

Culture of social adaptation and CORONA: Case of sub-Saharan emigrant students in Tunis

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Abstract

This study devises a sociological perception of the social adaptation of a migrant student minority from sub-Saharan Africa, temporary residents in Tunisia, particularly during the times of the Covid pandemic. This research paper revolves around a study of the quarantine repercussions on this category global pandemic. This study is also a reflection on the new practices by the global pandemic and a comparison of representations and perceptions of social adaptation with reference to official and non-official social control. Our research is a study of the social adaptation manifestations, forms and its varying degrees based on different strategies adopted by individuals. Such strategies can vary from conformity to contrast, to an innovative social adaptation or what is referred to as positive deviance. The analysis of the collected qualitative data has revealed striking differences in the social adaptation strategies adopted by the students in question. Consequently, the importance of intercultural sociological intervention as a means to establish balance and manage these differences steeped in Tunisia socio-cultural context has been highlighted.

Key words: social adaptation, social link, community solidarity, migrant sub-Saharan student, intercultural sociological intervention

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INTRODUCTION

This article highlights the modes of social adaptation of a marginalized category ; that of the migrant minority of Sub-Saharan students in Tunisia during the Covid pandemic. This current situation that is characterized by a global sanitary crisis is unprecedented.

The mandatory quarantine, restrictions on movement, work and outdoor activities combined with social distancing between people and their beloved ones. These are the specificities of a historical incident and a societal shift. Consequently, they raise the interest of sociological studies in knowing : How have the living conditions, the interpersonal connections, the forms of solidarity changed ? What are the different experiences and perceptions around this event ? Is it possible to say that it has brought to the fore profound social inequalities ? Does it question the relations of social control : authority and obeying the state ? Would there be a continuous questioning as to the nature of social relations ? Or to the shift pertaining to social links and to the difference in the adaptation strategy ? Special attention was given to this particular research gate via thorough investigation and sociological reflection.

This study however , is only going to include the group of sub-Saharan students during their journey in Tunisia in the times of a sanitary and social crisis . The following claims constitute a modest contribution to the scientific reflection on the question of social adaptation meant to emphasize the difficulties thereof with reference to the journey of sub-Saharan migrant students within the institutional and socio-cultural framework. As a matter of fact, this research revolves around the question related to Covid pandemic impacts on this category of migrant students in terms of daily conduct,

new imposed practices as well as their representations and perceptions of social adaptation with regard to social distancing.

1. Problematic

The migration of this multicultural category from Sub-Saharan Africa until their arrival to their migratory destination which is in this case Tunisia , and especially during the pandemic , brings to the fore a cultural diversity and raises several questions : Would they be able to socially adapt in the Tunisian society during this sanitary social crisis ? What is their hands on knowledge of the pandemic, sanitary protocol and life during quarantine...? How do Tunisians perceive them ? To what extent can we say that Tunisians are familiar with their lifestyles, dress code, alimentary mode ...? Their cultural references and outlook ...? They are so far almost unknown !... Many questions, unfortunately, remain unanswered. The level of negligence, misconception, prejudice, ignorance is increasingly striking on both sides. Our interest is not focused on the vulnerability of « irregularized» (Brésillon, 2020) sub-Saharan Africans, on a criticism of the politics of informal and illegal economy as well as political economy of the country (Gallien, 2020)and the relations between the state and the Tunisian society in the times of the Corona virus. Our study does not also hinge upon the studies of psychological order and cognitive behaviors meant to define the psychological challenges posed by the pandemic « The nature and treatment of the psychological distress provoked by the pandemic ». Our contribution is sociology-based. Starting from a crossroads of different cultures to create a space of interaction is the very core of our project of intercultural sociological intervention. Consequently , we are interested in the study and resolution of any form of hindrance that may stand as an impediment to social adaptation during this crisis :

How is social adaptation perceived and how is it experienced in the times of the Corona virus by the migrant students from sub-Saharan Africa during their academic journey in Tunisia ?

