workers.

During this initial phase of social integration, however, I was also faced with complete disarray - that of the young mediums whom I interviewed in one - to - one conversation. Like the other mediums, they were involved in the ritual outbidding to establish strength and domination. But they were distraught - young women struggling to discover who they really were behind their masks, and seeking some sort of help. They needed to confide in someone to work out where their chaotic path was leading them. All of a sudden, without warning, their masks would drop. The shaken ethnologist would now be safe enough; but it was the medium's turn to be terrified. The Government never overlooks this theatre: it is supposed to make up for failures in its treatment of citizens who had "laid down their lives for their fatherland". The Government has shifted this heavy political task to the sphere of the imaginary and on to the shoulders of young mediums; it is given regular coverage in the media.

Taken on by elderly generals linked to high - ranking party officials to perform prefabricated, highly profitable "mass divinations", the mediums have little or no leeway. Caught between these socio - political roles they have to play in return for trifling wages, and the belief that nonetheless they would like to inspire - a belief essential to their own self-esteem they live in agony. It was this discrepancy that I was able to investigate, applying myself to articulating their desire for recognition, their current situation in a society dominated by corruption and power, their immense childhood grievances, and their lives as a whole… This opened up a space in which "truth" could emerge in the midst of a sickening world of "lies". It came out at first in hints. Then, our reciprocal functions gradually forgotten, the mediums would speak more freely - to get some rest, a little peace and quiet, away from the tumult of the performances, from the police, the Party, the army… I responded to their need simply by listening, modulating our relationships to fit their expectations. In general possession is an imaginary platform on which the political dimension of things is exhibited. But at the same time it is an inter-subjective matrix for symbolic investment. From this double particularity stems, at least in part, the ease with which interlocutors can move from one level to another in their relationship with an ethnologist. Nonetheless, the very concept of the relationship tends usually, according to the line in which it is played out, and even without possession, to be influenced by two elements: the social actor on the one hand, and on the other the dream of suspending hierarchical codes and freeing discourse about oneself in society.

## RESEARCH ON RESEARCHERS: PERSPECTIVES

We will now move on to a new angle and to a social group to which anthropologists have hardly ever paid attention: scientific research workers. I studied this group in Uzbekistan (Selim 2007). I was involved in several research laboratories in both "soft" and "hard" sciences, all of them part of the Academy of Science, formerly branches of the overarching soviet institution. These laboratories, though an unusual terrain for anthropological investigation, were nonetheless treated in the classical anthropological manner, as in Laos and Vietnam. I took the customs and mentality of the researchers as the object of my study. Uzbekistan had been independent since 1991, when the USSR fell apart. As ethnologist I entered into a remarkable relationship. My interlocutors immediately seized upon it to restore in my eyes their identity as scientists, which had been ruined by the break with the USSR. Science was being travestied by the dictatorship that had replaced the tutelary power and imposed "national identity" as the inclusive object of all research. Set in another ex-satellite, Armenia, Vodka Lemon is a highly significant film. At an iced-over roadside stop in a desolate, poverty-stricken moonscape, one man asks another if he isn't nostalgic. "Nostalgic…? Never!" the answer comes. "But in the USSR we didn't have freedom," objects the questioner. - "True…," the reply comes, "but we did have everything else." In Uzbekistan things were worse than that: freedom was lost - as well as everything else. Police surveillance and terror reigned, increasingly harsh, and reached a crisis in May 2005, when demonstrators were massacred at Andijan.

