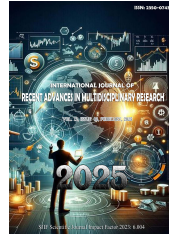




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RESEARCH ARTICLE

USE OF THE DOMESTIC BROOM IN THE FON COMMUNITIES OF DJIDJA IN BENIN

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ABSTRACT

The broom is a means of cleaning the yard, the bedroom, the environment, the human space and so on. It is used for many purposes, both ordinary and mystical. The aim of this research is to understand the different functions of this domestic cleaning tool. The reasoned choice technique was used. Empirical data was collected from 53 individuals who were interviewed. The sample consisted of ten dignitaries of the endogenous cult, housekeepers, fathers of families and resource persons. Qualitative in nature, the tools used were direct observation, documentary research and semi-structured interviews. It emerged that the Fon communities are firmly attached to their culture. The broom is used for a number of functions: purification, therapy, reconciliation, conjuration and prospiology. The broom represents power and a magical symbol. It can be beneficial or malefic. The broom is the source of many legends.

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INTRODUCTION

Unlike animals, man thinks what he does and does what he thinks. He is a cultural and visionary being (A. Takpé, 2015, p.25). The goal of man is to live and find the means to realize his dream. Everyone experiences evil: "it is everything that hinders the desire to live in fullness" (A. Kakoun, 2016, p.24). We must therefore ward off, reduce evil, acquire strength to obtain salvation, which is nothing other than "life itself, and this with the help of religious conceptions and actions" (C. Tchaou, 2018, p.41). Traditional beliefs revolve around the worship of deities or spirits embodying supernatural forces. These preside over the destinies of men and serve as intermediaries between the supreme god and humanity (A. Aguessi, 1987, p.8). The security of people and property remains a development issue for communities. Several efforts, namely: the creation of a single security force. Are deployed by the authorities in charge of security to ensure the safety of people. But these efforts come up against several obstacles, namely: social perceptions, the adoption of endogenous security strategies. The human person is an individual, but above all an individual who bears rights and duties, and who is considered the author of his actions, therefore "as responsible for what he does" (G. Agboton, 2000, p.39). For this, she is initially a conscious and reasonable being. It is "A thinking and intelligent being, gifted with reason and reflection and able to consider oneself as oneself, the same thinking thing in different times and places. The notion of personal identity

considers oneself as a unique being, and which has a unity, subjective notion of the identity of the self "selfhood", nothing to do with the objective notion of identity such as for example having the same genetic heritage, social identity, or even the identity of a body, (Th. Kousse mou, 2019, p.21). Communities perpetuate endogenous practices to protect themselves from generation to generation. In the past, they were more concerned with the spiritual aspect. To do this, certain communities invoked protective spirits to ensure security for their members. However, the broom presents several functions which are listed as the mystical power of the broom, the traditional African broom, the symbolism of the broom, the placement of the broom in front of a door, sweeping the footprints of an individual, etc.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the work, a sample was selected in nine districts and totaled 53 individuals, including 32 men and 21 women. These districts were selected by reasoned choice taking into account the existence of strong beliefs in endogenous deities and strong agricultural activities. As for the social actors interviewed, they were selected by quota in order to ensure the fairness of the actors. An exploratory survey was carried out among housekeepers, traditional leaders, leaders of endogenous religions and resource people. The interviews with them made it possible to understand the extent of the problems raised. The interview guide, the focus group and the

questionnaire were administered to these actors. Tools such as the observation grid and interview guides were administered to the target groups. The analysis model used is the official approach borrowed from R. Boudon supported by the structural-officials of T. Parson.

Search results

Presentation of Djidja: As soon as the first people settled on this land, their first main activity was farming. The generosity of this fertile land is such that the harvests were always abundant, therefore sufficient for everyone, as well as for friends who visited. Then this abundance of harvest was on everyone's lips: the harvests yielded. These people, to translate this good yield of food products into their language said: djidjè. dji=harvest, djè=gave. Anyone who went there said DJIDJE and from distortion to distortion, we arrived at the name DJIDJA which is today the name of the municipality.