Our focus is channeled towards the theme of social adaptation during the pandemic coupled with a questioning on the objective behind the model of social adaptation addressed by this project. The objective would be the interculturality, defined starting from a relational context with a direct interest in the mixed culture product of the strategies, dynamisms and manipulations developed by students to affirm their identities and to be able to socially adapt themselves. It is a model that helps students interiorize different modes of adaptation mainly behaviors and cultural knowledge in order to get engaged in the process of social adaptation and cultural change and to be able to master intercultural competences . Our reflection hinges upon one main research idea which could be temporarily answered by the following hypothesis : The intercultural sociological intervention optimizes the social adaptation of sub-Saharan migrant students during their academic journey in Tunisia in the times of the Corona virus. We would verify the hypothesis in accordance with the Tunisian reality, discern the social adaptation model relevant to our research category. Would social adaptation be determinist, narrowing, conformist that fuses all components into a social model that is unique ? Could this model be equally at variance with pathological social adaptation that does not deviate from negative individualism, a process that involves evasion then rebellion and eventually reaching a failure to adapt ? As a matter of fact , in our project of intercultural sociological intervention , there is no room for an imposed conformist adaptation or for an upheld resistance that may lead to social maladjustment . We are rather seeking to instill positive feelings of unity and solidarity between students through efforts of listening,

diagnosis and analysis of practices and representations that should be upheld by every socio-cultural component. As a reference to an anthropological volume on the Corona crisis , we are questioning the effect of the pandemic that has reversed the structure and form of society or what is referred to as “ the social morphology” (Xavier, 1939) , unsettled the rules of social distancing and “ proxemics” (Descamps, 1939) and has transformed our homes into an ultimate space of social isolation , a “sociofugal” (Levy, 2015) space.

In fact, this project of intercultural sociological intervention is going to place focus on 4 main objectives : The first is to determine the mechanisms of social adaptation. This objective unfolds as a conformist determinist presentation that puts forth a unique behavioral model via a socialization process imparting certain mechanisms of social control in order to safeguard social cohesion. The second objective consists in a process of diagnosis and screening of the problems students face when adapting to the determinist model meant to infer different adaptation strategies that were adopted. The third objective is an illustration of the adaptation model in question : shaping a new social adaptation based on collective action that consolidates social relations, social interactions between individuals and a society built on interdependence and that transcends negative individualism. The fourth objective is succeeding the intercultural social adaptation model which acquaints migrant students with skills , behaviors and cultural competences as tools to help them integrate into the process of social adaptation and cultural change and to be able to master intercultural competences. The objective seeks to strengthen communitarian solidarity while asserting cultural identity. It is an anthropological process that emphasizes cultural unity, historically generator of collective personality. Based on the premise that “ sociology constructs its research objects based on its own concepts”

and that “there has to be rupture with common sense , a reconstruction of the object from an interpretive choice followed by a validation of the hypotheses and explanations of this reconstruction in comparison with the collected data » (Beitone, 2018) . Our interpretation is twofold : a phase of deconstruction and a phase of reconstruction : reconstructing concrete facts from the social adaptation reality of migrant students from sub-Saharan Africa in the times of the Corona virus. The interpretation is constructed in the framework of a conceptual network composed of two main theories that of social adaptation and interculturality :

- The first phase covers an interpretation of the functionalist paradigm as a determinist approach²
- The second phase is the deconstruction and reconstruction phase along with an interpretation of the interactionist paradigm.³

Moreover, there are two other parts that are involved in our analysis and that help shape our research morphology :

- A functional interpretation of the social adaptation realities phenomenon of migrant students in the times of the Corona virus.
- An interactionist interpretation is designed to solve the question in the light of the intercultural prism.

As a start , before expanding on our research category , we should consider an analysis of qualitative data collected from the realities of its social adaptation followed by an interpretive study of the indicators characterizing the conducted intercultural sociological intervention as

² The functionalist theory conceives of society as a body composed of interrelated elements

³The interactionist analysis stipulates that a social fact is constructed at the heart of exchange dynamics (interaction) between individuals established through an idiosyncratic perception of one’s actions and that of others .

well as seek to build a conceptual framework for the two theories : social adaptation and the intercultural .

Opening this research with a discovery of the first theory : social adaptation.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1 Social adaptation

A society should assert a set of social control mechanisms that individuals incorporate in the course of the socialization process in order to guarantee a certain degree of cohesion with the collectivity facilitating , in most cases , social adaptation . This latter unfolds thus as “ the joint results of the socialization process along with social control mechanisms , the assets generating a sense of belonging to a group and , by extension, encouraging individuals to operate within a society” (Claire, 2013) In other words , social adaptation is the acceptance of formal and informal social norms . The juxtaposition of the word “ social” with the word “ adaptation” serves to inscribe the first word in the register of the “socius” and the “societas” the exchanges and “ the interpersonal links characterized by the notions of union and alliance” (Bouvier, 2005)⁴. Individuals tend to act in conformity with the parameters of a peculiar model of normality , legality and legitimacy established by society or by the group in which they evolve as socially adapted beings . Adaptation, however, can take many forms and can occur at varying degrees. According to Denis

3. According to Bouvier« The socius, is the companion. This element is positioned and acts beyond ordinary amenity. The term involves those that engage in a framework of tight bonds operating equally in concrete terms and within communities unfolding as values associated with the intellectual moral city ».

