JASO

VOL. XXVI 1995 No. 1

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SPECIAL ISSUE

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Studies in the Ethnography of Cameroon in Honour of Sally Chilver

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ISSN UK 0044–8370

Typeset in Times New Roman at
Oxford University Computing Service

Printed in Great Britain by
Antony Rowe Ltd., Chippenham, Wiltshire

SALLY CHILVER

Drawing By Rachel Hemming Bray, 1995

JASO 26/1 (1995): 1–4

'MAMA FOR STORY': STUDIES IN THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF CAMEROON IN HONOUR OF SALLY CHILVER

INTRODUCTION TO THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

IAN FOWLER and DAVID ZEITLYN

THE work of Sally Chilver has played a highly significant role over several generations of research in the Cameroonian Grassfields in the intersecting fields of anthropology and history. It exemplifies the convergence of ethnography and history in the field of Cameroonian studies. This collection of essays celebrates that work—each contribution touches on different aspects of the relationship of history and anthropology. History is illuminated by, and in much of Africa cannot be practised without, appreciation of the methods of anthropological fieldwork. Conversely, ethnography is enriched and enabled by the depth and awareness of change that follows the adoption of a historical perspective. Through her work Sally Chilver has brought the complexity of the Cameroonian Grassfields, its history, material culture and ethnography to the attention of Africanist scholars.

This special issue of *JASO* is the culmination of a broader project that celebrates the work of Sally Chilver. All the contributors to this issue of the journal and to its sister publications (Fowler and Zeitlyn 1995, 1996) feel personally in her debt, and welcomed this opportunity to contribute to the project. Certainly, many of us associated with Sally Chilver have long given thought to ways in which her important contributions to Cameroon studies might be satisfactorily acknowledged. The idea of a Festschrift was widely shared. At the last meeting of the Grassfields Working Group held in Oxford (organized by Sally Chilver) a number of us, notably Shirley Ardener and Professors Miriam Goheen, Eugenia Shanklin, Claude Tardits, Charles-

Henry Pradelles and Jean-Pierre Warnier, took the opportunity to conspire. The broader project of which this special issue of *JASO* forms a part is the welcome outcome of that happy conspiracy.

The papers presented here deal with the ethnographic complexity which any historical synthesis must confront. *JASO* is a fitting place for their publication since this reflects the long-standing relationship between Edwin Ardener (the founder of *JASO*), Shirley Ardener and Sally Chilver. As if to further emphasise this, the first two volumes of the new Cameroon Studies Series consist of Edwin Ardener's collected papers on Cameroon and our volume for Sally. In addition to these personal and intellectual connections there is the Oxford connection, which continues to this day. Sally Chilver's links with Oxford encompass both formal and informal academic sectors. On the one hand institutional ties: as Somerville undergraduate, and later Director of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at Oxford and Principal of Lady Margaret Hall; on the other a more informal role as an Africanist historian and ethnographer enriching the Oxford academic scene at the same time as she nurtured young Cameroonists and Cameroonian students and scholars.

Issues to do with representations of identity have always been a strong undercurrent in anthropology. However, since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the eruption of 'ethnic' conflict in Europe identity has become the object of more focused attention. It has been said that Africa exists in its very own temporal space but in this instance there is an approximate simultaneity in the chronology of events, interpretation and action. Here, too, the qualities and meaning of identity in cultural practice and political representation are deeply questioned in the context of the post-colonial African state. There are significant convergences and parallels, in both the events of Europe and Africa and the knowledge that is created in the interpretation of them, that remain to be explored.

Sally Chilver's life and academic endeavour significantly encompass all of these things. It is for this reason that we have included a biographical sketch as the introductory paper to this collection of essays. In so doing we mark, at least implicitly, the mutually constitutive qualities of actor, action and context. It is indisputable that as anthropologists and historians we may come to play significant roles in the production of the kinds of knowledge that tie in to the emergence of broad social and political groupings in the context of the colony and the post-colony. It is, perhaps, also inevitable that such knowledge may be incorporated into the armoury of the contemporary struggle for definition of locality and its articulation with the agents and offices of the post-colonial state. If identity is constantly reworked it is none the less fixed in narratives of the past. Since the early colonial period classification has been both a process of self-classification as well as classification by administrative officers and, latterly, by academics both expatriate and indigenous. In these two key and related areas Sally Chilver has played, and continues to play a major and dove-tailing role in the production of knowledge for and of the Grassfields.

In a broader context Sally Chilver's contribution to the Africanist worldview and the knowledge contained and generated by it is also highly significant. At a time when it was, perhaps, less than fashionable, Sally—to quote from Shirley Ardener's preface to *African Crossroads*—first went out to the field as 'an apprentice historian in stout boots' in the company of the anthropologist Phyllis Kaberry. This personal and academic alliance flouted the established academic bias in anthropology that eschewed the knowledge of missionary, administrator and trader in favour of the monopoly of the professional ethnographer. Happily, for those of us who have followed into the field, Chilver's work with Kaberry did more than simply help to neutralise the effects of this disciplinary bias against history (see Warnier's contribution in Fowler and Zeitlyn 1996).

The nature of the histories Sally Chilver has pursued are equally significant. Her methodological approach is that of thick description applied at a series of levels from paramount to descent-group head. The salient payoffs from this approach are, we believe, clearly demonstrated in the paired papers presented here that focus on historical issues. In the first instance Zeitlyn offers a recension of Eldridge Mohammadou's far broader regional depiction of the history of Central Cameroon. The rebuttal of Mohammadou's case is presented in the form of a letter from Sally Chilver to Verkijika Fanso, a senior Cameroonian academic. We have also included a paper by Jean Hurault that deals with the history of the chiefdom of Sonkolong. This represents a different, more geographically focused approach to the history of this region that draws in findings from settlement patterns, field archaeology and satellite photographs in addition to local history and oral tradition.

It is certainly the case that Chilver has retained her focus on historical issues in her archivist reworking of her own fieldnotes and those of Kaberry, and in on-going correspondence with Cameroonian colleagues. Yet she has become far more of an anthropologist than she might perhaps care to admit. A recently published paper on thaumaturgical belief in Nso' (Chilver 1990) is a case in point. Not only has it been widely quoted in literature on the Grassfields but, more importantly, it has significantly advanced our knowledge of African religious belief in a region for which such knowledge has till now been sorely lacking.

The papers by Baeke, Gufler, Pradelles and Koloss reflect the ethnographic vein of her work. Viviane Baeke, a student of Luc de Heusch, presents an elaborate account of Wuli cosmology in the spirit of Chilver's 1990 paper, but reflecting also a greater concern for the structural implications of the beliefs and practices she describes. The density of documentation and analysis provided by Baeke is still all too rare among studies of the Grassfields region.

Charles-Henry Pradelles pays homage to Sally Chilver in a paper which links his recent work among the Péré with Chilver's ethnographic and historical research in Bali-Nyonga. The Péré represent one part of a confederated raiding band that arrived in the Grassfields in the first quarter of the

nineteenth century under the Chamba leader Gawolbe. Pradelles has traced a ritual thread that links the present-day Péré of the Tignère region of Adamawa Province and the Péré of Bali-Nyonga.