The municipality is a region where endogenous religions and tradition continue to occupy a place of choice both in the daily lifestyle of the populations and in the immense and rich artistic and religious heritage recognized in the Fon cultural area. At the heart of this heritage which constitutes a base for the promotion of tourism, are the pits resembling underground villages which can be found in the locality. Djidja is the largest municipality in the Zou department and it is also the agricultural breadbasket which ensures the food security of this department as well as that of part of South Benin. Each year it records high production of corn, rice, pineapples, peanuts, market garden products and even cashew nuts and cotton.



Source: Field research results in 2024

Plate 1. Life in the village of Djidja

Broom direction: A broom is a floor cleaning tool. This cleaning tool, in its rudimentary form, consisted mainly of branches tied in a pile with a handle made from a large branch. It was especially when the floors of farms, originally made of clay, were covered with stone slabs or terracotta tiles, that housewives undertook more careful cleaning. In general, brooms were gradually improved because on hard and smooth

ground, they had to be flexible to be effective. Those made of pork bristle were the most sought after, while the most modest were made with birch twigs that the craftsmen gathered into a bundle by holding them with a link made of hazel or willow sticks. The handle, in most cases a strong ash branch, was attached to this end.

Typology of brushes in use

Ordinary household broom: In Fon communities, there are several forms of brooms. Each broom has its function! Not imported brooms as we know them in Western countries, but we are talking about endogenous brooms which have existed for generations. They are made with natural materials found in the region: straw, palm, coconut. In Fon custom, a simple broom is not limited to a domestic function. This everyday object, often made from natural materials, is loaded with symbolic, social and spiritual meanings. The broom is seen as a symbol of unity. This strong image reminds us that a single individual cannot accomplish as much as several individuals work together, form a unit and build a social bond. Beyond this collective metaphor, the broom embodies the idea of community and solidarity. When used in ceremonies or during gatherings, it becomes a visual reminder of the importance of mutual aid and social bonds. For us here, the broom is a powerful symbol of purification. Used in spiritual rituals, it serves to sweep away not only physical dirt, but also negative energies. This spiritual cleansing practice often involves sweeping specific locations before important ceremonies or after significant events. This reflects a belief that the broom helps renew harmony and maintain a healthy environment, both physically and spiritually. The sanctuaries are cleaned with the broom prepared for this purpose before worship (V.A. Bluku deity dignitary, 76 years old in Agouna). In Fon communities, the broom is also a symbol of purification and spiritual cleansing. It has a strong mystical and mysterious value, as it is both used as a means to get rid of evil spirits. Brooms are used to clean dust and ashes. They can be used to clean homes, household appliances such as ovens and fireplaces, or outdoor areas such as streets and yards; in the local language, broom is referred to as akiza. Which means the instrument used to clean. The household broom allows you to brush very dirty floors or to support a mop. It is used to purify people and objects. This is usually done when the individual has been a victim of occult forces.



Source: Field research results in 2024

Plate 2. Domestic endogenous cleaning brooms

Palm rib brooms are present in all homes. They bring together a handful of fibers simply tied with a string. This flexible and soft broom is used to sweep the interior of houses. Very short and sleeveless, its use requires bending as close as possible to

the ground. Brooms made simply from a few palm leaves are used for cleaning exterior floors. With sweeping sweeps, these palms prevent weeds from growing back in courtyards or village squares. Finally, the broom made from coconut fiber is a traditional object of art. Equipped with a handle, it is very aesthetic with its fan shape, but it is too hard to be used in homes; its use is limited to the exterior.