Claire, adaptation can take the conformist form or what she refers to as “ritualistic” or a less conformist form “ the variant” or an even innovative form in other words the opposing form and in the words of Claire the “ pathological” form. Conformity involves either a spontaneous adhesion or a deliberate adhesion that takes into consideration the way of living, acting, thinking that are influenced by group or societal pressure. This approach does not celebrate the way of living and acting that is “variant” and characteristic of a less conformist adaptation. On the other hand, “innovative” adaptation transcends conformity as it is distinguished by new ways of living, acting, thinking that are celebrated by society and by the collectivity. Nevertheless, excessive conformity to an illegal and illegitimate social group inevitably results into a destructive “pathological” adaptation. This type of adaptation has been perceived as a “deviance” in the theory elaborated by Merton (Merton, 1953) who, in this context, invokes five types of adaptation : conformity, ritualism, innovation, evasion and rebellion. The first two types are less threatening if stopped at the level of ideas. Evasion and rebellion, however, pose a major threat to society as they repudiate its operations.

We will tackle the second theory before moving on to a presentation of our research population

2.2 The intercultural

Literature on the intercultural is copious .What brought us here is an epistemological shift from a cultural paradigm to an intercultural paradigm chosen as our interpretive choice for this analytical research which would validate our hypothesis from a functionalist to an interactionist theory. In this context, one would refer to Malinowski, the founder of the functionalist theory which stipulates that culture in

its primary meaning, is a response to one's needs : nourishment, clothing and reproduction. Malinowski explains that institutions are established by individuals to satisfy their fundamental needs , that they constitute the backbone of the study of culture and that all cultural components should be in direct relation to these institutions . He also maintains that culture devises a coherent system composed of interdependent elements which facilitates individuals' adaptation to their milieu and help them satisfy their needs. On the other hand and from the interactionist perspective, culture is created by individuals. Instead of presuming culture as an objective fact (a cultural era , tangible element , a system) which invokes an overestimation of cultural differences and an intensification in stereotypes ; the interactionist approach studies culture as a system of significations, of collective symbols. According to Geertz (Geertz, 1998) : “ Man is an animal swinging in a web of significations that he himself weaved ; this knit is what I call culture ”.

Roy d'Andrade (d'Andrade, 1984) underscores that knowledge is steeped in the system of symbols and that it is shared to create a setting of interaction and exchange between these systems via common significations characteristic of speeches and behaviors, that's the intercultural. This intercultural project advocates an instructive approach with regard to diversity considered as distinct from difference. This project consists in managing and channeling differences in adaptation strategies to a culture of exchange, mutual enrichment, diversity and intercultural dialogue. Such reflection envisages routes for intercultural interaction that arrange a passage from differences to exchange, mutual enrichment acquired from diversity in order to employ intercultural competences for the benefit of social adaptation . As validated by Schnapper, culture is far from being an axiom. It is the product of a continuous negotiation between

individuals, a continuous creation. Culture incites the efforts of sociologists who call on a study of culture as subject to manipulations, reparations, transformations that can be temporary or permanent, intentional or unconscious, individual or collective. Nevertheless, some parameters are noteworthy mainly those that touch on distinguishing characteristics of each member of different groups. In this case , it is deemed necessary to subdue collective thoughts and attempts to devise an attitude that should be adopted by a group of people and to focus on the impact of different personalities component of our multicultural group studied in the scope of social adaptation .

2.3 The intercultural sociological intervention

Our sociological intervention could be divided into three phases: a phase dedicated to a description of the research question, followed by a phase of explanation and criticism and then the intervention phase. The first phase involves data collection and compiles scientific knowledge on the studied fact. It is primordial as it allows transitions to the following phase, the explanation and criticism phase. Explanation urges a need to delve into causes, which implies developing a critical approach as to official discourses disseminated by social actors and questioning the efficiency of the adopted practices and attitudes. According to G elinas, sociological intervention can take two forms: the first being resistance and the second entails severing ties with bygone systems of thought and suggests novel ones. As a matter of fact, an intercultural sociological intervention “is able to elicit reflection that helps individuals develop a comprehensive knowledge of the group to which they belong, develop critical thinking and analysis of different cultural forms, forge his cultural identity amid an acknowledgment and embracing of diversity and helps them act in a way that improves their living conditions” (Garcia

Castano, 2002). Individuals can thus create an idiosyncratic attitude; develop intercultural competences that promote communication, understanding and tolerance with regard to diversity.

