

REPORT

Populations facing Ebola.

Conference in anthropology, IRD (TransVIHMI, MIVEGEC) / RAEE (West African Network for the Anthropology of Emerging Epidemics)

Agropolis International Center, Montpellier, 21/09/2017

This conference, organized by two IRD units (TransVIHMI, MIVEGEC) and the West African Network for the Anthropology of Emerging Epidemics (RAEE), aimed at presenting ethnographic analyzes of the 2014-2016 Ebola epidemic, developing inter-team reflection on emerging epidemic diseases, and discussing among social scientists from French, European and African institutions, in order to reinforce research and collaboration perspectives for "preparedness" towards future epidemic crises.

The symposium gathered 43 participants (research and intervention experts in anthropology, social and juridical science, public health, and researchers concerned by emerging epidemics) from IRD, CIRAD, University of Montpellier and partner institutions: Chaire UNESCO de bioéthique (University Alassane Ouattara, Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire), Institut de Recherche en Sciences de la Santé (CNRST, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso), Centre Régional de Recherche et de Formation à la prise en charge de Fann, Dakar (Sénégal), Laboratoire d'Analyse Socio-Anthropologique de Guinée (LASAG, University Général Lansana Conté de Sonfonia in Conakry, Guinée), Institute for Development Studies of Brighton (United Kingdom), University of Amsterdam (Netherlands), Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Lyon 2 University (France).

The first part of the conference was devoted to discussing the notion of population and its social effects in an epidemic context. An epidemic requires redefining a population according to the biosocial categories used in public health: at risk or exposed groups, vulnerable populations, contact cases, suspect cases, patients, volunteers, etc. The presentations analyzed the various experiences of the epidemic in the field of those who came under these categories, in order to understand the social effects of risk, disease and public health interventions – either preventive or curative. In post-crisis time, some groups have maintained forms of sociability, claims or stigma, which are out of sync with the general population in terms of representations, social practices and memory, and do not seem to be taken into account in the global experience. These questions were discussed on the basis of ethnographic studies carried out in four affected and "high risk" countries in 2014-16 (Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal, Burkina Faso). The presentations documented the effects of communication in epidemiological hotspots, the forms of public engagement with risk and response, the alternative popular representations of the origin of Ebola, and the "silence" maintained by survivors. In the course of the debates, conceptual approaches more relevant than the notions of population and community were proposed for future social science analyzes on priority areas such as: local nosological entities around epidemic fevers, community involvement in public health measures, ethical aspects of epidemiological surveillance, prevention policies, and "ethical preparation" (or "humanization") of the response.

The second part of the conference brought together teams that engaged research and implemented innovative forms of result communication, adapted to the crisis situation in 2014-2016, through networks (Ebola Response Anthropology Platform @ ebola-anthropology.net, RAEE @ shsebola.hypotheses.org, etc.). In post-crisis time, as institutions call for "preparedness" and increasingly seek the expertise of anthropologists, the lack of availability of resources targeted at emerging epidemics leads to the need to articulate and interpret varied programs likely to cover this theme. In addition to the theoretical reflection developed during the morning, the bases for a strategic reflection were laid in order to ensure solid and coherent interventions by anthropologists who must

maintain networks of exchanges during periods outside the crisis. The debates have led, in particular, to define the meaning of "preparedness" for an anthropological research team.

In conclusion, participants unanimously acknowledged the importance of developing exchanges between African, European and international teams in order to consolidate partnerships in post-crisis period. The RAEE plays a key role in this regard and deserves to be strengthened and supported. New prospects for exchanges have been proposed, in particular during a Conference in Abidjan at the end of 2017 and a North-South-South-South Symposium in 2018.

The conference was supported by IRD (Department of Health and Societies, TransVIHMI and MIVEGEC Units, support for the RAEE), and the University of Montpellier.

Contact: Alice Desclaux, alice.desclaux@ird.fr, TransVIHMI/IRD (www.ird.fr), RAEE (shsebola.hypotheses.org)