Scientists are no longer tenured officials, but employees hired on contract following calls for tenders. Their work is to celebrate the grandeur of Uzbek culture and to denounce its repression by Soviet Russia. This rhetorical exercise is obligatory. Impoverished, bereft of scientific and social respectability, ridden with anxieties, worried even about their day-to-day survival, the scientists are deeply depressed. They idealize the Soviet past as a golden age of pure research supported by benign authorities. Little by little, this nostalgia impregnated the ethnological theatre of my investigations. Interlocutors vented their dismay, lamented the wavering of their self-esteem, the new regime's lack of respect for "the people" and for its "scientists" - the elite that had been cherished under the former regime. From our very first meetings, throwing caution to the winds, they reasserted themselves as colleagues of the visiting ethnologist, entitled to the same respect. My official status was taken as a guarantee. A strangely provocative brazenness took over, taboos were defied, some real and others imaginary, and this ad nauseam, the surfeited appetite eventually sickening and dying. The ethnologist's com-pliant ear brought about an irresistible return of repressed memories. Photos of parents were brought out and shown with pride; if they had belonged to the dreaded Cheka (forerunner of the KGB), no thought was given to the possibility that the ethnologist might not hold this institution in much esteem. Narratives would go back to grand-parents, tracing an uninterrupted course of progress (albeit with the Stalinist

episode tactfully passed over) that lasted until the fateful year 1991 that ushered in decline. A subjective mythology accompanied these personal histories narrated as part the triumphant historical and political development of imperial communism. Some interlocutors saw themselves as unrecognized geniuses; others saw their ancestors as heroes of a remarkable epoch; all saw the current situation as catastrophic - the cause of their broken hopes, the reason for their loss of scientific and personal value, their shame. They were haunted by the idea that their personal competencies would soon amount to nothing, that in Uzbekistan science would perish, that their descendants, unless they got out of the country, would become mere have-nots. A sense of death haunted them. Symbolically, death surrounded them: their personal death, the death of society, of political systems, of the nation. The country was now simply a prison from which one could escape only if one had money – and proper researchers no longer had that. Going on and on about their powerlessness, they ran around in circles, pleading with the ethnologist to let the outside world know of their plight, to be a witness to their collective doom. Now that at Andijan the Government had fired into the crowd, leaving doubt as to its readiness, willingness and ability to dominate and repress all opposition, salvation, as they saw it, could come only from elsewhere. Some interlocutors even began to fear for my personal safety: would the authorities let me go back to France with all the information I had collected, the details featuring in my notebooks? Wouldn't Government agents arrest me, confiscate my data, and find the names of my informers… The ethnological scene got increasingly troubled. In an Orwellian organization, it is not easy to tell the difference between fact and fancy: phantasms of State omnipotence are omnipresent. As a foreigner, I felt certain of some things and rationalized my certainties; but it was hard to keep my mind clear as I recorded the ways in which threatening fictions were dissolving boundaries. Insecurity spread; in the stifling atmosphere of suspicion, behavior became more and more contradictory, exaggerated, and transgressive. When I eventually left, I felt guilty. I was abandoning those interlocutors who were closest to me; I owed them something that I would never be able to really repay.

Unlike French colleagues who were based in Uzbekistan or were staying there for longer periods, I have decided to stick to scientific logic in this account, and not to cut out those parts of it that might militate against my being allowed back into the country. This same option never got in the way of my going back to Laos and Vietnam, where it is said that foreign researchers should avoid criticizing the regime. The issues, however, are not so much deontological as epistemological. The actual conditions under which research is being carried out should be treated as factors - political, to a large extent - that determine the anthropologist's reading of the situations in which and on which he works, and in assessing the extent to which these situations represent the object he is studying.

## "EXTRA-TERRITORIALITY" OF THE ANTHROPOLOGIST: SOME THOUGHTS

Following the arc of communist countries we come to China, where capitalist growth has become exponential under the aegis of a corrupt communist party. As in Europe in the early 20th century, social work seems to the authorities as a means of avoiding social conflict, offering a solution to the contradictions of their situation. Over the past 10 years, departments of social work have multiplied in Chinese universities. Initially the ideology of social work was imported from Hong Kong, where a tradition of "charity" had developed in the earlier colonial context as an anti - communist corrective. In the sphere of social work NGOs began to sprout and blossom timidly; crowds of young graduates moved into them as trainees. In order to plot this new social field, I worked with two NGOs and on them. One was para - governmental, part of the immense federation of disabled persons; the other operated with private foreign funding. Both of these NGOs dealt with parents whose children suffered officially from "mental deficiency". The terms used to define this condition were brutally concise: "schizophrenia" in the case of adults and "autism" in that of children. Both conditions were diagnosed summarily on a pragmatic basis and, given the Chinese demographic context, (with families in urban areas being entitled to have only one child), this medical assessment proved inalterable - in accordance with the notion (soon to become predominant) that "madness" can be explained only genetically. Other etiologies being unthinkable, it was up to parents to cope with what was seen as a family failure.