Hermann Gufler is a Catholic missionary, parish priest of Sabongari at the far north of the North-West province. His paper provides an example of how one missionary, inspired in part by his continuing correspondence with Sally Chilver, has built on the knowledge left by another. In this case Gufler, in collaboration with a local Yamba informant, has returned to one of the classic studies of the area: Paul Gebauer's monograph on spider divination. Through a series of conversations with Pa Monday of Gom as well as with other diviners, Gufler is able to update and re-analyse Gebauer's account of the system of *ngam* divination, a system which is not confined to the Yamba, but is found throughout the southern half of Cameroon.

Much thought has gone into the transliteration of the indigenous terms in the articles that follow. Because the native languages of the researchers include English, German, and French there is variation in the transliteration conventions used. We have not attempted to impose a uniform system on the authors. It is increasingly common to use the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to provide consistent representation, and this has been used in some of the articles below. It is hoped that readers will not find the inconsistency between papers obtrusive. One additional point on transcription is worth making: we have followed the convention of using upper-case B for the implosive-b in FulBe, as the Fulani are now called in the anglophone tradition.

In presenting this ensemble of papers we seek to illustrate not only the complexity of Cameroonian society, but also the extent to which Sally Chilver has helped to influence and shape our understanding of the history and anthropology of the area.

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JASO 26/1 (1995): 5–19

ACCIDENTAL COLLISIONS: A PERSONAL MEMOIR

SALLY CHILVER

Transcribed and edited by
Mitzi Goheen and Eugenia Shanklin

Early Life

I was born in Turkey, at an inconvenient moment—the day before the First World War broke out (3 August 1914); we had to get out and were whisked off to Alexandria. From there my mother made her way to England, to Cornwall, where her parents had retired. We must have seemed an extraordinary party, including Louisa, a Greek nurse, and David, an Armenian manservant belonging to my father, whose life could have been in danger had he stayed; neither Louisa nor David had a word of English. The lonely David apparently did nothing but moon up and down the cliffs so it was naturally suspected that he was summoning German submarines.

My mother's name was Millicent Gilchrist; had she not been born in the Levant, she could probably have become a renowned pianist. She was the daughter of a Scottish entrepreneur, Gavin Gilchrist. He and his family had wandered out from Clydeside and dealt in port services in the wake of the British Navy and merchant marine, branching out into other businesses along the sea routes. A few ended up in Australia.

My mother married quite late, and mine was a difficult birth for her; soon after, she and my father were parted by the war for about four years. That may account for my being an only child.

We stayed in Cornwall until the war was over. My first memories are from there, the very hard winter of 1917, when the local canal iced over, and of my grandfather's death, which was puzzling to me.

After the war, my father fetched us all back to Turkey and we stayed there in a huge Gilchrist house, called Ranfurly, for three years. Then we became refugees once again during the Graeco-Turkish war; we found ourselves in Athens, escaping on a crowded Romanian boat, being deloused in an American Red Cross camp, kindly treated and fed till we found a hotel.

My father, Philip Perceval Graves, was then a foreign correspondent for *The Times*. During the war he had got involved with T. E. Lawrence in the Arab Bureau and Revolt. He was an Arabic and Turkish speaker, and was travelling around the Middle East, Balkans and Mediterranean when I was a child.

My father's people say they started off as colonists in Ireland, no doubt Protestant exploiters, but some later became Home Rulers and identified with Irish causes. The name is English and quite common. There is much family mythification—anyway, the younger sons went into clerical and professional occupations and their names are found in the records of Trinity College, Dublin, by the eighteenth century. One of them founded a historical society and another, my great-grandfather, was a don at TCD, a mathematician, historian and Irish bishop. His brother, though, was professor of law at the 'Godless College', University College, London, as well as an algebraist.

The Anglo-Irish clergy were parasitic on the community, of course. Some were given little parishes to look after, sinecures, so they had enough leisure to engage in studies of Gaelic and Irish folklore and to think about higher mathematics. Poor but privileged, three became Fellows of the Royal Society. One wonders how these clerics, with their very small incomes, managed to raise huge families.

My paternal great-grandfather, the Bishop, had nine surviving children; my grandfather ten, by two wives. He was a civil servant, educationist and folklorist. I haven't mentioned the women; my remarkable aunts and great-aunts, some eccentric, none idle. One of my great-aunts was nicknamed 'the Plague of Bishops' and two married naval men who became admirals. All my father's sisters married, except one. By some curious set of accidents quite a few of his family also gravitated to the Levant too.

Early Influences

After the Greco-Turkish war, when I was eight, we returned from Greece to England; first to Cornwall, where my maternal grandmother lived, then to London. Things were uncertain for a while at *The Times*, with changes of ownership, but then my father's fortunes improved. In Cornwall, I can't

remember why, I had a very patient Swiss governess for a time before going to a local school. When we returned to London; I went to a good girls' day school (which my parents could then afford) but with absolutely no science except for what one picked up in Geography lessons.

From the day school in London, at the age of around thirteen, I went to a boarding school called Benenden, getting an assisted place after passing an exam. It was a single-sex school, modelled on the boys' public schools, with the senior girls maintaining order—but no chastisements, of course. We were taught Latin and I could have done the sciences, but it was too late to start me off. It was a good school, then fairly spartan.

If you put large numbers of adolescents together they can be horrible to one another. When I was thirteen I was the height I am now, so I was known as the giraffe. I had my share of teasing until I got old enough to do the teasing myself. Eventually, I found my clique; it was a threesome. We excavated a cave in a hillside, used to go and live there, seeking privacy. These were called 'buggies'—hideouts where you could smoke (though we didn't), read illicit books, or have the kind of conversation that in the pupils' common room might make you seem conceited. 'Showing off' was discouraged.

The teaching at school was certainly good; they were all women teachers except for visiting ones, and there was an excellent reference library full of encyclopaedias. The art teaching was splendid; and very broad or contentious subjects were freely discussed in class.

I got into Somerville College, Oxford, but was a bit too young to attend, so I went to art school for a year. I was told there that I had absolutely no talent: quite right too. I was interested in joining the university—to meet more boys, I expect, or anyway more people.

Somerville, Oxford

Somerville was a really remarkable place: there was privacy, the company of young persons and a staff full of characters. I changed from English to History. One of my tutors was the exacting Maud Clarke: no unsupported generalities were allowed. We were to choose a special subject and periods, and I chose the end of the Roman Empire and what was known as 'St Augustine and his age', so I mixed a bit with archaeologists and later classicists. I went for some tutorials to Magdalen, to a famous man named Stevens who was known as 'Tom Brown'. He used to say 'Come at 9.30; you can make breakfast and clean out the bird cage'. Then, after the essay, he would tell me what he had been working on, or whatever issue occurred to him that day. I was also taught by Goronwy Edwards, a famous medievalist; I suppose that was when I got a taste for thinking about taxation and tolls. It was then that I met Richard Chilver, who helped me with the Greek

sources for my special period and even compiled a crib of a difficult author for me.