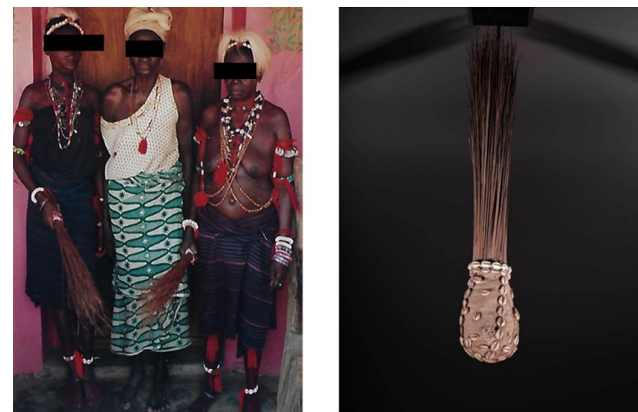


Source: Field research results in 2024

Plate 3. Brooms used to clean the courtyard and public square

Characteristics of broom types: Palm rib broom: Used to sweep the interior of homes, this soft and short broom requires bending over to clean. Palm leaf broom: Ideal for outdoor spaces, it prevents the growth of weeds and maintains the cleanliness of courtyards and village areas. Coconut fiber broom: More than just a tool, it becomes an object of art. Its fan shape and robustness make it an aesthetic and utilitarian symbol, although limited to outdoor use. These brooms, made with local materials such as palm and coconut, demonstrate ingenuity and respect for African artisanal traditions.

Broom of followers vodun nana bluku: The deity Nana bluku is a much worshiped deity imported from the hill district, especially in the Nago areas. The followers are all women. Depending on the locality, Nana bluku is designated by the names of the environment or a nominative of an event on the site. New recruits live in the convent for around nine months. They each always move with a sacred broom in their right hand, already prepared in the convent. This instrument represents for them what the stick is for the Peuhl man. With this in mind, a deity actor explains:



Source: Research results in 2024

Plate 4. The followers of Nana bluku holding the sacred broom in their hands

“Vodunsi is identified by his broom. This means that a new recruit is moving around with this type of broom every moment. She got rid of this instrument after two years of internment in the convent. As soon as her sentences in the convent were completed, she was released and entered active or civil life. After her death, her sacred broom is hung on a wall near which she is buried” (T.O. Dignitary of Nan bluku, 73 years old in Gobè).

Through this verbatim, we understand that the dignitaries consecrate the brooms of their new recruits and remain until their death. This identification instrument.

Broom universe

Functions of different brush uses: Each broom has its function. The brooms are made with natural materials found in the temperate zones of Djidja where palm trees, coconut trees and straws are present. Palm rib brooms are present in all homes. They bring together a handful of fibers simply tied with a string. This type of flexible, soft-touch broom is used to sweep the interior of homes. Very short and sleeveless, its use requires bending as close as possible to the ground. Brooms made simply from a few palm leaves are used in the bedrooms of houses. With sweeping sweeps of the broom, the palm fronds prevent weeds from growing back in courtyards or village squares. Finally, the broom made from coconut fiber is an endogenous art object; Equipped with a handle, it is very aesthetic with its fan shape, but it is too hard to be used in homes. Its use is limited to outdoors.

Mystical powers of the broom: The broom is also used to symbolize power, the sacred, white magic and even sometimes black magic. In the research community, this cleaning equipment represents many mysteries. In white magic intended to do good and ward off evil forces, the broom is a sign of purification and spiritual cleansing according to certain beliefs. The broom is used to purify people and objects. This is generally done when the person or object has been a victim of evil forces (bewitchment, spell, attacks, etc.) which explains these beliefs. With the advancement of science, the adoption of revealed religions and secularism, beliefs that were once very popular are today relegated to the level of superstitions.