2.4 Migrant students from sub-Saharan Africa in Tunisia

On Bearing in mind that the fundamental idea of this reflection is the latency of a curious phenomenon reflecting the presence of a genuine “strange body” since more than a decade such as the group of students coming in large number from Sub-Saharan Africa to pursue studies in Tunisia and enrolled in private universities . According to the statements provided by one of the respondents Mr TallSerigne : an estimate of 8000⁵ of them are enrolled in private universities. They are migrant students with different nationalities (about 30 nationalities), different religious backgrounds (Muslims, Christians, Atheists...) and different ethnicities and races : Black students from sub-Saharan Africa and white students from North Africa⁶. The phenomenon displays a richness in intrinsic cultural specificities proper to this population – migrant sub-Saharan African students – and offered by this exceptional multicultural space – Tunisian private universities – which highlights Tunisia as a fertile ground for cultural diversity and depicts interculturality as an ethnographic approach as a research methodology .

As a matter of fact , an analysis of the conducted empirical studies has revealed that the Tunisian private institution has emerged as a

4. According to Mr SerignTall respondent : President of the UESST : Union of Students and Interns in Tunisia

5. North Africans are not caucasians. They are Arab-berbers with a light tone of color that can vary from white to darker shades but can not be dark black.

favorite study-abroad destination hosting a community of immigrant African students pursuing studies in Tunisia .“A system of first and second cycle serving as a pathway to further studies in occidental colleges .”

This observation incites a definition and understanding of the reasons behind the choice of sub-Saharan students. In his article entitled “ Migrant sub-Saharan workers in Tunisia facing restrictive legislations on the employment of foreigners” published in 2017, Mustapha Nasraoui (Nasraoui, 2017) highlighted four key factors that paved the way for an emergence of a new reality through which Tunisia has today become a destination for migrant workers. This phenomenon started with relocating the African Development Bank (BAD) to Tunis in 2003 and in 2014. The second factor revolves around the measure adopted by the Tunisian authorities : removing the visa requirements for many sub-Saharan citizens (from Ivory Coast, Senegal, Mali, Nigeria, etc.) Another factor consists in the establishment of around sixty private institutes in the three Tunisian megapolis (Tunis, Sousse, Sfax) within few years. These institutes, designed mainly to recruit francophone students, have facilitated the integration of sub-Saharan students in Tunisia. The third factor has to do with the civil war in Libya that provoked attempts of illegal immigration of sub-Saharans to Italy from either the Libyan or the Tunisian coastlines . Consequently, Tunisia has become, as expressed by Hassen Boubakri and Sylvie Mazzella (Sylvie Mazzella, 2009) «country of transit to Europ».

Toure Blamassi ⁷, a participant in the conducted survey has provided clarifications as to the choice of our research category of Tunisia as a destination to pursue university studies while emphasizing that : « Sub-Saharan students choose Tunisia as a destination to pursue their university studies initially thanks to the easy and simple process of registration and enrollment. Cases of students whose applications were rejected are rare. Moreover, unlike in Europe, it is also affordable to live in Tunisia. Consequently, many families despite their low income can still send their children to study abroad without having to incur heavy expenses. Furthermore, the annual tuition fees for Tunisian universities are not costly. The costs are affordable. Families therefore should not feel concerned when sending their children, who will pursue their studies at Tunisian universities with an average cost, abroad. On a final note, older siblings who have already built up experience in these universities would likely play the role of an instructor : they would influence the opinions of prospective students and would recommend studying at Tunisian universities. »

Nevertheless, during their first contact with the Tunisian soil, Souhayma Ben Achour (Ben Achour, 2019) , Associate Professor of Law asserts that sub-Saharan students are confronted with a restrictive regime bestowing a certain degree of precarity on their journey. In fact, during their educational journey in Tunisia, students face a lot of difficulties in terms of the legal framework and the restrictions placed on their right to a regular journey. « According to Article 11 of the decree, visas and residence card are of two types : visa and ordinary residence or visa and temporary residence. The right to a residence permit seems to be a dream of sub-Saharan migrant students that is

6. Touré Blamassi is an Ivorian, ex-president of the AESAT Association for African Students and Interns in Tunisia. He is an intern at the BAD, MRH student at Time highschool. He has been in Tunisia for more than 16 years.

exceptionally difficult to achieve » It is quite evident that even before the Corona pandemic , this category has been suffering from serious integration problems faced within the host society in general and within the Tunisian system of private education in particular . Their situation was further damaged by the Corona conjuncture and their struggle intensified. This category has been victim of negligence and marginalization during and after the lockdown. Betty Rouland confirms this claim by saying that : « This global crisis is no longer sanitary, it has become a socio-sanitary crisis that has only further accentuated the vulnerability of already-enfeebled populations ».(Brésillon, 2020) As an attempt to place focus on the questions addressed by this study , one should recall that the first step of this endeavor is to carry out a screening , survey of problems and difficulties impeding the social adaptation of migrant students in the times of the Corona virus ?