Somerville was an experience for most people because of the teaching and the conversation, and because of the other things you could find in undergraduate societies. There was a medieval history society, and various people from all over England came and talked to it. Or you could go and draw at the Ruskin School of Art, or ride, which I enjoyed, or argue at literary and political clubs. I belonged to the Irish Society, which was constantly in a state of whiskified disarray. It was at the time of the Irish Blue Shirts on Franco's side, and the Spanish Civil War was going on, so the meetings were divided and contentious.

I skimped my work except for the bits I liked most; politics were to the fore and I was temporarily converted to Marxism by a fellow historian, so I joined all the hands-off groups, accompanied hunger marches and so on—a fairly typical left-wing groupie of the early thirties.

We visited a very intellectual group of striking miners in Wales, were lectured to by radical trades unionists, and went to various rallies. There was much conscience-searching. I recall being accused of being an 'incorrigible Social Democrat', at heart a bourgeois.

1935: Travel and Scribbling

I went down from Somerville in 1935 and then went on holiday with my mother. We were in Germany having a look at the Nazis; she thought I'd better go and look up my German step-relatives before the war she predicted broke out. We were in Berchtesgaden when my mother was bitten by some poisonous insect; she got rapid general septicaemia and died in a matter of days.

After that, I looked after my father for a few months; then I went off in the winter of 1935 on a tour to the Middle East and Bulgaria, just as people go to Nepal nowadays. My father arranged a few odd writing jobs for me, and I met him in Cairo where he was covering a conference. From there I went to Beersheba in a tiny plane and then to Jerusalem, where I had an aunt in broadcasting. At that time, there were some fascinating people about in Jerusalem like Tommy Hodgkin, then in the Palestine Service and later a radical African historian, and George Antonius (who wrote *The Arab Awakening*), also a member of the Colonial Service.

So I pottered about, looking at lots of places, keeping my father informed and sending the odd report on casualties in the troubles. Then I went up to Lebanon, where I fell in with some interesting francophone Arab intellectuals; on to Damascus, via Druze country (the country of the Assassins), and back by bus. At the Sea of Galilee I was laid low by some

stomach bug (a bout of amoebic dysentery) but was picked up and conveyed back to Jerusalem.

Back in Cairo was a very charming female first cousin who was a leader of the bright young things there. So I met her friends, including a young Hussar officer, Sean Hackett, who became head of British forces in Germany. He had joined the army, he said, because it gives one leisure for other pursuits, in his case the study of the Crusaders' castles. It was very odd to meet him again, many years later, as Principal of King's College London.

Then I met up again with my father. From Turkey, I went with him to Bulgaria. Somewhere in Bulgaria we were going along in a train when suddenly we stopped in the middle of a field. There were always coups and things going on, so we had no idea what was to happen, but a ladder was put against the door of our carriage and in came a man with six fingers on each hand. He announced, 'His Majesty is awaiting you at the bottom of the ladder'. The king was a butterfly collector, as my father was, so we were literally kidnapped off the train, which the king had been driving—a hobby of his.

We stayed for a few days at the king's dacha in the Rylo mountains and went butterfly collecting with him. When I came back to London I did some more freelancing and looked after my father for over a year. Then he re-met a widowed cousin whom he eventually married. So everybody was happy—and it meant that I could get married too, which I did in 1937. Kitty, my stepmother, was the nicest of persons. She brought her small son, George, whom my father adopted as his own: that made him very pleased. They eventually retired to Ireland, via Hampshire, after George had finished at Eton and gone to Trinity College Dublin.

My father resumed his Irish identity, was elected to the Irish Academy and took an interest in Cork University. Kitty, incapable of being idle, turned the house into a hotel and now George and Christiane, his French wife, manage it.

My father died in the early fifties. He was a funny chap, you could never tell what his politics were going to be. He objected to the gerrymandering that went on in Ulster politics in the twenties and wrote about it in *The Times*. That earned him quite a few enemies. Persecution of any kind enraged him. When he went to India to report on constitutional changes, it was Ambedkar, leader of the so-called Scheduled Castes, who earned his greatest admiration.

He has a niche in history because he discovered that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was a fraud, a plagiarized version of a pamphlet on another topic. You remember that antisemitic document that was widely circulated? When he died, his longest obit was in the *Jewish Chronicle*. There was a nice piece in *History Today* by the historian Christopher Sykes, all about this curious episode. He is buried at Bantry. The funeral was a great show with a mile-long procession on foot following the horse-drawn hearse.

At that time, I was writing reviews for odd journals and even thinking I was going to be a poet. It never occurred to me that academia was where I wanted to be—people didn't have to do Ph.Ds in those days. Once I got interested in French revolutionary thinkers and considered a thesis on Louis Blanc—thank God I didn't do it. Scribbling had started at Oxford. In those days there was a women's college magazine, which my friends thought was too chiffony, so we started up a short-lived rival, mildly feminist, called *Lysistrata*. We wrote to Virginia Woolf to ask her if she would like to write an introduction to the first number. She wrote back agreeing and then asked me to see her. After that I became an occasional visitor. I was asked to the house when a representative of 'the young' was needed and encouraged to air opinions.

She was rather beautiful and grand, sometimes scathing, very witty, but also very patient with 'the young' as she called us. Her husband was absolutely saintly. I started writing my first book, *A History of Socialism*, after Leonard Woolf said 'We need a general book, not a history of the Labour Party.' That book went through one or two editions: it is on the scrap-heap now. I sat in the British Museum Reading Room writing it for a long time. I've lost my copy. I think I'd be rather ashamed of it now.

1937: Marriage

Richard and I had a very formal wedding at St Mark's, North Audley Street; it was between Richard's home and mine. I was dolled up all proper, with bridesmaids. Both are dead now. Many diplomats and other people came to please my father. And of course the press turned up.

Afterwards, Richard and I went back to a New Forest cottage in which we had already been spending weekends together, but none of this, of course, was known to my father. I remember that as we were leaving, Father—trying to think of something to say—leant over the car and told Richard to be sure he had 'sufficient petroleum'.

Richard and I remained married until he died in 1985. He was in the Civil Service, a career civil servant, but could have been a cabinet maker or potter had he so chosen. He had been a classical scholar and in the Service, he went quite high up, second from the top of a ministry; he was rather uncompromising and said what he thought to ministers, but some liked him. The Chilvers came originally from East Anglia, real English. Richard inherited some very heavy mahogany furniture and a water-colour of a family parsonage set among cows. His father was a solicitor. That, perhaps, gives the background. After that, I was busy setting up a flat and I kept on working at journalistic oddments.

The Second World War

Shortly after the war broke out in 1939 I was asked to present myself to the civil service establishment officers and allocated to a civil service job. I went first into the new Ministry of Economic Warfare; my bit, called Neutral Trade Intelligence, handled what were called Navicerts (to do with the blockade of Germany), which involved reading up on the economies of neutral countries so that they got what was necessary but not a surplus of, say, iron and steel, or even boots, to pass on to Germany. Information also came from anti-Nazi volunteers, railwaymen and telephone operators for instance, who must have taken great risks.

Then, having been noticed by an old friend of Father's who was finding people for a new secretariat section in the War Cabinet Office, I was transferred. That was where I worked on supplies to and from the overseas territories of Belgium and France.

