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THE PROFESSIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH IN AFRICA

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Abstract

This paper aims at contributing to the exploration of new areas of research on childhood and youth in Africa. The idea results from two previous academic researches. The first was concerned with the processes through which sociological discourse on the professions in modern States has formed and transformed over time. In this case, it is found that in the modern States the role of the professions has been ambivalent, revolving around collectivity-orientation and self-interest. Yet, the scientific basis of their knowledge makes them the State’s privileged mediators for social control. The second study took scientific knowledge, the basis of professional power, as its object. Almost all the different theoretical orientations reviewed, in the sociology of sciences, share the view about the socially constructed character of scientific knowledge. In relating these two perspectives, the questions of critical importance in future research might be: as objects of scientific knowledge, have African children and young people been subject to distinctive constructions, which are sensitive to their historicity, by professionals of childhood and youth in Africa? Since the collectivity-orientation of professions cannot be taken for granted, how professions’ own processes impact on the understanding of, and acting upon, childhood and youth in Africa?

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Introduction

An application of the sociology of science and the sociology of professions to the study of the sciences of childhood and youth in Africa can stimulate original questions for future research in the continent. The clergy, the monarch, or the modern State, shaped, during various periods, the functions of the professions, because their technology of government and the lives of their authorities have partly relied on the application of expert knowledge (Sawadogo 2008). Professions and States developed together (Durkheim 1947, 1992; Parsons 1951; Spencer 1896). The history of their relations exhibits alternating conflicts, but their function for each other has been vital, mostly in modern societies (Halliday 1987). Yet, as Halliday observed, “notions of professional civility have been jettisoned as completely as earlier functionalist interpretations have been repudiated.”(Halliday 1987:3).

In general, current interpretations share the view about a “professional narcissism” with typical ends: professions are preoccupied with pecuniary interests and are committed to the protection of their economic domains; they are enamoured of the pursuit of upward collective mobility and consolidation of class interests. In these processes, the State appears only as benefactor of these privileges. These interpretations contrast with others which, through the rediscovery of functionalist analysis of the professions, and discussions on the status of professional knowledge, reassert professions’ significant role, though ambivalent, in the changing modern State (Dingwall 2008; Freidson 1970, 1986, 1994; Halliday 1987). It is obvious that African State shows a quite different pattern (Medard 1991) and their relations to formal knowledge are not always comparable to those of Western States. But these contingences in the development of African States do not invalidate the central status of professions in government processes. The aim of this paper is rather to record the professional fact and to stimulate the discussions of the role of professions in shaping children and young people identities and their lives as well, and to inquire, in so doing, how the specific patterns of African State results in specific dynamics of constructions and reconstructions. In other words, this paper wants to contribute to the exploration of new areas of research on childhood and youth in Africa through a linkage of conceptual frameworks in the sociology of sciences and in the sociology of professions.

The paper is a result of two previous academic researches (Sawadogo 2008). The first was concerned with the processes through which sociological discourse on the professions in modern States has formed and transformed over time. In this case, it is found that in the modern States, the role of the professions has been ambivalent, revolving around collectivity-orientation and self-interest. Yet, the scientific basis of their knowledge makes them the State’s privileged mediators of social control. The first section of the paper discusses this dimension. The second study took scientific knowledge, the basis of professional power, as its object. With regard to this dimension almost all the different theoretical orientations in the sociology of sciences share the view about the socially constructed character of scientific knowledge. The second section gives a detailed discussion of these theories. In relating these two perspectives, the questions of critical importance in future research might be: (a) as objects of scientific knowledge, have African children and young people been subject to distinctive constructions, which are sensitive to their historicity, by professions of childhood and youth in Africa? (b) Since the collectivity-orientation of professions
cannot be taken for granted, how professions’ own processes impact on the understanding of and acting upon childhood and youth in Africa?. Both sets of questions fall within the sociology of science and the sociology of the professions. The last section outlines research orientations around these questions.

The social shaping of scientific knowledge

Classical epistemology in Philosophy supposes that scientific knowledge escapes from social determinations. It sees in the nature of scientific truth outside its subjective construction through human social activity. Sociology on contrast poses that scientific activity is a social activity, subject more or less to the same social determinations. The institutionalisation of scientific knowledge results not only to its internal dynamics but also to the social conditions within which it is produced and diffused. This chapter is about how social scientists addressed the issue of the status of scientific knowledge and the conditions surrounding its production in society. We need to understand these processes in order to understand how specific mental scheme comes to dominate the organisation of childhood and youth reality (or fails to do so) in contemporary Africa.

