



TOWARDS A DECOLONIZATION OF THE TESSMANN FANG SOUND ARCHIVES (1907-1908)

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**ICTM
Belgium**



GENERAL PROBLEMATIC

❖ Decolonizing the Sound Archives

- ✓ Decolonizing the Sound Archives
- ✓ Decolonization = the end of the colonial state
- ✓ Decolonizing Sound archives = allowing free access to them to the original owners > unmuseumify them.

the facts:

Objects collected before and during the colonial period.

> Property of the collector of his country.

Specific case of sound archives two value systems.

The medium is owned by the collector and his descendants.

The content is useful to the owners

GENERAL PROBLEMATIC

Issue :

- Not to dispossess the collector of his support while restoring the content to the owner
- The owners recover the ancestral oratory/musical substratum as well as the underlying identity values.

Win-win approach.

- Physical object: restitution = reversed dispossession = restitution
- Sound archive: restitution of the content and not of the object

GENERAL PROBLEMATIC

❖ **Our objective**

- To present the methodology of decolonization by unmuseification of sound archives.
- Practical application of this method to the Tessmann archives (1907-1913).



AVAILABLE DATA

INVENTORY: 36 FILES PROCESSED

❖ Oral literature (9)

- ✓ 4 Tales
- ✓ 2 chantefables
- ✓ 3 extracts from Mvet

❖ Songs (16)

❖ a capella songs (7)

- ✓ 2 solo songs
- ✓ 5 songs with choirs

❖ songs with instruments (9)

- ✓ 7 in a dance context
- ✓ 2 in solo with instruments

❖ Memory and dexterity games (5)

- ✓ 2 Children's rhymes
- ✓ 1 Genealogy
- ✓ 1 Word games (poems?)
- ✓ 1 Abstract count

❖ 1 drummed message

❖ 2 imitation animal language files

❖ 3 Ritual incantations

OBJECTIVE

- ❖ **To move from sound archiving to "ethnolinguistic" archiving**
 - Need for transcription
 - Need for translation

- ❖ **Main difficulty**
 - **2nd or 3rd hand data / dummy data**
 - ✓ The collector is missing
 - ✓ Informants are absent

 - **Need to find and understand the production context**

TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION : DIFFICULTIES

❖ Transcription difficulties

- **The digitization of the wax cylinders and its Sizzling/ Crackles**
 - ✓ Reconstitution of the sentences according to the context
 - ✓ Setting up a listening team
- **Specialized lexicons**
- **Outdated terminology (impression of transcribing an unknown language)**



❖ Translation Difficulties

❖ Pre-identification of files

- **Directories**
- **type of performance & production context**
- **Rituals and ritual procedures**