That was the first time I learned about the French Cameroons—the need for things like the various kinds of cotton prints which supposely encouraged 'the natives' to produce cash crops, for machetes and spare parts. I sent to the Naval Intelligence people for books about all these places: the Belgian Congo, Madagascar, French West and Equatorial Africa. I was, at the same time, working with the Free French forces and civilians concerned about their colonies. At the end of the war and after the liberation of Europe, I went back to journalism for a bit, this time employed by Daily News Ltd., until I was willingly lured back into the Civil Service as a temporary officer in the Colonial Office.

Colonial Office, 1947

The Colonial Office was a rather intellectual establishment in the old-fashioned way that Oxbridge is supposed to be in detective stories. My superiors were a scholarly lot and keen that younger administrators should know what they were talking about. Shop was talked, books lent, exercises set; there was an excellent library. So I was prepared for academic life to some extent. I became, in time, secretary of the Colonial Social Science Research Council, an advisory body which supervised research plans. This meant that one met many academic characters, such as E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Daryll Forde, Raymond Firth, Audrey Richards, and Margery Perham, and had to follow their arguments. The Colonial Office, seeing that I was genuinely interested in what they were saying, told me I could go to evening classes and lectures at the London School of Economics. Here I was put in the charge of Lucy Mair. So I went to the LSE, in the evenings, heard lectures by Edmund Leach and the fatherly Isaac Schapera, attended seminars and wrote papers. There were other people about, too. Maurice

Freedman was there, and I became great friends with Audrey Richards and Lucy Mair. They couldn't stand each other, those two; it was a well-known aversion.

Part of the research effort of the Colonial Office was connected with the great effort to establish local universities and provide them with teaching materials. I wasn't much involved in the politics of the decolonization process, but the Council was feeding research into it and setting up local research institutes. So you might say it was rather like both writing a Doomsday book and preparing university-educated elites. I wrote a memory piece about it for an LSE seminar which was published with others in *Anthropological Forum* in 1977. A good part of the job was getting the funds for the research institutes and individual projects through the Treasury. The research people engaged included ex-service men like Jack Goody, Paul Baxter and Mike Smith, as well as more recent graduates. A fair number of Americans were recruited too.

I first met the Australian Phyllis Kaberry in 1951 while I was at the Colonial Office, when she had completed the first draft of her *Women of the Grassfields*. One of my tasks was to get field reports into a publishable state; so I rang her up to ask her to come over and vet layout changes I had made and agree on illustrations. At much the same time I made friends with an American Fulbright Fellow, a fiery spirit named Ruth Landes, who had worked on the Ojibwa and in Brazil and was studying race relations in the UK. She introduced me to the classic American anthropological literature of the time. Both she and Phyllis were in and out of our house. Between them they improved my education. I was also sent on conference and business trips to Uganda, Kenya and to Nigeria, and, at the invitation of the Carnegie Dominions and Colonies Fund, to the USA to learn what was going on in American universities—in African studies in particular. There were also arrangements with French and Belgian official bodies for exchanges of information on research. Well, I was getting tired of being a reporter of other people's work and beginning to feel ashamed of dealing with the needs of institutions or regions without first-hand experience.

By 1957 I had been invited to come to Oxford to the Institute of Colonial Studies, which became Commonwealth Studies. The Colonial Service, then being indigenized, were trained here and at other universities. The task was to organize courses and research seminars for them. It was both a winding down and a winding up, in which the civil services of the newly independent countries were to be offered transitional opportunities for training and, later, attachments for special study. At the same time a merger with Queen Elizabeth House, which was to become the University's centre for all manner of development studies, was carried through.

Phyllis had already been planning to return to the Grassfields, Nso' in particular, and suggested I should join her during the long vacation, which was now possible. I had it in mind to make a documentary study of the archives of the three divisions and to try and observe local reactions to the

very rapid changes in the style of imperial rule taking place—on paper, at all events.

Cameroon

The first time I went out was for a mere two months in 1958. On that first field trip Phyllis was getting back into Nso' and had gone out earlier. I went by air to Kano, Lagos, hedge-hopping to Tiko airfield. A kind friend at UAC (United Africa Company) had arranged a lift to Bamenda for me.

The quickest route was through the French side; and somewhere near Babadju, we skidded off the road and were rescued by a French junior officer in a kepi, with much whistle-blowing and shouting. He, with his comfortable wife, gave us tea. This trivial incident remains in my mind because I was struck by the difference of style—the Frenchman more authoritarian, more demonstrative and more at home, in a more modest house, right next to a school, than his British counterpart. His wife was making a pastry. It was an unpretentious domestic scene.

In 1958, and later, there was a certain feeling that great transformations were at hand—all children would go to school, hospitals would be free, a lot of cargo would appear, etc. This applied mainly, of course, to young educated males, but it provoked a sort of reaction too that the past would be forgotten, and we were asked to record it. At one point we found a barricade across the road, surrounded by men who insisted that we turn off to visit Bamessing to 'take history'.

There were other effervescences, such as *anlu*,[1] directed as much against some of the new elite as the retreating colonial power, while old quarrels were revived and argued in the courts. We were classified as historians. In schools, the desire for local history, written down, arose at the same time as the call for independence—I mean the notion of the history of small groups, which had already been encouraged by the Colonial Education Department—going to a village on the spot and not doing it from the documents. So far as I was concerned, 'oral history', to start with, was less important than trying to understand resistances and accommodations to German and British imperial rule and the interpretations put on them by both parties.

In Bamenda, after I had explained my project to the District Officer, I was given complete *carte blanche* to look over the files, other than those in current use, and even encouraged to take away as many as could be fitted into Phyllis's Land Rover. We went to Nso' loaded to the brim with files. In Nso' I soon found myself locally involved—with Phyllis's induction as

1. The so-called women's revolt; see e.g. Ardener 1975.

Yaa woo kov (titular Queen Mother) and the preparations for it, with streams of visitors and the activities of the newly formed Nso' History Society. The *Ndzëëndzëv* dispute was on, too.[2] I was another pair of ears for the contestants. We stayed in the Basel Mission Rest House, to which many people came, quite a few with letters to be written. Fon Sembum III himself came secretly after nightfall, often depressed and worried (and often rightly), with his exhausted attendants, who curled up and slept on the floor. In addition to the office files I was working on, we set to work on the Nso' tax records and the arrangements behind them, which, so far as I was concerned, led me into a more detailed inquiry into how accommodations were made to colonial demands as well as providing a social geography of Nso'. When I got back, I tried a first draft on an Oxford seminar, and then Phyllis and I pared it down for publication in *Africa*.

Next time (1960), I went out for longer, to finish the colonial administration job, start on the Bali chiefdom, and visit areas in divisions other than the southernmost Bamenda Division. By this time Edwin and Shirley Ardener were creating the Archives at Buea, so it was possible to start work there, and fill in gaps. Buea was beautiful and damp—I recall opening a cupboard to discover that the pretty print dresses I had brought out were covered with mould.