Authors have been ambivalent about the processes of development of human understanding. Durkheim (1915) is obviously the classic, and even a contemporary, relevant reference about the matter. However, Durkheim was addressing the problem within a wider debate about social action, which was part of his larger project of making sociology a scientific discipline. Although he contributed to the development of a sociology of knowledge, his legacy does not help with a discussion of the basis of disciplines. A more helpful and recent approach comes from Bourdieu (2004). He argued for the assumption about the relative autonomy of scientific practice. According to this theory, all thoughts, perceptions, and actions derive their meaning from the specific social universe in which the social agents who produce them are located. This social universe constitutes a ‘field’. It has its own specific logic, more or less formalised, which reflects its specific ends and the particular nature of the games that are played within it. The incorporation of such a logic that enables the coordination of individual members of the field constitutes the “habitus”. Since the scientific field displays hierarchical relationships, this incorporated disposition replicates the symbolic and material characteristics (scientific capital) of each individual member. The scientific field itself is in interaction with other social universes, that is, the universes of power. The integrity of the scientific field depends on its capacity to refrain external values, which enter the field through its members’ networks of relationships. As a result of this, the study of the scientific products becomes a study of the logic of the specific field and its relative independence from its environment; for the field “(…) function[s] as a system of censorship, excluding some directions and means of research de facto without even stating any restrictions” (Ibid: 60).

This approach to scientific products is a significant move away, not only from the old enchanted vision of science traditionally addressed in epistemology, but also and almost from three competing approaches.
The first, and most traditional approach, is structural-functionalism. It was represented by Merton (1973), and has been remarkably illustrated by Cole and Cole (1967) and Cole and Zuckerman (1975). Its core thesis is that the scientific world is a ‘community’, which develops for itself just and legitimate regulatory institutions, attributing thus scientific work a contingent status. The ‘reward system’, as a mechanism of measurement of the degree of recognition from scientists belonging to the same community, also functions as a system for the production and maintenance of the scientific community. Yet this approach has been seen as objectivist and realist, from historical sociology’s point of view. Given that sociology was developing at this time, this approach was giving an official account of science. In addition, by emphasizing the reward mechanism as regulatory system, Bourdieu (2004) criticized it for reducing science to a consensual ‘collective finalism’.

The second approach is the Kuhnian (1962) perspective, which introduced the notions of ‘normal science’ and ‘scientific revolution’. Scientific development is seen as a discontinuous process, with a series of breaks, where periods of normal science and revolution alternate. The concept of ‘paradigm’ or ‘disciplinary matrix’, as an open framework acquired in the course of professional socialization served to account for the internal dynamics of the scientific community. Yet by emphasizing the normative frame of science, Kuhn reintroduced a mere internal change of science, hence overlooking its social environment.

The third trend encompasses distinctive but convergent approaches under what it is commonly called the ‘new sociology of science’, summed up through the “strong programme” (Bloor, 1983, 1991). One of these distinctive insights is from the Edinburgh school, represented by David Bloor and Barry Barnes (1974). Drawing from Wittgenstein, Bloor (1983) developed a theory of science which attributes rationality, objectivity and truth to local legitimacy in relation to the contingent sociocultural norms and conventions of the particular group which produces them. Nevertheless, with Harry Collins (1981) and the Bath school, the formation of preferences within the particular group defined by the Edinburgh school is apprehended through an interpretation of the scientific community with a focus on hierarchies. The directions of the shifts of paradigms have been correlated with the quality of their producers and those of their receivers, hence implying the structure and the logic of the scientific field, developed by a historical sociology of science. But, even so, from a historical sociology perspective, Collins “remains enclosed within an interactionist vision’, and for this reason ‘he does not at all consider the structural conditions of the production of belief (…)’ (Bourdieu 2004:21).

Other studies attentive to everyday scientific practices come from the laboratory studies. According to this perspective, as suggested by Knorr-Cetina (1992), scientific objects are embedded in technical, symbolical and political processes. This has been empirically demonstrated by Grmek (1973) and Holmes (1974) about Claude Bernard’s research, and also discussed by Medawar (1964). The ‘socio-philosophy of science’ developed in France, and represented by Latour and Woolgar (1979) belongs to the laboratory studies. Their distinctive problematic rest on their radical realism, reflected in their suggestion about the generalized symmetry between human and non-human. But, as far as historical sociology is concerned, their emphasis on the permanent
construction of scientific knowledge has led them to a highly sceptical conception of scientific knowledge. Unlike this approach, Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) ground their relativistic view on the very nature of scientific work. They reassert the indexicality of scientists’ discourse through an identification of two repertories of discourse. One, ‘empiricist’, is highly impersonalised and is associated with the public discourse of the scientific community concerned; and the other, ‘contingent’ is associated with private discourse among scientists and emphases personal contingencies. Objectivity is, therefore, a product of collective construction which has a regulatory function, not merely an attribute inherent to the object of study. However, such a collective construct leaves little place for external contingencies, that would, as the pressure from peers does, influence the process of construction.

The Bourdieusian approach and its competitors appeared to be complementary. The classical Mertonian and followers’ approach was more structuralist in orientation, while recent laboratory ethnography seems to have an empirist tone. Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) are more interactionist in their perspective, since the context and the interaction among scientists are of fundamental value to them. Bourdieusian approach claims to transcend the dichotomies between structuralism and interactionism, through the concept of “habitus”, seen to be a subjective disposition of the individual, but strongly reflecting social structures. The subjectivity is an embodiment of the social structures to which the individual belong. For an empirical study such an approach is highly relevant. Yet to investigate past event, where records are not always available about the individual scientists’ membership in social structures, although not impossible, require another alternative.