In the pleasant Canton premises of the federation of disabled persons, adult "schizophrenics" who had supposedly been "cured" were involved in games and other daytime activities, while their parents, trying to come to terms with their troubles, attended lectures and presentations on "mental illness". Every week parents and children shared a collective meal in the friendly atmosphere of a carefully selected restaurant. The parents formed a heterogeneous group embracing all social categories, hierarchy being temporarily sidelined. The room was light and airy. Nearby, a small windowless room was set aside for private conversations between organizers and families; it was locked and never used. It is there that I was sent, however – to the special room for communication that had never actually taken place. Parents came in gravely, couple by couple, to talk to me about their children's "madness". They told me how it had become more and more difficult to bear, until one day they had had to call in the police. Their offspring had been taken into custody, put in a psychiatric ward, given calming medication - that caused illness and eventually

exhaustion. When parents could no longer afford the hospital fees, their offspring was dismissed. These were the phases that came up in all the narratives. In general, what led to the build -up of the patient's violence against his or her family was the violence reigning in the world at large: at school, at work, at the hands of Party militias and of mafias, in the streets, in bars. Living quarters were cramped; overcrowding made the intrusion of endemic societal violence particularly difficult for families to bear. Unemployment was another important cause of the slide into "madness"; young adults whose applications for jobs were rejected time after time turned their resentment against the families on which they were dependent. Closeted with the ethnologist in the extraterritorial "confessional", parents would tell their story impetuously, unable to stop until, overwhelmed with emotion, they burst into tears. They thought that somewhere else, with a different treatment, their child might have avoided this unending fall; this thought ached in them, sometimes in pangs, like an open wound. They felt powerless facing neighborhood surveillance, hospital administration with its formalities and routines, social relationships based increasingly on money, employment that no longer came automatically and value that was measured by consumption. These overall factors, however, were not explicitly dealt with in our interviews; our interlocutors would have liked simply to meet normal standards and felt ashamed at being unable to do so.

The foreign ethnologist carries to its limit the symbolic function of otherness that enables one to say things about oneself and one's society that cannot normally be said, as no provision has been made for them. To deal with people who have been crushed by society and its arrangements, a place has to be invented where they can speak and be heard. This venue must necessarily be delocalized, imagined as extra-territorial. As a corollary, interlocutors can distance themselves from their own situation by asking about the ethnologist's country, in my case the management of "madness" in France. Following these conversations I was formally invited to lecture to the group of parents as a whole - with encouragement from the supervisor of the premises, formerly the manager of a large psychiatric hospital. This in turn produced invitations to the homes of some families who wanted to show me the actual settings they lived in. Here they were actually venturing to expose themselves to outside eyes, despite the traditional Chinese reticence; usually every effort is made to hide one's life, stigmata and shame from the malevolence of the people around one. Adults labelled as "cured" (a euphemism for irreparably damaged) lurked near these scenes of reparation in a vain attempt to re-establish lines of communication.

## Conclusion

Leaving our Asian travels and travails, I would like to come back to the question of the analytical mediations implicit in the anthropologist's hearing. When anthropology was born in the 19th century its posture was one of radical otherness. This led it to "enhance" the otherness of the peoples observed, that is to increase the degree of their difference. It also hypostatized culture and ritual, and this precluded focusing on individual utterances. As the 21st century opens, otherness has been brought back to the foreground by identity issues stemming from globalization of capitalism, which is seen as a threat by almost all societies. The other has become a stranger once again - but now an enemy to be expelled, thrust back and absorbed in negativity. The other has been reinvented, imagined anew, reconstructed and reproduced in order to protect and conserve a self that is being wounded and diminished.