This time Phyllis collected me, and we drove up via Kumba and the Mamfe road, crossing the iron bridge built by the British during the First World War, with hippos and crocs below, and inching round the hairpin bends on the Widekum–Bali stretch. Again, there was no difficulty in getting access to files, this time to the more detailed Native Authority files. I got through a vast number by reading them into a tape recorder whenever possible. From Bamenda we made a joint visit to Bafut and Bafreng, then Phyllis dropped me off at Mankon and went off to Nso' and Bamunka. Later, I was picked up again, went to Nso' and from there visited Ndu, Mbot, Ntem, and the Nkambe archives, and we went for a stay in Bum, an astonishing place. By this time I was collecting material everywhere on pre- and early-colonial regional trade and gift-exchange. Finally I was dropped off at Bali-Nyonga where Phyllis later joined me, and there made a start, with great help from Mfon Galega II. It's a cosmopolitan place, where everybody, almost, claimed to originate from somewhere else, and where there were some nonagenarians who had known the explorer Zintgraff. It was in that year too that we went to Belo to stay with the hospitable Schneiders and visited Laikom, where Gil Schneider arranged for us to be shown the royal statue that later became known as the Afo-a-Kom. By this time, of course, we had given up the idea of monographic studies—of Nso' and Bali, say—for a more regional survey approach, though as yet without much in the way of linguistic clues to guide us.

2. This was a dispute about the occupancy of the position of *Ndzëëndzëv*, the purported Nso' 'kingmaker'.

By the end of 1961 I had completed the Oxford task and moved back to London, where Kenneth Robinson kindly gave me an attachment as Research Fellow to the London Institute of Commonwealth Studies. This was ideal for preparation for the next trip with Phyllis. I learnt some linguistics at SOAS, read and re-read the German and French materials, what missionary material I could lay hands on, and tooth-combed Phyllis's and my notes. By this time too we were in touch with Claude Tardits and exchanging information.

We were back in 1963 for a longer period, in a now independent and federal Cameroon, revisiting some areas and making a foray into the Wum Division, including Kom. We went out by ship, with a Land Rover and a full kit. By this time, of course, we had come to know the ministers then in power and were given all necessary help, even being helpfully met at the docks by Mr Lafon (Faay Lii Wong) of Nso' and Mr Daiga of Bali. Mr Jua's help in Kom was essential and we were exceedingly lucky in our interpreter, E. K. Fombang, who had excellent English, as you can see from the vocabulary I collected from him. His father, a son of Foyn Yu, was enormously bright and wise and enjoyed teasing us. His son saw to it that we made no mistakes in etiquette. We visited Mme, Funggom and Bunaki, and I had a useful stint in the Wum archives. There had been various other strokes of luck. In London I had met two students to whom I owed introductions to Ku (Meta') and Bali-Gham, and on my return to Bali-Nyonga I found myself assigned to the care of the stately Do Paul Tita Sikod, a member of the customary court, in whose quarter I lived, and when he was busy I had other excellent helpers. I was allowed to join a local society and so became familiar to people. The language of Bali, Munggaka, is comparatively easy. I had a smattering of it, and when I attempted to say anything this was fun for everybody. 'You are speaking Church Bali,' they said.

I am making this survey job sound like a success story—there were hold-ups, failures and car troubles. Whole areas remained unvisited—Esu was being covered by the Ardeners, but more time should have been spent in Funggom and Wum. I wish Igor Kopytoff could have stayed in Wum longer and unravelled it further before getting ill. We got very little in Babungo—except charter-myths over and over again but now we have Ian Fowler's thesis. Practically nothing was done on the Yamba, but now Father Gufler is there, so look out for his work in *Anthropos* (1995, 1996).[3] And also, there were distractions from what we were supposed to be at—a reconstructive survey of political systems and their adaptations under colonial rule. There were the farmer-grazier conflicts; the creeping changes in land tenure; the helter-skelter attempt at the introduction of Local Government, British style (a chapter since forgotten); the persistence of old quarrels now recorded in the local press; the seductions of ministerial office—let alone *anlu*. Since the survey was done—with few resources—

3. See also the article by Gufler below, pp. 43–67.

there have, of course, been major monographic studies and specialized papers. You have to think of *Traditional Bamenda* as something on the lines of the International Africa Institute Ethnographic Surveys, what Audrey Richards gaily called 'hoovering over the top'. One would rewrite it from start to finish now.

Mostly I walked everywhere. Phyllis used to drop me and basic kit in the Land Rover and then come back and pick me up and move me somewhere else, like a cat with kittens.

We came back by boat to Liverpool. I was as thin as a rake, having acquired an interesting parasite. At the Tropical Diseases Hospital, I luckily fell into the hands of an Indian registrar who had written a thesis on it; he was delighted to meet it again. I found it very hard to adjust for a while. I started trying to make a first draft of the survey, surrounded by notebooks, earlier summaries, tapes and cups of tea; Phyllis was to edit, revise and add to it, and I compiled a report for the Bali History Committee, corresponded with its members and sent them bits to comment on.

Post-Cameroon

Quite early on in 1964, to my surprise, I was invited to meet the Council of Bedford College (London University). They asked me for a c.v. and after that asked me formally if I would accept the post of principal. I don't know in the least who suggested me. It had just become a mixed college—the statutes had been changed—in so far as the student body was concerned, after having been a pioneer in women's higher education in this country, starting in 1849, giving its own diplomas. It took a long time for women to be admitted to degrees—that honour goes to Trinity College, Dublin. But the faculty had always been mixed at Bedford College.

Why did I accept the offer? Well, it was an honour, and I had no professional qualifications as either an ethno- or a grapho-historian—had not undergone any of the *rites de passage* in the proper way. My career, such as it was, had been more administrative than academic. I kept running away from the desk but I earned my living as an administrator. This was an administrative job and I was lucky in having very good staff to work with, as well as some very remarkable academic colleagues. The London colleges are of various shapes and sizes. This was a complete little campus with over 2,000 students. So there was everything to do from finding rugby pitches to places for electron microscopes, and a good deal of scope.

We had some excitements in 1968. They say 'revolutions start in the Department of Philosophy.' But it didn't last very long, as demands for student representation were easily met. When you are in this sort of job, you are a sitting duck to be put on government committees in addition to university ones, and some were very interesting indeed. One—a Royal

Commission—took me to Turkey, Israel and Malta, another to Moscow. There was also an enjoyable stint as a trustee of the British Museum.

After seven years I moved, in 1971, to Oxford to be Principal of Lady Margaret Hall, then still a wholly women's college—a very different scene and in a way more alarming. The University's system of government has been described as an ordered anarchy—a rather ritualized one in some ways. It works because of an invisible administration, ease of personal contact, and a good deal of devotion to duty. Before long, there were mounting pressures for colleges to 'go mixed', the men's colleges leading the way. Given the structure of the University, 'going mixed' meant co-residence and the introduction of men Fellows in women's colleges and vice versa in men's. There were other means of 'going mixed' which were never seriously considered, since collegiate identities were far too strong. And once the determination of some of the men's colleges to admit women and make at least a few elections of women to Fellowships was clear and presented on liberal grounds, some of the women's colleges began, one by one, to follow suit. 'Going mixed' was seen as the progressive, politically correct thing. It was a strong, if confused current, welcome to most undergraduates as emancipatory.