An alternative to these practical constraints, although not impossible to overcome, could be found in the history of science. An influential approach to knowledge production in the history of science comes from Michel Foucault. Foucault’s (1971) inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, is indeed a synthesis of his methodology elaborated earlier in The Archaeology of Knowledge ([1969] 1972), itself grounded on Madness and Civilization (1967), The Order of Things (1970), and The Birth of the Clinic (1973). In this book, Foucault (1971) suggests that, in all societies the production of discourse is controlled, selected, organized and redistributed. These mechanisms operate through different but interplaying procedures. On the one hand there are the procedures of exclusion, mainly through interdiction. This sets the boundaries for the object of the discourse, ritualizes the circumstance of its circulation, and defined the attributes of the legitimate speaking subject. On the other hand this knowledge control functions through division and rejection, with the speech as its object. Yet, in modern society, the reconfiguration of the status of discourses has not resulted in their homogenization. Their distances have rather, been maintained through a framework of knowledge and institutions. According to the author, the true and the false belong to the same system of exclusion. Their history reflects the interweaving power relationships between actors in the discursive field. In this sense, in contrast to what Bourdieu argued, there is no significant difference between the two approaches. Foucault’s “discursive field” is the ‘scientific field’ of Bourdieu during “normal science”. Foucault (1972: 47) ignores conflicts by saying that, there is “no question of interpreting discourse with the view to writing a history of the referent. (…).What we wish to do is to dispense with “things” … [t]o “depresentify” them”, because conflict
does not matter significantly in time of relative stability. Hence for him “discourse must not be referred to the distant presence of the origin, but treated as and when it occurs.” (Ibid:.25). From this point of view, it is possible to review the substantive literature on the professions without being constraints, as Bourdieu’s approach would require, on tracing the significant on the selected authors’ networks of relationships. Nevertheless, like Bourdieu, is also my view that Foucault has tendencies towards structuralism. As in all structuralism, maintains Bourdieu, “...agent disappears by reducing it to the role of supporter or bearer (Träger) of the structure.” (Bourdieu 1996:179). The significant contention between the two approaches lays on the fact that Foucault is a historian, and therefore is dealing with ‘archives’, which do not keep always trials and errors of social processes, but actualised representations and practices. Furthermore he was more concerned with natural sciences, where the level of integration is higher than in the developing social sciences. The implications of the two approaches have sharply different consequences in term of reflexivity. The issue has been, however, strikingly developed by Bourdieu (1993, 1996, 2003). He suggested that the objectivity defined in context can be undermined in two main ways: firstly by the restrictive nature of any disciplinary accounts, and most importantly its maintenance despite of its weakness in a context of less developed science, like social science where paradigms are not yet fully stabilised. Secondly, in relation to the first, there is the tendency to focusing on existing theories instead of always also reflecting on them through permanent critique of the object itself. Norbert Elias (1956), before him, suggested that the danger was even increasing because of the numerous factions in social sciences. This can lead to dogmatism, anything contrary to science. It is therefore necessary to constantly have a reflexive attitude, through which according to Bourdieu “the question of privileged viewpoint should be replaced by the scientific control of the relation to the object of science.” (Bourdieu 1993: 52).

Overall, it emerges from this critical review two significant conclusions. On the one hand, despite their difference of orientations in addressing scientific knowledge, there is a clear shared interpretation of the constructed character of formal knowledge. On the other hand, as boundary-work, jurisdictional conflicts among disciplines are not only necessary for reflexivity and knowledge advancement, but it can in some circumstances led to dogmatism, almost when self-interest takes over le status of the object of study in knowledge production, as well as it use. These issues come more into focus when considered within the system of professions and their role in social control.

**Professions and social order**

Formal knowledge embodied in science is critical to occupational hierarchy. Since modern state has built its foundations and its technology of government on it, the state for the professions as alternative bonds of modernity is that of the control of that knowledge. For its control is at the same time a control over some configuration of reality. This power made professions a significant actor of modern society. Yet scholars have been ambivalent about their role. With respect to this ambivalent status they constitute potentially sources of vital stakes for children and young people’s lives. This is why an inquiry into the agency of children and young people in African states must
leave a place of choice for the inquiry into the dynamics of the institutions which shape their lives. In order to relate the knowledge and the reality of childhood and youth in Africa, there is a prior need to examine the available conceptual framework for making sense of these of control that knowledge, that is, the professions. Chronologically, four types of discourse dominated sociological approach to the professional fact. It was originally functional, then monopolist, before shifting to a relational approach with two periods of development.