Source: Results of field research in 2004

Plate 5. Brooms of protection, conjuration and perspiration

This is particularly the case of the endogenous broom to which mystical powers are attributed, in most countries on the continent. In various cultures, the broom represents power, the magical but also sexual symbol. It can be beneficial or evil. The broom, source of legends, is multiple. Since ancient times, this tool, whose primary function is to rid indoor and outdoor

floors of dust and debris, has represented much more than a household device. In various cultures, the broom represents power, a magical but also sexual symbol. It can be beneficial or evil. The broom, source of legends, is multiple.

Beliefs around the broom: The broom is used to purify but also to protect the place. In some societies, its handle was made of ash to promote its protective appearance. In Western popular beliefs from the Middle Ages, the broom is the attribute of witches, who ride it to go to the Sabbath (nighttime assembly of witches in European folklore), celebrated on a mountain. Witchcraft being then considered evil, the association between this use and the broom with evil powers was very quickly made. We find traces of this imagery even further back in time, in Celtic, Nordic, Germanic, then Roman and Greek mythologies. Furthermore, the broom between the bare legs of witches is often considered a phallic symbol. In fact, and by association of ideas, we can consider that the witch riding her broom is a clear manifestation of an ancient tradition (in reference to an earlier custom during which women rode a broom and jumped over the fields) aimed at promoting the fertility of the earth. Still on the other side of the Mediterranean, it is visibly the idea of a force contained in hair that predominates. They were supposed to dissipate the storm when placed under the roof. This belief refers to an age-old mythology according to which the goddess of good weather chased away the clouds with a broom.

In ancient China, it was forbidden to leave a broom in the room of the dead because the deceased risked coming back to haunt the place...

It is forbidden to hit a man with a broom as it risks rendering him impotent. If you want to prevent an unwanted guest from returning to your home, after their departure, simply sweep the room or place where they were during their visit. It is not uncommon to notice the rooms and courtyards, in short the house is not swept so that the abundance is not chased away, or even so as not to offend the soul of the dead during the first days of mourning. Sweeping near a person's feet ensures a life of celibacy and solitude because it seems that with the dust the whole aura of the person flies away. Culturally, the broom hanging on a door can indicate the presence of a girl to marry. It should be noted that its use also remains very codified during periods of mourning. Furthermore, sweeping at night is not recommended because there is a risk of injuring the invisible guests, and with them the protective spirits of the home who walk around there. We often find the same symbols around the broom in different regions of the world. So, whether it is to purify or chase away unwelcome occupants, the broom should be used above all to sweep in front of the door!

According to tradition, the broomstick gives witches the power to fly. Far from pure folklore, this ride takes up a very ancient myth and symbolizes the separation of body and spirit. The types of wood used also have an esoteric meaning: the ash handle represents air, the links which attach the brush to the handle are in willow, in homage to the moon and the fog, the twigs are in birch, a sacred wood, for the goddess Earth. As for the handle, it is coated with ointments to allow the trance necessary for this journey of the spirit.

Social representations of the broom: Leaning a broom against a bed attracts evil spirits and death. Moreover, sweeping at night is sweeping happiness out of your house. When you do not want to receive a visit from a stranger at late hours, you should not sweep your stoop at night. When sweeping the dust, you must be careful not to move towards the outside of your house so that luck does not run away. An old broom should be thrown away when you decide to move. When sweeping the dust, you have to be careful not to move towards the outside of your house so that the luck does not run away. To make a man helpless and unhappy all his life, you have to hit him with a broom. To signal to a visitor that it is time for them to leave, you must return a broom behind a door. To prevent someone from getting married, you have to sweep the dust in their direction. The broom placed in a dark corner is a demon repellent. Sweeping your house thoroughly after the departure of an unwanted visitor will prevent them from ever setting foot there again. Moreover, sweeping the night is sweeping happiness out of your house.

