

Charlotte BRAILLON, « Leo Frobenius and the tribes of the Congo (1905-1906): a forgotten enquiry ? On an image of the Indigenous and its origins »

Conference presented at *Leo Frobenius: histoire croisée de la constitution et l'appropriation d'un savoir ethnologique en France et en Allemagne*, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Frankfurt am Main, 19-20 February 2014

Scholars are familiar with the expedition of Leo Frobenius to the Congo-Kasai, a journey that was achieved in 1905-1906 and resulted in a first publication, *Im Schatten Des Kongostaates*. But the founding text of this exploration, is, on the contrary, less known. Produced by Leo Frobenius, the *Questionnaire de la mission scientifique allemande dans l'Afrique centrale* included no less than 80 questions, related to the « customs » and « traditions » of the tribes living in the Basin of the River Congo. Blank versions of the *Questionnaire* were directed at the officials of the Congo Free State. The purpose of such a work, as stated by Leo Frobenius himself in the preface to the *Questionnaire*, was to gather his own documentation on the tribes of the Basin. Thus, it appears that the field workers, regularly in contact with Indigenous tribes, were asked to contribute to the project, by answering the questions that had been invented by Leo Frobenius.

Only a few years before, the Congo Free State had set forth such a field enquiry. The latter was also based on a questionnaire aimed at the Indigenous tribes and designed by Belgian lawyers, with a majority of questions related to legal matters. The *Questionnaire concernant l'organisation politique, civile et pénale des tribus du territoire de l'État indépendant* (1887) was also transmitted to the colonial agents (officials, missionaries, judges) and it resulted in a series of works originating from the Lower-Congo. Creators of both questionnaires did not know the answers before they invented the questions, with a series of theoretical options behind the conception of the documents. Were they conveying an image of the Indigenous and some ethnographic orientations? In this respect, the contribution will be guided by a comparison between the questionnaires and it will open a debate on a colonial image of Indigenous law.