Once Lady Margaret Hall had voted for co-residence a new face was needed, and anyway I was 65, time to retire. Towards the end of my time, in 1979, we had our centenary, a great show with fireworks and music. By this time I had bought this little house to escape to with my files. So now I was backwards and forwards to London. But Phyllis had died in 1977 after a series of depressing illnesses from about 1973 on—it was a stroke. Mike Rowlands was her executor. Boxes of her Cameroon papers arrived—she had left them to the LSE, or rather to the British Library of Political and Economic Science within it. David Price, then a postgraduate student at the Institute of Social Anthropology, was installed in the attic and showed marvellous talents as an archivist. The papers—fieldnotes and correspondence—are now at the LSE and usable, but the tapes, alas, have perished.

Her death was a blow. I have, off and on, been transcribing and indexing some of her notes, and mine, for her benefit: sometimes combining them into topical sets to work on jointly as well as for use in the network of exchanges she had begun, both with Cameroon students and others. I temporarily inherited this informal network; but now it has greatly expanded following the CNRS conference on history and ethnology in Cameroon organized by Claude Tardits in 1973, Warnier's initiative in 1978 and the new approaches from Leiden and the USA, but also because of initiatives from inside Cameroon itself and its diaspora.

After Richard's death in 1985 I sold the London flat and moved my working books and papers to Oxford. I'm still sorting them here. I don't see myself writing my own Grassfield pieces. If I were thirty years younger now, what would I have done? I would have liked then to work more on Nso' or rather on Mbiame, Nkar, Nsë and the Noni chiefdoms, especially Nkor, a trade-centre, and then on to the northern and north-western sur-

rounding areas, and at the same time on the interesting disturbances, rebellions and alignments created by the entry of the missions. We were only too aware that we were 'hoovering over the top', doing a kind of handing-over job for others to take up. Still, there would have been masses of other projects to consider. There are still huge holes in that Grassfields map with its accidental frontiers—Dumbo, Misaje, Mbembe, Esimbi, northern Fung-gom, the Mashi-Furu-Nser area up to the Katsena, for example, and the northern escarpment area and immediate 'overside'. Very stout boots are needed still, I gather. But I'll interject here that apart from the Banyang, the 'overside' area north of the Cross is, I think, a virtual blank in the literature as yet, apart from administrative reports. So there is still room for new studies. Yes, even in get-at-able parts of the Ndop Plain, as well as revisits to places for which there are older studies—for example, Nsei, studied by Agathe Schmidt in the thirties. The wealth of cosmological material to be found 'off the road' is surely shown by Viviane Baeke's work on the Wuli of Mfumte,[4] and for some unexpected findings see Bertrand Masquelier's remarkable work on a Metchum valley polity.

But this is not to deny for an instant the need for problem-oriented work or re-studies at intervals in areas about which a good deal is already known, or, say, of comparative studies of marriage or mortuary rituals, with some time depth.

I am conscious of being stuck in the early sixties. But Cameroonian colleagues remain interested, indeed almost fixated on that period, one in which the options before them were essentially dictated from outside.

I think if we were starting again I would be less surprised than I was at first by the varying interpretations of institutions and events we received, sometimes from the same person, and the difference between what is supposed to happen and what actually does happen on a particular occasion. One soon recognizes the clichés, including one's own.

I don't think I shall be writing anything new on local history. All the main points I would wish to illustrate about oral history have been made by David Henige and illustrated in Ranger and Hobsbawm's collection and in Jan Vansina's revised book. Of course, I remain interested in who is 'making the history' now. One should be reading the plays, novels and novelettes, too, to pick up the current clichés of the neo-traditional revival, and the local newspapers. The feedback loops are more complicated than ever.

4. See also her article below in this issue, pp. 21–41.

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JASO 26/1 (1995): 21–41

WULI WITCHCRAFT

VIVIANE BAEKE

Introduction

THE Mfumte form a cultural, linguistic and administrative entity consisting of thirteen villages. Their territory is bordered in the north by the river Donga, the natural border with Nigeria, with the territories of the Mbembe in the northwest, the Limbum in the southwest, and the Yamba and Mambila in the southeast.

The Wuli constitute the population of one of these thirteen villages. They number nearly 4,000 and live on either side of the wooded banks of the Mamfe river, a tributary of the Donga. Today, despite their large numbers, they form a single village community (Lus on the regional geographical maps) subdivided into ten areas or hamlets, each comprising from three to ten units of resident lineages. The lineages and lineage segments are patrilineal and patrilocal. The Wuli practise an almost exclusive village endogamy and more than fifty per cent of marriages occur within the same village or hamlet. The elders maintain that they ignored the institution of chiefship before the German colonization and that all important decisions concerning the village were taken in councils held by the 'fathers', that is to say, the most important members of *ku* or *ro* initiation societies. Three chiefs have served as head of the village this century. This new institution created its own emblems, regalia, status, rights and duties, inspired by neighbouring traditional chiefships, principally that of Limbum. Today the chief of the village serves as the official intermediary between the Wuli and the modern administrative structure of Cameroon.

Witchcraft and Anti-Witchcraft

A Wuli myth relates the confrontation which took place between the two demiurges *Nui Ndu*, the spirit of water, and *Nui Manka*, the evil spirit. The object of this cosmic battle was mastery of the universe and more precisely the creation of living beings. The water spirit won by pouring streams of water over the fire which had been started by the evil spirit. After these events, the first three men came out of a water hole to people the earth. This victory of the water spirit over the spirit of witchcraft is considered a precarious one by the Wuli, one which is constantly being challenged. Since these primeval times, the water spirits have multiplied; they are responsible for women's fecundity and hence for the multiplication of human beings. *Nui Manka* is still pursuing its evil task by giving evil powers to human beings while they are still in their mother's womb: it remodels embryos by giving them extra sets of internal organs or by abnormally shaping their organs. These physiological abnormalities then become the seat of diverse supernatural evil abilities.

To fight the witches' activities, the water spirits help human beings by granting their own powers to certain ritual objects manipulated by the members of the *ro* initiation societies. These ritual objects may be small figures of fired clay or wood, masks of wood and woven fibres, calabash megaphones or iron bells, according to which initiation society they belong to (there are seven in Lus). A few important initiates, the 'fathers', are the guardians of these objects, which they keep in sanctuaries throughout the village; the other initiates are only users, not keepers. During the manufacture of these objects, a chicken must be sacrificed, transferring its ritual potency: the blood running over the objects allows their penetration by the water spirits. After this ritual of investiture, the initiates carefully store the objects away from the sight of women, children and non-initiates.

The aim of the rites performed by the initiates with the help of these objects is to protect a person and his family from any future evil act or, if the person is already ill, to persuade the witch who cast the spell to stop his destructive action. In both cases, the healer-initiates use mostly dissuasion by means of powerful words uttered in public, reinforced by the use of charms associated with ritual objects, which threaten the witches with one of the illnesses that the *rovo* can cause. The imprudent witch who continues to 'drink' the blood of his victim after this public announcement will invariably die, as a result of either the *ro* charms or the action of the other witches.

A fairly precise nosological code guides the seers in their diagnoses. Only certain illness can be caused by the witches, generally the most dangerous or those from which one dies most quickly (for example, smallpox, dysentery, tuberculosis, high fever, generalized oedema or weakness). As for the seven initiation societies, they can each bestow a specific illness (ascite or 'swollen belly', elephantiasis, abscess, swollen limbs or extremities, painful joints, palpitations, loss of manual dexterity, etc.). However,

in some cases the witches can also cause the illness that is specific to an initiatory association.