❖ voluntary polysemy

TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION

ηγί

*Institution,
(secrete society)*

ηγί

*Members this
secrete society*

- **The question of voluntary polysemy**

➤ **ηγί βά σεη**

άσεη

Heal

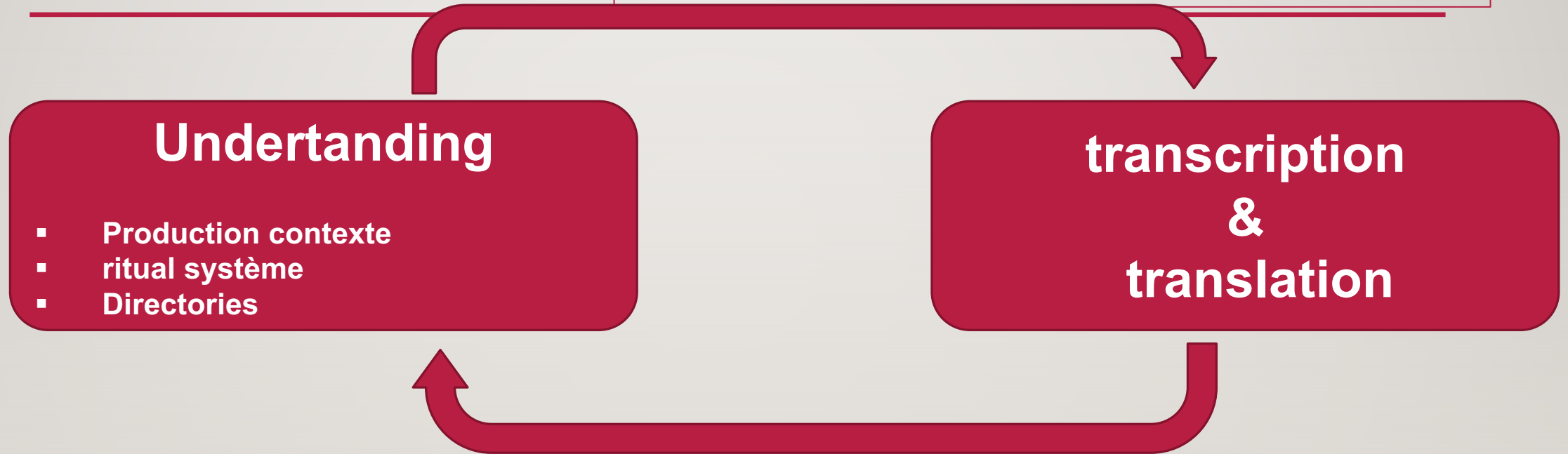
work

- **For us :** "the Ngi (secret society) heals"
- **for the initiated :** "the Ngi (members of secret society) works"

- **Morphosemantics: identification of possible forms and meanings**

METHODOLOGICAL PREREQUISITES

❖ a constant back and forth



❖ understanding the ritual to transcribe/translate well

❖ Transcribe/translate to understand the ritual

rite élong / bekung

Elong : Light

- Symbolic animal: the rooster (elong)
- Performer : Ndong-Mba

Bekung : Darkness

- Symbolic animal: owl (àkùng)
- performer: bekung

Tessmann : Bekùng = chimpanzee dance

Transcription 2020 : Bekùng = dance of the Owl



mèkùŋ mááwùlù àná “owls walk like this”
 mèkùŋmááwùlùmá “owls walk like this”
 mèkùŋmááwù’o “owls walk... ”

❖ **Transcribing well helps to understand the ritual**

❖ To understand /translate :
Find the descendants of
Tessmann's informants

e mote a vüi esisa, mot abuda ngí;
l'homme (mâle) qui tue Essissa, l'homme : victime du Ngí;

e mote a buñ esisa, mot abuda-ngí;
l'homme qui maudit Essissa, **l'homme** : victime du Ngí;

nnem a džī esisa, abuda ngí.
(le) sorcier qui avale Essissa : victime du Ngí.



Entretien avec Charles **ESSESSA** MBA,
descendant de ESSESSA (ESSISSA), Personne
mentionnée par TESSMANN

(Ebengone sud Cameroun, 2019)



èsèsà
name of person

ésésàà
little Sparrowhawk
(Accipiter minullus)

èsésā
Debris, remains, intestines

ésésàà
tumultuous sharing

- ❖ Consultation of current speakers
- ❖ initiated in the rites studied
- ❖ uninitiated but knowledgeable about the language and culture

Écoute T51a et T51b à Mekomo-Essakounan (sud Cameroun 2019)



Identification by the speaker
T51a & T51b
(incantations followed by songs /dance)

- it is a song from the So rite
- incantations performed at the final exit of the initiates
- the words praise a candidate.
 - he is from the Esseng clan
 - his village is indicated
- the following dance is called Essana (So ritual dance still performed today)
- Demonstration of the dance

Harp song of an orphan

Ch : Eèèèèèèèèèè **Phonétic**
 Mwánàná mà wél' éééééééé
 Mèèbò yáèèèééé
 Zààámbró màdzó mà mà móbòn
 Eyèèèèèèèèèè

S : Màdzó ngwèmé
 Ngwè?è mà
 nó bikò tàmátòbò óvòn
 Kevazingo

Ch : Eèèèèèèèèèè
 Mwánàámà wél' éééééééé
 Mèèbò yáèèèééé
 Zààámbró màdzó mà mà móbòn
 Eyèèèèèèèèèè

S : Màkò màtóbó ñsòhòsòhò
 Nó byáyìmwànsòhògwánrìbàn
 Mbang

Ch : Eèèèèèèèèèè
 Mwánàámà wél' éééééééé
 Mèèbò yáèèèééé
 Zààámbró màdzó mà mà móbòn
 Eyèèèèèèèèèè