Firstly the founding scientific literature on the professions was functional. The instrumental role of the professions against the asymmetric expert-client relationship was the main focus. Professionalisation appeared as a logical effect of the evolution of structural guarantees for the expert-client mediation. Here, professions were simply alternative regulatory institutions of the developing modern society. What was distinctive in them, and their actual function in the social system, were the major subject of theorizing. With regard to their attributes, Flexner (1915) has been regularly identified as the first who attempted a systematic account. He stressed the central significance of the “professional spirit” as a distinctive disposition of the professional, with six core attributes: cognitive (intellectual and learned), moral and affective (personal responsibility and altruism), organisational (institutionalise body of knowledge and mechanism of transmission through education and internal organisation), and the finality of professional expertise (practical problems solving oriented). Flexner’s work, like some others, is however a precursor to sociology of the professions. As Dingwall reminds us, “[…] these have, for the most part, been treated as of mainly antiquarian interest” (Dingwall 1983: 1). Modern serious inquiry into the professions commenced from Parsons (1939, 1951, 1964, 1968) and Hughes (1958, 1971). Two core features emerge from Parsons’ interest in the professions in modern society. Firstly, he was concerned with the conditions and mechanisms of the maintenance of the social order in the changing social context. The functional specialisation of the family in modern societies was leaving niches in the social system. The emergence of professions resulted, therefore, from a structural need as an alternative regulatory mechanism to the disintegrating traditional social institutions. The balance of power between client and professional was analysed within the framework of role system, with dominant authority granted to the latter. As Abbott comments, “[f]or Parsons a professional’s power over clients was necessary to successful treatment … It was grounded in expertise, guaranteed by professional control, and offset by the trust between professional and client” (Abbott 1988: 86-87). Secondly, Parsons was serious discontent with the universalism and abstraction of the utilitarian principle about economic motivations. Insights from Weber on the structure of action process, he argued for a historically grounded moral order, disregarded by utilitarian theory. The study of the professions, as non-profit occupation, was a mean to this theoretical confrontation against utilitarianism. He placed the distinctive collectivity-orientation of the professional within the institutional framework which made it possible. In this view, he contented that, “[w]hatever difference there may be from a psychological point of view between the typical motives of physicians and businessmen must be analysed with this in mind, taking it as a starting point” (Parsons [1951] 1991: 473). Functional approach to social order was influential in early writings. Durkheim (1947) viewed in the division of labour a functional adaptation to a changing society, where professional relationship replaced “primary” social relationships. Spencer (1896) reached early the
same conclusions with particular stress on the functional emergence of professions in relation to different political structures. Weber (1947, 1968), Tonnies (1955), Simmel (1971) were addressing through different standpoint occupational development as functional response of modern society. To sum up, what was crucial to Spencer, Durkheim, and Parsons, like other early functionalists, was: how should the new social relations brought about by the industrial revolution be ordered, and what are the alternative institutions to that end? All had seen in the professions the gate-keepers of the “absolute values” of the developing modern society and the guarantees of the public good. They were aware of the fragility of human motives, but treated irregular behaviours of the professions as reflections of dysfunctional institutions. In general they have not been interested in conceptualising the professions as separate from the social system they were analysing. Carr-Saunders (1928), Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) and Marshall (1939) contributed significantly to an attribute oriented inquiry into the professions. As Abbott and many others observe, the properties which they identified became the core of the later definitions of a profession. Basically, they observed the increasing number and varied types of professionals. Marshal particularly stressed the changing patterns of professionals’ relationships with the welfare state. In the early 1960s however the scope of the discourse about the professions shifted toward a more naturalistic approach, with focus, not on their function, but more on the structural transformation, which led them to the relatively full self-control. “Professionalisation” was portrayed in terms of explanatory category about the ongoing processes of self-governance, as an indicator of accomplishment of some occupations (Millerson 1964; Wlenski 1964). The perspective has been criticised by later writers (Abbott, 1988) of being linear. Nonetheless “the explicit focus on structure and its evolution led to theories about the historical forces driving the structure, and hence the structuralists developed the explicit models of professionalisation […]” Abbott 1988: 15). Overall, in a “scientific” point of view all these founding authors defended an abbreviated argument: they all to the professional fact for granted, and undertook a classificatory endeavour, by identifying on the basis of the everyday life’s categories those occupations deserving the attribute and those excluded. In some way it might be argued that, on contrast to what has been often suggested by contemporary writers, it was this very attribute approach that was using the concept as a “folk concept”. Hughes use of the concept was far more detached, but his marginal position among his contemporaries was detrimental to the development of his insights. But, the new evaluative flavour of the literature about the professions, which developed from the 1970s onward, is his legacy.

Secondly, sociological discourse about the professional significantly changed by the 1970s. The previous studies seemed to have provided basic details, and so scholars have turned their attention to theorizing. The structural processes of professions’ developments tended to be taken for granted. What was conspicuously changing was the explanatory framework of such processes. From the functional version, it moved to a monopolist one. In this view, the structural developments were considered instrumental to professional dominance. Their service orientation has been replaced by self-interested motivations, making professionalization a collective endeavour for mobility. The first decisive move came from Eliot Freidson. Profession of Medicine, first published in 1970, initiated the theoretical split with traditional theories. Parsons role system in the physician-patient relationships has been reassessed in the light of Becker’s (1963)
theory of deviance and Hughes (1958, 1971) concepts of “licence” and “mandate”. On contrast to Parsons Freidson considered illness as socially constructed, and the physician owe his exclusive right over illness and health management, to the State. Professional dominance was initially interpreted as resulting from State’s demand, but his further works questioned professionals’ claim over all the components of their work (Freidson 1970b, 1975, 1983, 1986). Similarly Johnson (1972, 1973a, 1973b) argued about the impressive character of professionals’ claim to public service. He supported the manipulative character of medical knowledge, for it is not only historically embedded, but it also generates clients’ needs. This professional expropriation of society’s need have been epitomized by Illich’s work (1973, 1975). The significant contribution of Johnson has been to link professional power to interweaving networks of relationships, where professional autonomy appeared as contingent and always negotiated; for professions have never escaped from the patronage of third party (Johnson 1973b). The collegiate control over work had been very brief in history. His suggestion that “professionalism” and “third party control” in the control of professional-client relationship provided a framework for the classification and analysis of professional occupations prefigured the later conceptualisation (Freidson 1994, 2001). The rediscovery of Elias ([1939] 2000,1964, 2007) seminal work on the professions put forward the relational approach, accurately developed by abbott (1988).