The Wuli distinguish several categories among the supernatural powers which the *Nui Manka* spirit has bestowed on certain men and women. These powers range from the witchcraft which destroys human lives, the most dangerous, to the power to seize one's neighbours' potential game, destroy their harvest or devour their domestic animals. They all have the reputation of being dangerous; all are illicit, although not all are disowned by society with the same strength and some even have an ambiguous ethical position.

Each type of evil power has its seat within a different physiological abnormality of the internal body organs which allows the subject to 'metamorphose' (*byitə*) into a supernatural being who generally assumes an animal form. The name of the host animal is also used to designate each particular occult power with the exception of the most dangerous of all, which is known by a specific name: *ɾɛ*.

Man-eating Witchcraft

Of all evil powers the *ɾɛ* occupies a particular position, being the only one to attack human beings and also the only one capable of spreading illness and death among them. It designates an evil force destructive of human lives and is violently disowned by society. I use the term witchcraft for this power only. Those who possess this power, the true *bire* witches (e.g. *nwire*), must be fought by any means.

The exercise of this power, exclusively nocturnal, allows the witch to metamorphose into an owl (*wu*), leopard (*bwʉ*) or dog (*mvə*) in order to come to his victim's bedside and transmit an illness. This evil will inevitably bring the sick person to death if the witch maintains control. The witch chooses a victim in a complex process in which personal enmities and rivalry between the victim and the aggressor do not play a direct role. In fact, witches are perpetually on the look-out for words uttered in public during family reunions, ritual assemblies, feasts and discussions. On these occasions, one can sometime hear slander or gossip about a breach of custom or some transgressions that someone has committed. In general, these conversations reveal a conflict between two persons, a person and a group or two groups: a woman and her mother-in-law, the parents of a woman and the lineage of her husband, who have not paid bridewealth in full, a man and the whole of his agnate's wives, the latter against one of them, etc. These 'powerful' words (*bɛ fansə*) often expressed in anger, are dangerous because they are uttered in public, revealing a weakness in the social structure which the witch can then exploit. His future victims can only be the members of the household of the person who has just been put

on the spot by a public statement. If a man is openly accused of not having paid all of the bridewealth to his father-in-law, witches may attack him or, more often, his children. Therefore, witches do not obey their own vindictive urges, but follow the path of other peoples' enmities, disagreements and jealousies. The expression used by a person being accused of witchcraft is 'Your speech draws the attention of the witches on to me.' This means that witches will attack a person because of dangerous statements made by another. The witch needs a link in the form of verbal aggression in order to attack. If such dangerous speech occurs the accused will ask the accuser to perform a ritual of reconciliation during which the latter withdraws the statement, thereby showing that they do not want witchcraft to enter the house of the person whose faults were revealed in public. When witchcraft is invoked during a meeting called to determine the origin of an illness, those who utter imprudent words are severely criticized, as are the witches who turn this verbal aggression into physical aggression. Criticism must also be made with discretion, so that no witch can hear it.

This impersonal process by which the witch chooses his victim is the most frequently mentioned kind of bewitchment. But there are other mechanisms through which the witch is forced to attack certain victims. Witches have a duty to avenge the members of their lineages for acts of witchcraft committed by their affines. A woman beaten by her husband because of supposed adultery is afraid of being attacked by the witches of her husband's lineage; she is convinced that if she dies, one of her brothers will avenge her by killing one of her husband's sisters by witchcraft. In this particular case, the evil action is invoked before any sign of witchcraft (illness) has manifested itself. The strong statement which, in previous cases, was only slander, gossip or the public revelation of error, now becomes a threat of witchcraft.

In all cases, *rɛ* witches always begin by 'drinking the blood' of their victims, who are then infected with a debilitating illness which ultimately kills them. This intermediary step acts like an alarm system. The diviners are consulted, a meeting is called and different groups or persons in conflict explain their case. The meeting generally ends with a healing ritual, performed by an initiate of a *ro* association, which aims to frighten the witches and to persuade them to release their hold over the victim.

There is another category of bewitchment which, unlike the two already mentioned, is not the consequence of any strong statement or particular social conflict. The *rɛ* witches who take part in certain cannibalistic feasts with other witches have to bring a victim, one of their children or a close agnate, as compensation for future nocturnal meals. This act of witchcraft within the descent group generally has the immediate effects of a sudden illness leading to death. Unlike vengeful evil acts towards allies, the possibility of killing one's own children or agnates by witchcraft is only mentioned in public to deny it. For the witch, it is the price paid for power. A network of reciprocity among consanguines is

therefore opened in the world of the night, one which is simultaneously parallel and antinomical to the network of reciprocity of institutions, filiation and alliances which govern the social relations which take place during the day.

The realisation that one has been bewitched occurs while dreaming. Certain nightmares, accompanied upon waking by the first pathological signs of an illness, are indicators that the body of the dreamer has fallen prey to a witch. The *bire* act completely anonymously. No one ever admits to possessing this power and precise accusations are rare. The seers merely mention the number of witches, their sex, and the lineage the evil attacks come from. Precise accusations were formerly more frequent but still did not lead to proceedings. Men and women who had been personally accused by a member of their own lineage could decide to submit to an ordeal to maintain the unity of the family group, though they could not be forced to do so. Also, whether the accused was found innocent or guilty, the accuser had to give some goats to his lineage as an indemnity, either for unjust accusation or for having caused the death of a member of the kin group through the ordeal. The ordeal consisted of taking a poison extracted from the bark of a tree, *Erythrophleum guineense*. Nowadays, a ritual called kɛkɛ takes place when a diviner has revealed that a patient is bewitched: all the persons present declare over the medicine of initiatory *ro* societies—as elsewhere over the Bible—that they have not bewitched the patient. If the witch has 'sworn' and still maintains his hold over the victim, then the charm will kill him.

Apart from the ordeal, which has now disappeared, the only certain way to detect the *rɛ* witchcraft power of a deceased person is to perform an autopsy to reveal any physiological abnormality bearing the power. This abnormality, called *gelengu*, designates the auricle of the heart when it is shaped like a cockscomb. Such an abnormality allows a person to change into an owl, leopard or dog, an action described by the verb *byitə*.

The notion of person is important to understanding the mechanism of bewitchment. The human being comprises a body (*mani*), a 'breath' or 'principle of movement, mobility' (*zi*) and a 'principle of life' or 'heart' (*mbɔ*, heart in the sense of centre). The breath, as the principle of life, resides with the heart (*mbɔkɣi*, with the sense of the organ). The 'breath' leaves the body through the mouth during sleep; it wanders like a cloud in the bush. On waking, it returns to the body through the eyes, which then open. At the time of death, it leaves the body for good, wandering here and there before vanishing. The 'breath' can only cease to function, lose its strength or, more frequently, be torn off or stolen by the witches who destroy human lives, which they do by taking some hair from the victim, who is often already ill, during the night. Loss of consciousness and delirium are signs that the 'breath' has been stolen, and death will follow unless it is restored quickly. However, to steal a person's 'breath' is the final phase of a bewitchment. A witch begins by causing an illness, which is called 'sucking the blood'. At this stage, the victim is 'taken' but is not

yet in mortal danger. Although weakened by illness, the bewitched remain conscious and retain their psychological integrity, or 'breath'. The 'breath' plays only a passive role in the mechanism of bewitchment in so far as witches attack their victims during sleep, when the breath has left the body.