As a result of this development, the high-profile anthropology of the 1960s and 1970s no longer raises much interest in the public at large; cuts in its budgets and personnel have weakened it. A new range of foreigners and strangers, within boundaries and outside them, is being arranged in hierarchies according to levels of strangeness, in order to shore up the foundations of beleaguered "national identities". "National identity" is no doubt the penultimate state in the decomposition of the sovereign body of each nation. During this phase, strangers do not have to be given a hearing; instead, they are either summarily "integrated" and sorted out into identificatory categories, or sent back to the places from which they set out. Into a world that is both globalized and fractured, split up according to myriads of mythical origins that are constantly been updated, the anthropologist infuses the idea of an extra -territorial identity - an identity in suspension, that should be given an impartial hearing with no purpose other than disinterested cognition: a disinterested identity that exists simply in order to be understood. The ethnological theatre stages a confrontation of two identities. Usually interlocutors are surprised that anyone should have come such a long way without expecting anything in return except a mere epistemic increment: disinterested understanding, knowledge. According to the social and economic texture of their society, this surprise can initially be very great indeed, as it is in China, where the break-through of capitalist rationality and commoditization has made spectacular progress. In Laos and in Vietnam, on the other hand, the arrival of the ethnologist is framed by the mediums' own visions and interpreted in their light. In Uzbekistan, despair is so intense that the anthropologist's arrival is a sort of epiphany: the unexpected appearance of a savoir of the Word. In all the cases I have dealt with here - I could have added my French terrains, in working class and State -assisted milieus - social actors are quick to take advantage of the hearing offered by the ethnologist. At first they place it in their own social setting, in the local hierarchy of stakes, conflicts and degrees of domination. Subsequently, however, the countenance of

an other takes shape - somewhat unsteadily - and enables them to raise self-awareness and to go beyond the manipulation of momentary facilities; most interlocutors follow this desire.

In a world based on money, the anthropologist cuts a figure that is all the more strange as - unlike psycho-analysts and mental health professionals - in order to talk to him one does not have to pay him or her. The anthropologist simply gives his time to those who approach him. This is literally an outlandish position; it has no place in the current order. But precisely because of this, it demands of the anthropologist a high degree of control in the relationships he sets up. This holds for both a critical point of view and a clinical one (Douville 2008) and even, if one so decides, a psychoanalytical one. Professional deontology, axiological codes of "best practice" and "governance", and traditional moral virtues are of little help here. These terrains are quicksands in which each step can be fatal, both on the outward journey and the return. This applies both to writing and to word of mouth, to feeling, sensibility and theoretical reasoning. Once outside his or her terrain and network of relationships, the ethnologist should not lose sight of the political networks governing reception of the knowledge he has garnered. Anthropological products can very easily be "hijacked". The epistemic aim underlying ethnological investigation - that of grasping micro-social particularities - can be used to bolster all sorts of "differentialist" paradigms with their multiple variants - ethnic and religious, for example. Differences - leading to a differentiation of political and social management  can be applied to a host of social categories (foreigners, jobseekers, "seniors", incompetent parents, etc.) that are gradually being managed in differing and deviant ways (one of these being outright exclusion), and concerted efforts are being made to legitimate such practices. Admittedly, ethnologists are less valued in this respect than psychoanalysts. The latter are suffering from the popularity of their profession and the rise of the "pop-psy" in the media (Nadaud 2006); the "pop - ethno" is still some way off… Nonetheless the same trap awaits him or her: that of making the norm and its opposite unchallengeable, of marrying psychoanalysis to ethnology to set up as a model a normalizing family. The results of my research show in detail that anthropologists, no matter what their position may be and whatever their terrains, are inescapably constrained by two sets of fundamentals: on the one hand, the political structure of the society under examination and its effects on people; and on the other hand, their own subjectivities, their personal histories and their affectivity. Results become scientific in overcoming these limitations without abolishing their material basis and thereby attaining a higher degree of intelligibility.