S : Màdzóngwèmé
 Ngwè?è mà
 Nábyáyìnàná à byé mà

Word-for-word

mother's child, I am dying
 me faisrai quoi
 who will still tell me things they beautiful

me say harp
 pity me
 that we are going to try to live in Kevazingo¹

mother's child, I am dying
 me faisrai quoi
 who will still tell me things they beautiful

me go me steller course course
 that we mourn the child-daughter of Mbàng

mother's child, I am dying
 me faisrai quoi
 who will still tell me things they beautiful

me say harp
 pity me
 that we mourn mother she gave birth to me for we cry for mama, the one who gave birth to me

❖ **Final presentation****Translation**

Son of my mother, I'm dying
 i'm helpless
 Who will still say sweet words to me

I sing on my harp
 poor me
 as you are now going to rest at the foot of the

Son of my mother, I'm dying
 i'm helpless
 Who will still say sweet words to me

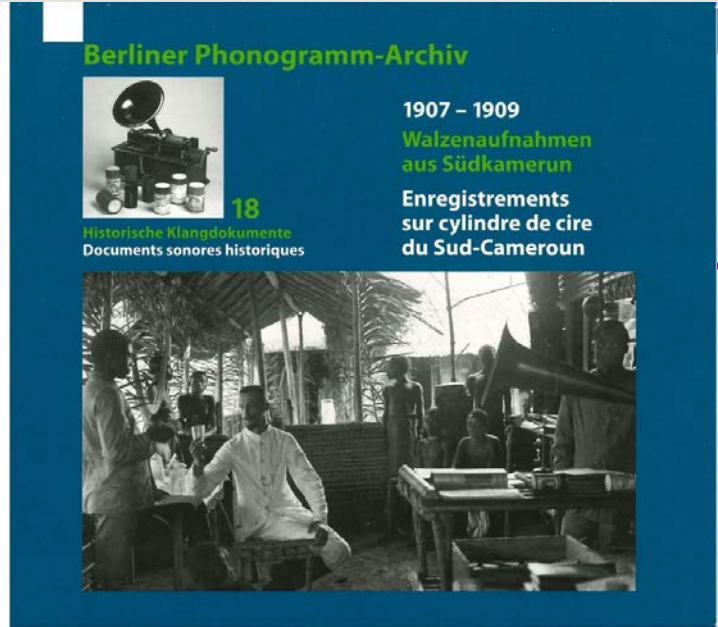
I stroll along the course
 for we mourn the nephew of the village

Son of my mother, I'm dying
 i'm helpless
 Who will still say sweet words to me

I sing on my harp
 poor me

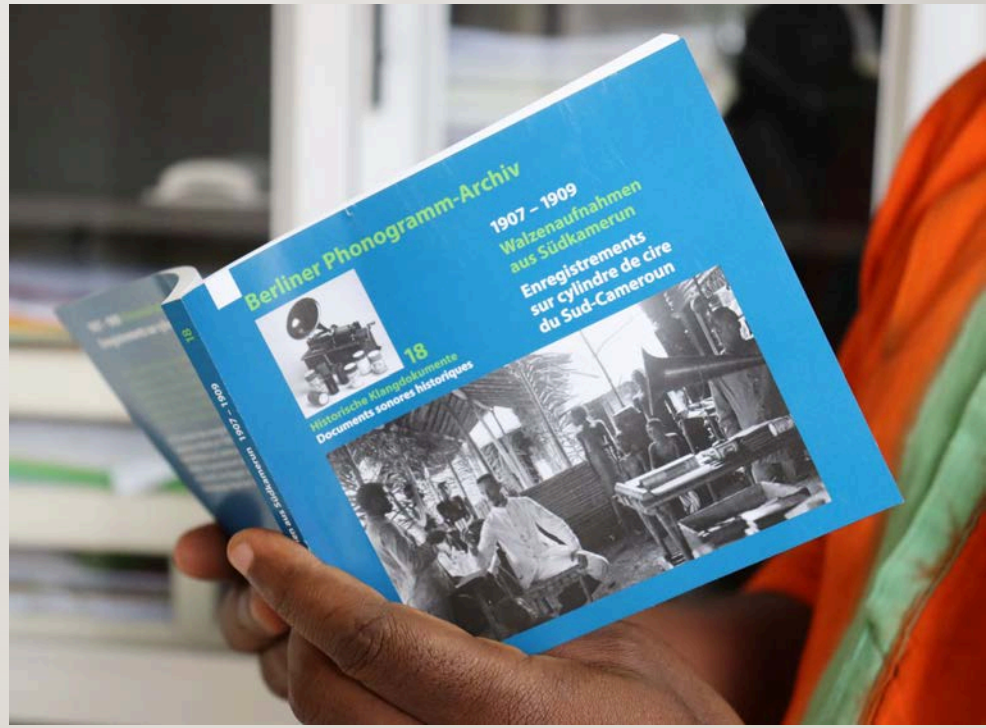
¹ The village elders are buried at the foot of a Kevazingo.