Johnson’s approach represents an advance on the classic statements such as, for example, that of Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1964); first, because it is relational; second, it questions the taken for granted desirability of professionalism and third, it departs from empiricist nominalism. … The fourth merit of Johnson’s approach is that it allows for mobility of jobs between categories (…). (Cain 1983: 108).

Another major contribution to this approach came from Larson (1977). She emphasised, like Freidson and Johnson, but unlike Beland (1976), Ben-David (1963, 1966) and Bledstein (1976), the instrumental implications of professionalism for professionals as collectivities. Professions are, on contrast to early assumptions, viewed as market organisations, expropriating social meanings through cognitive and organisational control. Yet while Freidson and Johnson were sceptical about the concept they were using, Larson opted to address the issue within the traditional definition of the concept, hence explicitly ruling out occupations which were inconsistent with her framework. Overall Freidson dedication to find a generalisable definition of the concept of profession within its institutional framework, Johnson’s uncritical view of the institutional definition of the concept by pointing that early societies does not develop professions, and Larson explicit focus of its traditional anglo-saxon definition bared the way to innovative inquiry. As Abbott accurately evaluates it,

[b]y accepting professionalization as the thing to be explained, the new power theorists accepted the assumptions behind the concept. These included not only the idea of a fixed sequence of events or functions, but also assumptions about the best example of professionalism (American medicine and law), about its essential qualities, and about the character of the interprofessional world. (Abbott 1988: 6).
This view was about to change in the 1990s. Yet in-between times, a cultural approach to professional dominance (Bledstein 1976; Haskell 1984) emerged with focus on the cognitive power of the professions. Both returned to the Parsonian fascination with expertise as a social relation, thus emphasizing the cultural authority of professions and their role in individual mobility. Yet they did not escape from the tyranny of the original framework either. Nevertheless, above these circular theorizing which found it hardly to split with original images of the profession, as Dingwall states it:

[...] there does seem to be a broad consensus on the key issues. First, it is clear that we need to take a very much wider perspective in attending to the historical settings of both individuals and collectivities. Professional work should be studied not just in the context of a division of labour but as part of a network of social and economic relations. Second, the importance of knowledge is reaffirmed. The division of labour is also a division of knowledge, with consequential implications of reciprocal dependence and vulnerability between participants. [...] Third, and most important, is the stress on comparative empirical work.

(Dingwall 1983: 11-12).

Thirdly, by the 1980s the relational approach to the professions was markedly framing sociologists of the professions’ outlook. Comparative studies supported some insights of Parsons, and Hughes effort to demystify the professions received supporting evidence. Freidson (1986, 1988, 1994, 2001) then reasserted, in line with Parsons, the centrality of professional expertise in contemporary societies but argued against a total occupational control over all the dimensions of its work, for some evaluative aspects could not be exclusively address by the mere professionals. By doing so Freidson (1978) skilfully integrated traditionally conflicting views, where Parsons and Hughes (1858, 1971) complemented. The profession was then conceived within a general framework of the sociology of work. Its structural development and its nature must not be pre-supposed, as Parsons did, or decreed by “fiat” (Dingwall 1983), that is, in abstract. Freidson reconceptualised “the …profession as a limited number of occupations which have particular institutional and ideological traits more or less in common” (Freidson 1994: 16), reflected in the concept of “professionalism”. The profession is now view as a way of organising an occupation, rejoining Johnson who perceived this political dimension as “represent[ing] much more than only a status, for it produces distinctive occupational identities and exclusionary market shelters […] which set each occupation apart from (and often in opposition to) the others” (Johnson 1972, p.45). To be sure, the changing environment of the professions was already notice in the second edition of the *Professions of Medicine* (1970). The nature of the medical professions makes it contingent to third parties decisions, which cannot be guaranteed. In The *professions and their prospects* (1973) the changing trends in third parties intervention in professional work is mapped, by taking stock of his arguments in *Professional dominance* (1970). Yet he was convinced by a core inalienable property of the professional: his expertise (Freidson 1986). From him

in any case, when an occupation has become fully professionalized, even if its work characteristically goes on in an organization, management can
control the resources connected with work, but cannot control most of what the workers do and how they do it. (Freidson 1973: 23).