As an attempt to curb this phenomenon, we opted for a remedy, an intercultural sociological intervention as a means to change the forms of socio-relational organization in line with a process of intercultural social adaptation ? To do so , it was deemed essential to adopt a qualitative approach to acquire thorough understanding of the variables that affect the social adaptation of students in question . Consequently , an empirical test was carried out which took the form of a one-to-one non-directive interview in order to learn about the perception of 10 migrant sub-Saharanans : 8 among which are students and the other two are expatriates . The 8 students are engaged in associative work and occupy positions therein alongside their studies : The head of the AESAT (Association for African Students and Interns in Tunisia) : 8 members of his executive board who are also presidents of 8 sub-associations of different African nationalities respectively : Senegalese, Malian, Chadian, Gabonese, Congolese, Cameroonian,

Burkinabe and Nigerian. The two expatriates are the Nigerian consul in Tunisia and the Senegalese ambassador in Tunisia. Furthermore, a theoretical conceptual research on the types of social adaptation has been carried out and has generated data that were analyzed via coding and transcription. The following section is dedicated to a validation of our hypothesis and demonstrate the correlation between the intercultural sociological intervention and the social adaptation of sub-Saharan migrant students pursuing studies in Tunisian during the pandemic ? In this context, we would conduct our analysis in accordance with a sociological intervention methodology. Such analysis hinges upon two main axes of intervention : the first involves a description along with an explanation of the fact while the second signals the phase of intercultural intervention .

3. Migrant students in the times of the pandemic : realities of social adaptation

This research phase involves a deconstruction of the real fact social adaptation realities of sub-Saharan migrant students during the Corona period and its reconstruction in the light of an interpretive , functionalist paradigm . We would therefore, pinpoint the mechanisms of social adaptation from a functionalist, determinist and conformist perspective. There are two implicit premises to our analysis. The first probes into social adaptation, defined by sociology as the social order which denotes assimilation, continuity and maintaining the system. The second pertains to a unique cultural model that : “ assures humans’ self-adaptation and their adaptation to their milieu the same way instincts facilitate animals’ adaptation to their environment ” which implies a celebration of cultural differences which, by extension,

places emphasis on stereotypes⁸ . During the Corona crisis, and according to the functionalist determinist model, society can only offer one behavioral model. In response to a model imposed by social control, our category of analysis develops a movement of resistance. So, what are the obstacles to social adaptation as far as our field of study is concerned ?

What is the realm of signifiers and “ symbols ” to which our surveyed actors, representative of their communities, make reference ? What is the logic underlying their actions and strategies for social adaptation ?

We would proceed with an open coding as an endeavor to conceptualize and compile survey data composed of word and phrases which would be divided into two categories : a representation of social adaptation difficulties and the strategies adopted by our research category to overcome these difficulties. The strategies could take two

7. In fact, migrant sub-Saharan students, during the process of socialization, interiorize mechanisms of social control to which they are subject. Such mechanisms are established by society and operate to safeguard cohesion within collectivity that would often facilitate social adaptation. Our surveyed students have undergone a long journey: « primary socialization » that refer to learning components acquired during childhood, inside their families , at school and with peers . Currently, their migratory project of pursuing studies in Tunisia, is considered as the second phase of socialization « secondary socialization » indicative of a process of integration within new spheres of society producing individuals who are socialized and modeled . During this process, individuals become active by imitation and as a result of a direct contact with the new environment. One of the main consequences of this socialization process is the constructing a social framework which operates within the confines of a « formal social control » that establishes the primacy of law and order through the agency of public authorities and of « informal social control» which refers to implicit pressure to which students are subject in their immediate environment

main forms : either a conformist ritualistic social adaptation or a pathological social adaptation .