Mystery around the broom: Fon society contains many mysteries which are an integral part of the daily life of the actors. Despite imported religions like Islam and Christianity, beliefs are practiced. If there is one object that is part of the daily life of the actors, it is the endogenous broom made by grouping together several twigs. The broom is very powerful and contains powers. When a person wants to move, he is advised to leave the old broom instead of leaving, taking it with you means dragging the problems and spirits of the old house. You should avoid hitting a man (male) with a broom, it's the worst curse. Indeed, hitting a man with a broom is tantamount to rendering him impotent and sweeping in his direction will prevent him from marrying. The other power of the broom is to chase away bad spirits or unwanted people. If you have any doubt about the presence of evil spirits in the house or if you suspect a person of having bad intentions there, the simplest thing is to sweep the house well after leaving and that's it. And finally, the right way to attract wealth into the house is not to sweep the house at night. Sweeping the house at night chases away the good spirits who come to sow prosperity and joy in the house.

DISCUSSION

Brooms are as much a tool as they are a social symbol. Indeed, household chores are often delegated to the working classes. Its use may have a negative connotation for some people. Brooms are also the symbol of the housewife, a stereotype that has stood for centuries. Starting a new life with another person requires a leap of faith, and by leaping forward, the couple shows their commitment to solidarity by entering into the community by creating a home. By symbolically sweeping away the past and any negative waves, the way is opened to prosperity and fertility. It is also a call for support of the marriage from the entire community of family and friends who will count with the officiant (R. Mahoussi, 2016, p.66). What may seem normal in other places is almost forbidden. But the funny thing is that those who forbid you, especially parents, often cannot give you an explanation for these prohibitions. If an individual places a broom leaning against his bed, the cleaning tool instrument attracts evil spirits to death. To sweep the night away is to sweep happiness out of your house. An

old broom should be thrown away when the user decides to move. When sweeping, you must be careful not to direct the dust towards the outside of your house so that luck does not escape; to make a man helpless and unhappy all his life, you have to hit him with a broom; to prevent an individual from marrying you must sweep the dust in his direction; the broom placed in a dark corner is a repressor of demons; Sweeping your house properly after the departure of an unwanted visitor will prevent them from ever setting foot there again (A. Kakoun, 2016, p.41). The brooms typically endogenous to the Fon communities are indicated because they are made with natural materials which are the veins of coconut trees, bearings and especially the kind of herbs that grow there. This type of broom is smooth, soft and can be used for sweeping. Sleeveless and very short, its use requires simple physical effort requiring a serious recess close to the ground to successfully clean. The broom was chosen as the domestic symbol of the house. It is supposed to drive away all impurities and bad energies. Some also see in the broom a symbol of union of the masculine (the handle, phallic) and the feminine (the triangle brush represents the female sex) and therefore a symbol of fertility. The broom represents the border between past and present. The jumping of the broom symbolizes the symbolic entry into a new life and the spiritual crossing of the threshold of the land of marriage as a spouse (Amangbé, traditional therapist). A mystical broom is a tool specially designed to clean and wash you of all impurities that ruin you without you realizing it. Thanks to this broom, no evil forces will be able to reach you; simply because you use this broom which holds great mystical powers, which gives it the power to chase away all negative energy and restore your environment.

CONCLUSION

Moreover, the broom is defined as a household utensil consisting of a long handle and a brush for its modern version, and simply a stem of palm leaves used to remove dust and debris. The type of broom used at the time determined the social rank of its owner. The modern broom is used by wealthy families and the traditional one by the poor. But the broom does not only have a cleaning purpose. Brooms are as much a tool as they are a social symbol. Household chores are often delegated to women and small children. The use may have negative connotations for some people. Brooms are considered tools for spiritual purification. Traditional brooms are not limited to the domestic sphere. In many cultures, they are also a powerful symbol of purification. Used in spiritual rituals, they serve to sweep away not only physical dirt, but also negative energies.

This spiritual cleansing practice often involves sweeping specific locations before important rituals or after significant events. This reflects a belief that brooms help renew harmony and maintain a healthy environment, both physically and spiritually.

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