By the 1990s the argument was established in his writing, and his collected works were a product of permanent reflexive theorising (Freidson 1994, 2004) and dialogue with others such as Good (1960, 1969) and Tawney (1920) and a detour through weberian legacy. Professions are conceived through weberian concept of ideal-type" and resulted in the “professionalism” framework. As already suggested by Johnson (1973a, 1982, 1994), Freidson considers professionalism as a scale within which different occupations, according to their state of professionalisation, interact.

I use the word “professionalism”, stated Freidson, to refer to the institutional circumstances in which the members of occupations rather than consumers or managers control work. […] In the most elementary sense, professionalism is as a set of institutions which permit the members of an occupation to make a living while controlling their own work. (Freidson 2001: 12; 17).

Overall Freidson is devoted his career to disentangle the puzzling of the concept of profession which was preventing sociologists from innovative inquiries. He conspicuously showed the centrality of professional expertise, and the potential contingencies of its autonomous practice in the changing social context. But he was more interested with the external consequences of professionalism, therefore devoting less effort to developing a deep account of the process of professionalisation, interprofessional dynamics, and the mechanics of third party influence. Yet his legacy has been fruitfully appropriated.

Finally, in line with the relational perspective, Abbott (1988) develops an innovative ecological approach to the professions. Typically professions are seen as exclusive groups, and their knowledge has made central in this competing relationship. He takes the departure from professionalisation with a focus on what occupations do (their work) rather than on their structure. Such assumption is view to significant observations: the competitions between occupations for work control, and professional differentiations. The classical organisational structure is less important to understand these processes than a focus on groups with common work. Here we see that Hughes and Freidson are revived. The significant processes to observe are then the conflict of

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1 Professionalism has been conceptualised through three models. The first logic is driven by free market. Workers meet on the labour market. It is supposed to have the potential to regulate itself without institutional intervention. The second logic is driven by legal-rational bureaucracy principle. Here managers regulate and decide the use of the labour force. The third logic is a labour market controlled by occupational bodies. The aim of every profession is to reach this stage. These logics have been articulated with social and political contexts. The variation of the logics considered reflects variations between different States. Furthermore, each of the three logics gives a differential importance to formal knowledge and kills, which increase when we move toward an occupational controlled labour market. Given these interactions between state and professionalism, although individual ethics is important, Freidson argued that the focus should be on the institutional ethics. Since the technical control over the work is the common ground between all professionals wherever the work takes place, the critical issue remains the control over the social and economic conditions of the work. The ethics of professionalism can be undermined by these constraints, making the study of the social and economic conditions of work an important dimension in understanding of professional ethics in contemporary societies.
jurisdictions between the groups, the boundaries being conceived as having a level of saturation. The role of the state the jurisdictional control is rather ambiguous. For it is a competitor, producer of ecological niches and mediator between competing groups through sets of regulations. Clients differentiation is merely the product of professionals’ market strategies, if it is not channelled by the state. As Dingwall vividly summarizes it,

[Abbott] sees occupations, or, in the case of the ‘professional system’, particular kinds of expert occupations, struggling among themselves to carve out a niche in the field of work, drawing boundaries around the territories they claim for themselves, extending them whenever they can, drawing back when they are forced to do so, sometimes lording it over their neighbours, at other times finding their own patch of land under threat of colonization” (Dingwall 2008: 94).

It clearly comes out from this analysis the ambivalent status of the professions. The “professional narcissism” should not be neglected. It is found indeed that professions are sometimes preoccupied with pecuniary interests and are committed to the protection of their economic domains; they are enamoured of the pursuit of upward collective mobility and consolidation of class interests. In these processes, the State appears only as benefactor of these privileges. On contract, in reconsidering functionalist analysis of the professions and discussions the status of professional knowledge, it is not either illegitimate to reassert professions’ significant role in the changing modern State. As Halliday puts it “Because knowledge and planning become “the basic requisites for all organized action in modern society,” scientists are drawn increasingly into the Arena of public policy.” (Halliday 1987:20). The significance of these processes for scientists of childhood and youth is to investigate them in relation to the dynamic of social structures (State, scientists, children and young people and significant others) in Africa. There are some interesting research themes which can be primarily addressed.

**The professional constructions of childhood and youth in Africa: new directions for future research**

These two theoretical discussions, when brought in connection, suggest potential questions. It is shown that scientific knowledge is of a special type. It is produced within particular networks of relationships, through specific processes. So its production is subject to an internal dynamic according to which individual members reward each other. Its objects can result from niches created by explicit social needs. But it can also create its own through creations of niches in human needs. Its system is however an open system, so that the internal dynamic of a science remains in interaction with external processes. The reward between members of a scientific community and the hierarchies which result from that is a product of the interactions between internal and external processes. The inequality in the control over knowledge in a scientific community or between occupations, and the ambivalent role of those who controlled it
in society, that is the professions, offer a special case in the study of childhood and youth in Africa.