3.1 A social adaptation that is conformist and ritualistic

This specific type of social adaptation is based on conformism . According to Merton (Merton, *Eléments de la théorie et de méthode sociologique* , 1965), it is “ the way individuals behave which is inextricably linked to the socio-cultural context. It’s a mechanical application of formal social control” . This formal social control entails adopting conduct models that are biding and degrading to which individuals should adhere whatever the consequences . In our context and environment , foreign students are forced to adopt conduct models and sanitary norms which further emphasizes automatic sanction that supersedes considerate advice . Consequently , an individual adaptation or what is referred to as ritualistic adaptation comes to the fore . The fact that one wakes up everyday , put on a face mask , use hand sanitizer before leaving the house and then keeping a distance of one or two meters constitutes a routine that is far from being pleasant yet unfolds as an indispensable element of social adaptation . Members of our research category have struggle to cope with the imposed compulsory measures of social distancing , lockdown , wearing a mask ..

The statements of the AESAT president testify to the veracity of the previous claims : « We strive to cope with social distancing .Humans , especially members of the same community , always thrive on social connection .. » According to Rodrigue Koné (Koné, 2003), the sanitary crisis has “ an important social cost ” as he expands on the distress caused by social distancing : « We are a society molded by

community relations , a society where the visual and the palpable are matters of great importance ».

Eventually , everyone wishes for a successful year at university , that's why students should opt for the conformist adaptation model achieved through means that are socially accepted . This idea is expressed in the words of the Chadian Association's president : « Our students should invest the time dedicated to lockdown in revision , probe into distance learning, conduct research, compile references, make the necessary exam preparations. That would guarantee their success which is the objective of their migratory journey ». Those who were surveyed agreed unanimously that linguistic differences was the major obstacle to social adaptation . They argue that communication complexity is the primary reason behind escaping adaptation . In fact , this particular impediment gnaws at social involvement and prevents social adaptation resulting thus in an attitude of rejection , stigma and depreciation of the host country's social norms and opinions which can develop into discrimination . The flow of information was also obstructed during this period of crisis . The president of the Gabonese association confirms this claim in the following statements : « We are required to abide by social and sanitary protocols imposed by the Tunisian authorities . We arranged our means of communication in such a way that information , especially those concerning curfew , would be delivered in time. » « For our part , we are doing our best at translating the official speeches broadcasted in Arabic and sharing them in our networks ... ». In response to exclusion mechanisms , students tend to develop a behavioral mode that consists of “ identity strategies” (Hanna Malewska, 1998). These strategies unfold as defense mechanisms , an inner psychological process, a shield against pain and anxiety . This could explain the deviance, developing a pathological social adaptation. Variance , according to Guy Rocher

(Rocher, 1972) is the adhesion that is more or less in conformity with dominant behavioral models , characterized by ways of living and acting or thinking that are tolerated but not valued by society . Students who are deviant those who refuse to wear the mask in public spaces set an example that is accepted but not appreciated. President of the Cameroonian association explains that : « At the beginning of the pandemic, we did not comply with the sanitary protocol, wearing a mask , and we noticed that Tunisians did not appreciate this behavior and treated us with suspicion and derision » .

3.2 A pathological social adaptation

A pathological social adaptation describes a state of excessive destructive conformism , it takes the form of either super-conformism or deviance .

In this context , and following Merton's concepts on adaptation modes , we managed to draw attention to innovation and rebellion . Some of the surveyed students have reported adopting the innovation mode of adaptation. Adopting such a mode of adaptation entails that students have recourse to new means that are illegal and illegitimate only to succeed their year at university , also referred to as academic fraud , such as exam fraud and even falsifying exam papers .. while others opt for evasion , characteristic of the rebellion mode of adaptation . Students who refuse to comply with social norms , fail to adhere to a conformist social adaptation and face difficulties as to succeeding the academic year usually resort to escapism . As a matter of fact , during the lockdown , they have turned to excessive habits : alcoholism , toxicomania i.e. drug addiction .. along with an excessive passion, an addiction , for video games. Such habits are inductive of a pathological adaptation or maladjustment leading to escapism and

rejection , to withdrawal and failure . This is the case for many Congolese students. According to the president of the Congolese association: « Many of my Congolese fellows are video games addicts , it is an outright addiction, they cling to their smart phones, they are always up late and they spend the whole day playing , a phenomenon that has escalated during the lockdown . They abandon their studies and they have increasingly gave in to consumerism! »