**REFEFRENCES**

Althabe G (2002). Oppression et libération dans l'imaginaire, La découverte.

Assoun PL, Zafiropoulos M (ed.) (2002) L'anthropologie psychanalytique, Paris, Anthropos Economica.

Balandier G (1972). Political Anthropology, Vintage Books, ISBN 0394718186

Barthélémy T, Selim M (ed) (1993). "L'ethnologue dans les hiérarchies sociales", J. des Anthropo. 53: 54-55.

Bastide R (1950), (1995). Sociologie et psychanalyse. Paris: PUF.

Bazin L (1998). Entreprise, politique, parenté, une perspective anthropologique sur la Côte d'Ivoire, l'Harmattan.

Bazin L (2005). "L'enquête ethnologique, cristallisation des modes de relégation" in O. Lecervoisier Terrains ethnologiques et hiérarchies sociales, Karthala.

Datong H (2008). *La Chine sur le divan*, Entretiens avec Dorian Malovic, Paris, Plon.

La Pradelle M, Selim M (1988). "Communication et rapport social dans l'enquête ethnologique sur la France contemporaine". Etudes de linguistique appliquée : 69: 7-15.

Douville O, Fotso-Djemo JB (2008). "Pour une anthropologie clinique", *Le Journal des psychologues,* n° 258 (Dossier : 18-50).

Glynos J, Stavrakakis Y (2008). Lacan and Political Subjectivity: Fantasy and Enjoyment in Psychoanalysis and Political Theory. Paper Presented at the 58th PSA Annual Conference Swansea, 1-3 April 2008.

Hernandez V (2005). "Démarches anthropologiques et hiérarchisation dans des espaces à activité finalisée" in O. Lecervoisier, Terrains ethnographiques et hiérarchies sociales, Paris Karthala.

Juillerat B (2001). Penser l'imaginaire, Essai d'anthropologie psychanalytique. Lausanne, Payot.

Kundid L (2004). Penser la dictature aujourd'hui. Enquêtes d'anthropologie politique auprès d'habitants de Santiago du Chili. Ph. D. thesis, University of Paris VII, 28 janvier 2004

Lacan J (1966). La science et la vérité. Ecrits (TII), Paris, Seuil.

Mannheim K (2006). Idéologie et utopie, Paris, Editions de la MSH.

Memmi A (2006). Decolonization and the *decolonized*. Translated by Robert Bononno. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. ISBN 0816647348

Memmi A (1991). The colonizer and the colonized. Translated by Howard Greenfeld ; Introduction by Jean-Paul Sartre; afterword by Susan Gilson Miller. Expanded ed. Boston: Beacon Press.

Nadaud S (2006). Manuel à l'usage de ceux qui veulent réussir leur [anti] oedipe, Fayard, Paris.

Ortigues E, Ortigues MC (1973). Œdipe africain, Paris.

Puget J (1989). Violence d'Etat et psychanalyse, Paris, Dunod.

Selim M (1979). Rapports sociaux dans *une cité HLM de la banlieue nord de Paris*, Paris EHESS, Tél.-00126510.

Selim M (1991). L'aventure d'une multinationale au Bangladesh, Paris, l'Harmattan.

Selim M (1995). "Ethnologie sous contrainte", *l'Homme et la société :* 115, pp105-114, Paris.

Selim M (2003). "Marché des croyances et socialisme de marché au Vietnam", Paris, Revue Tiers Monde, TXLIV : 173 :81-97.

Selim M (2007). "Travail, idéologie et réflexivité dans le cadre de la globalisation" in V. Hernandez, P. Ould-Ahmed, J. Papail, P. Phelinas : L'action collective à l'épreuve de la globalisation : 205-234, Paris, L'Harmattan.

Zafiropoulos M (2001). Lacan et les sciences sociales. Le déclin du père. 1938-1953. Paris, PUF.

Zafiropoulos M (2003). Lacan et Lévi-Strauss, ou le retour à Freud. Paris, PUF.