**Categorizing and classifying: historical sociology of African statistics and populations studies.** Before the nineteenth century, particular figures of childhood and youth were constructed with less reference to age (Ariès 1973). The reference to age in the classification of individuals emerged systematically in the nineteenth century partly resulted Populations studies (Turmel 2008). Statistics stood as the legitimate tool for this purpose, as it was for other sciences. Originally, Statistics stood for the description of the State by itself for itself (Desrosières 2000). Knowing the nation in order to administrate it has always been critical to the State. Statistical tools enabled therefore to discover or to create means thanks to which the world can be describe and acted upon. In this regards it is not surprising that it was through statistical thinking and reasoning that, large-scale inquiries singled out children and young peoples as an autonomous category. Turmel is correct when he underlined that:

As the nineteenth century discovered statistical thinking and reasoning through large-scale empirical investigations – understood as population studies conducted by state authorities (Farr, Villermé, Quetelet etc.), the statistical concepts of population, and sub-population, came of age. Within the large movement aiming to delineate the national population in western countries, these statistical investigations brought to light the peculiarities, hitherto unknown, of different parts of the population, among them, children. (Turmel 2008:1)

There is here a matter for study for social scientists of childhood and youth in Africa. Indeed, if the differentiation of age stages emerged with statistics, the point of departure in the study of the professional construction of these categories must naturally be the study of age categories in African statistics and Population studies. This offers a privileged opportunity to address the issue in three ways corresponding to the frameworks provided in the sociology of sciences. The first way would be to address, according to the classical sociology of science perspective, the internal dynamics of statistical science as applied to age category in Africa. This classical approach consist in the study of the normal rules of functioning of an efficient scientific community: professionalisation, institutionalisation and autonomy of search, competition between researchers, transparency of results, and triangulation of pair reviews. The issue of age categorisations would be then placed within the internal dynamics of statistical science and the role of African statisticians in their shaping. This is an “internalist” approach to scientific practice. The second approach argues that it is a reduction to address scientific practice in disconnection to its social context. It is the argument of this view that it is in considering the social conditions which made possible or blocked internal processes that one can better understand the dynamic of the sciences. In this regard, taking age categorisation as object, the question would be that of the implications of these social conditions on the development of an endogenous categorisation by African statisticians in terms of their professionalisation and their competitiveness within the larger discipline. This is the “externalist” perspective. A third view argues however that such separation between “internalist” and “externalist” is artificial, and that the nature of scientific practice necessitates an approach which blurs the methodological divide.
Scientific objects and their networks should therefore study as part of the same reality, where networks participate in the validity of the scientific productions. Although this approach could lead to some misunderstandings in some sciences with regard to a danger of relativism, in statistics, the historical link of the discipline with the State makes the divide obviously untenable at least as a starting point. Such research directions are likely to go even beyond the subject matter of childhood and youth. The measurement itself and the phenomenon it is measuring are all subject to contestations and are all social phenomena. The processes of their stabilisation are of particular interest for social sciences.

The ecology of childhood and youth collectives in Africa: Configurations and transformations. Large-scale statistical inquiries result in the construction of regularities. In Europe these inquiries led to the uncovering of young people’s conditions related to health, work, education, social problems (e.g. abandonment, neglect, truancy, delinquency etc.). Their situation was thus framed in an unprecedented way, which called for collective attention. Through historical investigations of statistical institutions in Europe and in the United States, Turmel (2008) shows that the differentiation of children age group and their specific conditions resulted in collective movements which involves various actors. Among these actors there were families, various reformers, public authorities and the state, with the aim at finding a response to the disturbing situation of children and young people. Approaches in the sociology of the professions can be helpful in understanding and explaining these processes. The ecological perspective in particular offers conceptual tools to inquire how according to a given ecological context corresponding occupational groups emerge (while others disappear). Research topics focusing on the emergence of occupational institutions related to children and young people conditions, with particular emphasis on their emergence, compositions and reconfigurations from the colonial to the present period would be of particular importance. Further outcome of such study would be to shed some light on the dynamics of endogenous institutionalisation of children and youth condition in Africa. Like in the case of statistics each occupational group can be studied with regards to the internal constructions of childhood and youth and the implications of external conditions on these internal processes.

Institutional disputes and stabilisation of childhood and youth in Africa. How the networks of actors related to childhood and youth can communicate. In order that this collective be able to think about and to act upon youth, it needed to circulate. In Western societies, the literature shows that this circulation was immediately prevented because of the different background references of the various actors of the collective. Besides, no precise criteria or standards were widely recognised. A common symbol was needed with the help of which people could communicate about childhood and youth. In these societies, infant morality and compulsory education set up the social environment and conditions for large-scale inquiries. Biologically and psychologically, children and young people’s body are observed, recorded, described, weighted, and measured with diverse technologies. The status of the different actors in symbolising the figure of childhood and youth reflected the conditions of young people. Underlying these processes power processes in knowledge production or use, Latour say that “scientists and engineers speak in the name of new allies that they have shaped and enrolled; representatives among other representatives, they add these unexpected
resources to tip the balance of force in their favour” (Latour 1987:259). Biological parameters were initially dominant, latterly displaced by psychological parameters. The synthesis of biological times and psychological times were embodies in latter technologies. These technologies formed a set of threads according to which children and youth are measured and classified, “making these devices central to normality, hence to developmental thinking, for every childhood collective has to confront the question of the child’s transformations-growth-maturation, etc.- in both its body and mind”. (Turmel 2008:8-9). This paved the way to developmental thinking’s sequence/stage framework. The role of the different networks of actors (scientist of not) in negotiating a local and generalized stable figure of childhood and youth in Africa is of special interest to social scientists in Africa.