In short, as we tackled a description and explanation of adaptation realities relative to our research category i.e. sub-Saharan students, we would conclude that : the determinist model of social adaptation is established as a standard in order to safeguard the cohesion of a unique socio-cultural system . It is a model that is vehemently resisted by our research category i.e. migrant students , victim of the Tunisian public policies that abandoned and marginalized them during the Covid crisis . Such policies did not take into consideration the difficulties faced by this category in terms of linguistic differences and flow of information which undermined their integration and further deteriorated their situation . The repercussions are perceptible in the lack of certainty as to the choice of the adaptation models and strategies to overcome the crisis . Some opt for a deviant adaptation , others display a pathological adaptation , some resort to unprecedented illegal means and practices along with a tendency to escape and evade reality while others become victims of excessive habits that may even lead to maladjustment and social exclusion. Our study of the different modes of adaptation adopted by our research category allows the following observation : Difference between social adaptation strategies are striking and could not be in conformity with a unique determinist and functionalist model . So how can we change the situation of the students in questions ?

First , these students are required to become social actors and get involved into a project of societal change . In other words , students are required to develop a comprehensive knowledge of different situations that can convey a negative image of them . Sub-Saharan students can take action to change their lifestyle, dominant values and focus on the organization of their community during the sanitary crisis. Consequently, they grow into active social actors at the heart of a given society ; they develop a sense of solidarity and they take actions that foster their social adaptation to this new milieu . Accordingly, social actors become cognizant of their interests and develop an outlook that involves others . In this context , it was deemed necessary to follow an intercultural sociological methodology and to adopt an interactionist interpretation in order to “ make sense of this blurry vision , confusion and comprehend new practices imposed by this situation” . This could be achieved in the second phase of intervention through a reflection in the light of the cultural prism

4. Apprehending the intercultural

As opposed to the paradigm that defines culture according to objective elements (cultural era , material element , system) , the intercultural approach seeks to embrace diversity and not difference . As a matter of fact , cultural dialogue and exchange , mutual enrichment brought about by diversity are key elements of a successful intercultural sociological intervention that opens horizons for interaction in order to benefit from intercultural competences , developed in the framework of an unconventional intercultural mode of adaptation .

This conception has been illustrated by the following statements of Touré Blamassi ,one of the respondents : « This crisis in

undoubtedly difficult, but to counter this crisis , our shield would be our Afro-optimism. We should keep in mind that if innovation was a child , deficiency would be the mother and courage the father . So , we should have the courage to ‘childify’ innovation!»

An intercultural sociological intervention (Cabé, 2008) serves to optimize the social adaptation of sub-Saharan students to contain this socio-sanitary crisis . To achieve this goal , our students should develop intercultural attitude and competence that would establish them as social actors , promote communication , understanding , a culture of tolerance as a response to diversity . Acquiring an intercultural competence entails undergoing a threefold process composed of decentration (change of perspectives) , discovery and negotiation.

Decentration is «Learning to live together and with others ” is the core competence that should be developed by every social actor engaging in a process of reflection and analysis of his/her capacities and knowledge pertaining to social adaptation . In other words , such competence is strictly related to a phase of strengthening of cultural identity and ties of communitarian solidarity. This question of cultural interaction can also be studied through the lenses of anthropology in order to highlight the African cultural unity that is historically characteristic of collective personality. In other words , promoting communitarian solidarity unfolds as a means to combat restrictions imposed by the pandemic . Consequently , a process of strengthening identity : the socio-cultural aspect of identity while consolidating cultural traits characteristic of African unity should be emphasized . African unity is a cultural phenomenon that remains relevant . It is also a concept that introduced into the register of our surveyed group and that has been internalized as part of their codes of communication .

They express themselves using terms like « We Africans », « Our culture », « Our brothers and sisters », « Afro-optimism, goodness ... », « African solidarity », « Our community »...

Constantly referring to this cultural and historical bond will motivate students to improve their adaptation reality , promote a sense of cultural identity , and to foster an outlook that is community-oriented . Then Ivorian anthropologist Cheik Anta Diop (Diop, 1981) defines the three cultural traits in his reference book « Civilization or Barbarism » as : « social bond , goodness, cheerfulness and optimism ». The Senegalese member of the AESAT executive board argues that : sub-Saharan students have been raised in an environment that is marked by a sense of community . They usually grow up in extended families , with their paternal aunts and uncles . He maintains that : « For us, the child belongs to the whole community ». Such statements testify to the cultural unity that is inherent in all sub-Saharan Africans and that is reflected in their external behaviors . The African expression “ Us” displays a relationship between individuals and their community living and acting as one body. Thus , decentration unfolds as the backbone of intervention generator of intercultural competence . This phase has been elaborated and confirmed by the testimonials of our surveyed group.

Discovery is "Get out of yourself and put yourself in the other's shoes in order to better understand your point of view".