RÉSULTS



❖ archiveCD_audio + Explanatory bookle

Cf. Communication Susanne FURNISS



- ❖ **Decolonizing = making the content of the Sound archives accessible and explicit.**

- **CD : access to the sound**
 - ✓ **Finding back the “voice of the ancestors”**
- **Booklet : access to transcription, translation**
 - ✓ **Rediscovering lost rites**
 - ✓ **Have tools to understand them**
 - ✓ **Potentially revive them.**

INTEREST IN DECOLONIZATION

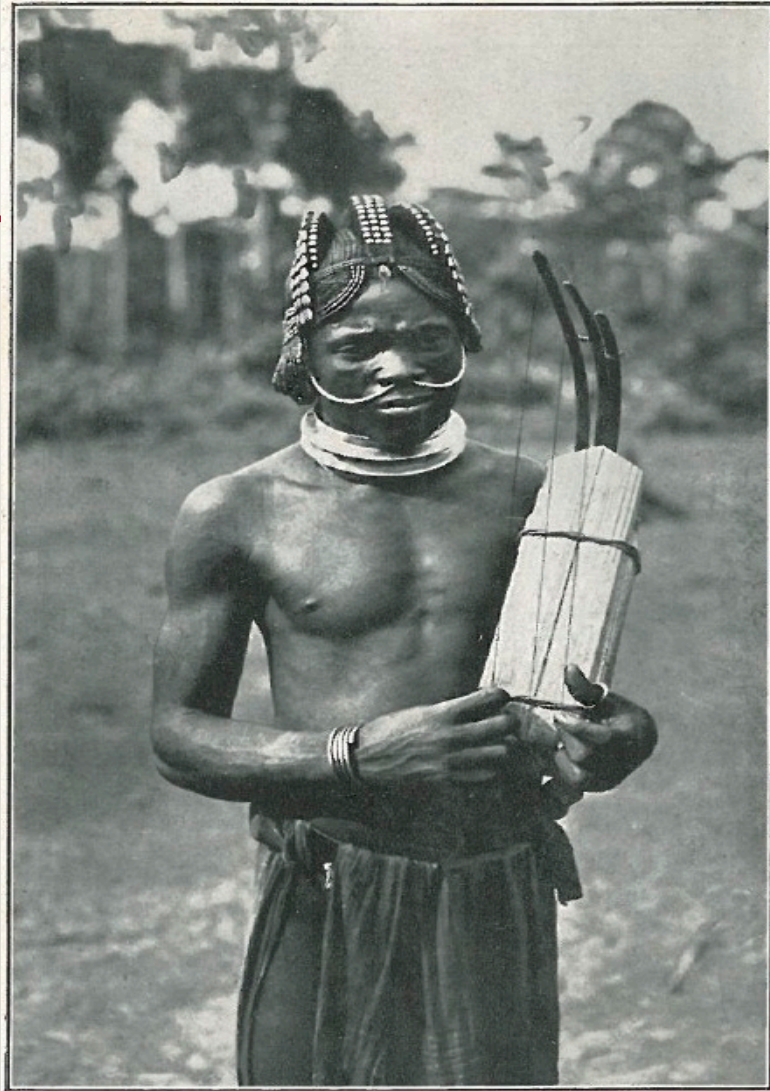
❖ For the collector and his descendants :

- To have a valued archive
 - ✓ Better identification of the content
 - ✓ Better presentation in museums.

❖ For the scientific community

- To have a rare and unpublished corpus on the art of oratory and ancient ritual practices

AKIBA



THANK-YOU