**Childhood and youth agency and institutional patterning of youth in Africa**

In Africa children and young people’s conditions are not homogeneously bad. But as Boeck and Honwana pointed out “very children and young people enjoy the luxury of being taken care of by their parents or the state until they reach the age of eighteen” (Boech and Honwana, 2005:4). The majority of those beyond this age face the challenges of unemployment. The active role of young people is overshadowed by their widely shown disturbed figure: the young Christian fundamentalists in Sub-Sahara, the young who are responsible of their family due to war or diseases, those drawn into war as soldiers or drawn into the informal sector of the economy; drug use, alcohol, premature and unsafe sex, breaking thus societal norms, conventions, and rules; sometimes by breaking limbs and lives; there are the truants, the abandoned or neglected, and violated children and youth. These processes have led to a significant documentation of children and young people’s agency in Africa by African social scientists. The important question worth investigating would be the implications these expressions of agency on the “thinking” of institutions. In other words, did this lead to institutional reflexivity in Africa?

**Conclusion**

An application of the sociology of science and that of the professions to the study of the sciences of childhood and youth in Africa might stimulate original questions for future research in the continent. The clergy, the monarch, or the modern State shaped, during various periods, the functions of the professions; for their technology of government and the lives of their authorities relied partly on the application of expert knowledge (Sawadogo 2008). Professions and States developed together (Durkheim 1947, 1992; Parsons 1937; Spencer 1896). The history of their relations exhibits alternating conflicts, but their function for each other has been vital, mostly in modern societies (Halliday 1987). Yet, as Halliday observed, “notions of professional civility have been jettisoned as completely as earlier functionalist interpretations have been repudiated.”(Halliday 1987:3). In general, current interpretations share the view about a “professional narcissism” with typical ends: professions are preoccupied with pecuniary interests and are committed to the protection of their economic domains; they are enamoured of the pursuit of upward
collective mobility and consolidation of class interests. In these processes, the State appears only as benefactor of these privileges. These interpretations contrast with others which, by rediscovering functionalist analysis of the professions and discussing the status of professional knowledge, reassert professions’ significant role, though ambivalent, in the changing modern State (Dingwall 2008; Halliday 1987; Freidson 1970, 1986, 1994). It is obvious that African State shows a quite different pattern (Medard 1991) and their relations to formal knowledge are not always comparable to those of Western States. But these contingences in the development of African States do not invalidate the central status of professionals in government processes. Rather, the aim of this paper is to record the fact and to stimulate the discussions of the role of professions in shaping children and young people identities and their lives as well, and to inquire, in so doing, how the specific patterns of African State results in specific dynamics of constructions and reconstructions. In other words, this paper wants to contribute to the exploration of new areas of research on childhood and youth in Africa.

The paper is a result of two previous academic researches (Sawadogo 2008). The first was concerned with the processes through which sociological discourse on the professions in modern States has formed and transformed over time. It is found that in the modern States, the role of the professions has been ambivalent, revolving around collectivity-orientation and self-interest. Yet, the scientific basis of their knowledge makes them the State’s privileged mediators of social control. The second study took scientific knowledge, the basis of professional power, as its object. All the different theoretical orientations in the sociology of science share the view about the socially constructed character of scientific knowledge. In relating these two perspectives, the questions of critical importance in future research might be: (a) as objects of scientific knowledge, have African children and young people been subject to distinctive constructions, which are sensitive to their historicity, by professions of childhood and youth in Africa? (b) Since the collectivity-orientation of professions cannot be taken for granted, how professions’ own processes impact on the understanding of and acting upon childhood and youth in Africa?

These two theoretical discussions when brought in connection suggest potential questions. It is shown that scientific knowledge is of a special type. It is produced within particular networks of relationships, through specific processes. So its production is subject to an internal dynamic according to which individual members reward each other. Its objects can result from niches created by explicit social needs. But it can also create its own through creations of niches in human needs. Its system is however an open system, so that the internal dynamic of a science remains in interaction with external processes. The reward between members of a scientific community and the hierarchies which result from that is a product of the interactions between internal and external processes. The inequality in the control over knowledge in a scientific community or between occupations, and the ambivalent role of those who controlled it in society, that is the professions, offer a special case in the study of childhood and youth in Africa. Four themes emerge from the theoretical discussion and analysis:

- Categorizing and classifying: historical sociology of African statistics and populations studies, which investigate the processes statistical negotiation of children and young people’s category in Africa;
The ecology of childhood and youth collectives in Africa: configurations and transformations which analyse the processes of emergences of networks of actors concerned with children and youth in Africa, their composition and transformations over time;

Institutional disputes and stabilisation of childhood and youth in Africa. The heterogeneity of the networks of actors involved in understanding and/or acting upon children and youth makes it interesting to inquire the processes of stabilisation/or failure of stabilisation of a common language on childhood and youth in Africa.

Childhood and youth agency and the institutional patterning of youth in Africa, would inquire into the implications of recent awareness of children and youth agency on institutional thinking in Africa.
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