So far , we have complied all possibilities and situations to create a favorable ground for social interaction and collective action (Touraine, 1965) . Members of the AESAT executive board along with the presidents of the African sub-associations have highlighted the importance of collective action to support the sub-Saharan migrant

community during the sanitary social crisis in Tunisia . This can only be achieved by strengthening social bonds and interactions between the members of the category in question throughout their integration journey in the Tunisian society . Such objectives invoke a notion of belonging and a network of social interactions that equally reunite individuals and groups . According to Bouvier (2005) , those networks represent a « a connection which is carried out in such a way that it is maintained ». In fact , the term « social bond » refers to reunification , connection , attachment between entities of the same group or of different groups which naturally subdues notions of conflict and tension . For Paugam (Paugam, 2008), the above-mentioned concept implies a desire to coexist and to connect the disconnected . Consequently , reciprocal exchanges would be free , voluntary , operating within associations in an environment of communitarian solidarity . Social organizations are certainly proof of a developed competence as they are the framework in which individuals seek collective action and social exchange . In this context , the Senegalese ambassador in Tunisia stated that : « A crisis management unit has been implemented since the beginning of the crisis and only the actions in collaboration with AIESAT and the UNESST are noteworthy when it comes to census, observations, needs assessment and distribution of help ». Negotiation which is « a symbiosis meant to promote understanding while avoiding confrontation ». It is the essence of an intercultural innovative social adaptation .The following context could represent a concretization of this mode of adaptation : The president of the AESAT confirmed the initiation of communitarian action or what he refers to as « a unit of African solidarity responsible for the collection of donations, conduct of censuses , sensitization and orientation.» This unit is a product of collective action that strengthens social bonds and promotes

individual-society interaction that is based on interdependence and that transcends negative individualism . These are the pillars of an « innovative adaptation ». Such mode of adaptation refers to an adherence that is more or less conformists with dominant models of behavior which are characterized by innovative ways of living, thinking , and acting that are accepted , even revered by society.

The head of the association for Gabonese students and interns provided the most accurate illustration to this mode of adaptation by celebrating the innovative initiatives launched by Tunisian engineering students in their conception of protective face masks using 3D printers with laser technology through which they have come to produce thousands of masks which helped Tunisian hospitals in the days of battle against the Corona virus . The head of the association for Burkinabe students and interns has celebrated the initiative taken Burkinabe IT students which consists in launching a digital platform for online learning « EasySchool » through which they could overcome rules of social distancing and forced lockdown that separate students within academic institutions . As a final observation , an intercultural sociological intervention provided for : an initial stage of intervention that revolves around a thorough analysis and comprehension of obstacles impeding the social adaptation of our marginalized research category . This adaptation mode unfolds thus as an instructive process seeking to help students develop cultural and behavioral skills as means to engage in a process of adaptation , change and mastery of intercultural competences . The second step revolves around devising a follow-up strategy examining the ground for interaction as a means to help students get involved in a process of integration and innovative adaptation while inviting intercultural competences .

CONCLUSION

Having reached the end of this analysis , we come to the conclusion that the social adaptation of this marginalized category of sub-Saharan migrant students in Tunisia in the times of the corona pandemic is perceived differently . This new perception is reflected in the various degrees of interaction and that is not limited to a determinist approach that is in conformity with formal and informal social control . This perception is, however, based on the strategies adopted by asocial actors . The conducted surveys have revealed an anthropological logic, that is cultural and historical, behind the process of social adaptation in question . Such process seeks to strengthen the African cultural identity which would consequently safeguard social stability during a period of crisis. The recommendations of our surveyed group insist on the importance of strengthening social bonds and individuals-society interactions , being the basis of unity and of every social organization. This form of social exchange is of fundamental importance as it represents the shield against stress and « parochial thinking » (Fanny Chabrol, 2020) generated by the Corona conjuncture. Maintaining social interactions and embracing a variety of resources as a defense against lockdown challenges. Adopting such an attitude can reduce the negative effects of lockdown and provide immunity against its difficulties. Thus , intercultural dialogue , mutual exchange and enrichment represent the key elements of an effective sociological intervention that creates horizons for interaction in order to benefit from intercultural competences characteristic of an innovative intercultural adaptation . Our study on the intercultural sociological intervention has proved that our marginalized research category is undoubtedly able to meet the conditions for a harmonious coexistence in the times of a crisis . Coexistence, however, remains a continuous

process of intercultural construct. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to conduct permanent investigations and make the necessary adjustments especially with regard to instances of exchange, distanciation and openness.

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