Remarkably, as well as their life principle and their breath, the *rɛ* witches possess the faculty of secreting, of giving form and movement to an entity called *manka*, which they 'send', 'create' or 'give birth to' (*bo manka*) either when they themselves are dying or at the time of death of other people. In this last case, the *manka* is the product of the witch's evil power and of certain characteristic traits of the deceased, such as their physical appearance and memory. This entity is invisible to all except witches and diviner-magicians,[1] and is a kind of white ghost taking on the form and traits of the deceased; this ghost will wander inside the deceased's courtyard and will haunt the immediate relatives night and day until the end of the funerary rites are finished. Then the *manka* will rejoin and associate with the deceased's *zi* breath and wander forever in the bush, except in some particular cases which we will discuss below. This ghost to whom the witches give life, but in the likeness of the deceased, does not to my knowledge correspond to any concept linked to the human person.[2]

The *manka* is a complex entity which only manifests itself to humans for a short while during funerals and reveals itself by creating a draught and a strong smell of palm oil. Although harmless in itself, it none the less frightens everybody, because, born from the will of the witches, it is a cog of the witchcraft mechanism. They are, in a way, the invisible support of the ever-present powerful words which the dead uttered during their life, because, as we have seen, these powerful words are the basis of the mechanism of witchcraft and mark the victims of future evil actions. The *manka* is, rather than a spirit-double, the memory of the dead, which the Wuli always perceive as a menace. The witches also use the statements of the dead as well as those of the living. Moreover, as they get older, the elders multiply their injunctions, intimidations (they publicly threaten people with misfortune which will occur after their own death) and prohibi-

1. Called *mantacho*, these diviners have the same powers as the witches but only use them in a socially approved manner to heal or mend the misfortune caused by the *rɛ* witches.

2. There is nevertheless the interesting case of Bangwa, a Bamileke chiefship. On the one hand, a kind of exclusively male witchcraft, *sue*, allows its beholder to appear 'as a white shape similar to our half-visible ghosts'. On the other hand, the double—or more precisely the undercover—of the *ŋgankan* healers, in contrast to that of other people, changes upon their death into *ghangami*. The Bangwa think of this feared entity 'as a white silhouette similar to that which accompanies the witches who belong to the house of *sue'*. It must be ritually chased out of the village after the burial ceremony because it can bring a kind of shame. The *ŋgankan*, although outside witchcraft, are respected but fearsome magicians who are capable of changing into wild animals.

tions (for example, a grandson must not marry a woman from a certain lineage). The presence of the deceased's ghost at their funeral is a reminder that witches have no intention of forgetting his statements. The transgression of oaths made by the deceased, of rules and prohibitions which he decreed when he was alive, are all open to the witches' evil actions, just as are the statements of the living. But whereas the statements of the living, young or old, men or women, are all 'heard', only the threats from important elders are truly 'registered' after their death. It is often said that the ghosts of persons long dead often come and join that of the newly deceased during a funeral; also, as long as there remains a single person who can remember someone long dead, the witches can summon the *manka* of that dead person during a funeral. However, according to some people, a *manka*'s period of activity does not exceed five years. When a child dies, since they did not live long enough to utter many powerful words, the ghosts of the long dead come to haunt the funeral to recall their own dangerous and strong statements. It is also said that the *manka* haunt the funeral more if the family of the deceased has been unjust, wrong or ungrateful towards them. The dead, through the intermediary of their *manka* manipulated by the witches, are dangerous for the living.

The corpse decomposes in the tomb but nevertheless remains for a time the seat of the memory of the dead, in particular the powerful words they uttered. Curiously, if the witches remember because they have 'heard', the dead remember because they continue to 'see' what their next of kin are doing. Memory moves from the auditory to the visual. The Wuli have no ancestor cult and the dead are only solicited to be asked to forget about the living or, more precisely, to 'close their eyes' (*kɣiləmi*) on the actions of the living. Certain rituals take place for this reason only, on the recent tombs of important deceased: to 'close their eyes' on past statements or oaths. If the deceased 'close their eyes', forget, they, the witches, will also forget. If the deceased are obstinate and 'keep their eyes open', their agnates will ask a stranger to the village to open the tomb and remove the skull from the skeleton of this troublesome dead and then go into the bush and lay it on the ground among the roots of a big tree.

Manka ghosts have a final noteworthy characteristic. After the funeral, the ghost of the deceased joins the *zi* in the bush, but if the deceased was a 'father' in a *ro* initiation association, that is to say a guardian of a sanctuary and keeper of *ro* objects (see above), then the *manka* is captured by the water spirits who inhabit these objects and joins the *manka* of previous keepers. One of the rules of the *ro* associations is that a son succeeds his father. There is no ancestor cult but there is a lineage of *manka* which ensures the efficiency of anti-witchcraft associations. The *manka* entity, subjugated by the water spirits, is granted the power to cause illness by entering the ritual sphere of *ro*. We see here a division of labour: the *manka* cause illness, the water spirits cure them (see also Baeke 1985).

Further elaboration of the Wuli notion of the person may be helpful in our understanding of the mechanism of bewitchment. The term *mbɔ*,

which defines the 'breath' and, by extension, the heart in which it resides, designates at the same time the kernel of the palm nut. It is there that the *rɛ* witches hide the 'breath' of their victim by placing within it a lock of their hair that the witch has stolen. But it is also said that when a witch has stolen the 'heart' of a person (i.e. the 'breath'), the 'skin' (*ngo*) may also be seized. This term designates the external envelope of the body, its physical appearance as well as certain personality traits (the voice, etc.). The 'breath' is therefore both the strength and internal energy of a person and some external characteristics; the heart is its seat, the growing hair the visible external metonymical sign.

When the *mbɔ* or 'breath' of a person is captured and 'devoured' by a witch, this person, deprived of this essential part, dies. However, it is also said that the whole person is 'eaten' by the witches, heart, flesh and bones. The autopsy of a presumed witch reveals precise details concerning which parts of the body of his victims he ate; if the heart of the deceased contains a blood clot in the shape of a frog this indicates that they have 'consumed' a child.

To sum up, we can say that the 'breath' or *mbɔ* is defined in different ways depending on the context or the point of view. When it is at one with the body, it is a constituent element of the person and resides in the heart. When the two entities of body and 'breath' are separated, the latter is the whole person in the invisible world of the witches, whereas in the world of the non-witches it is materialized in a lock of hair enclosed in the kernel of a palm nut which is hidden in the bush or in the village.

The body of the victim is the object of symbolic action where metonymy and food metaphors mingle. When a person is ill, it is said that a witch is 'drinking their blood'. When the patient has lost consciousness, is delirious or is at death's door, it is said that the witch 'stole their heart' by taking a lock of hair in a supernatural way, which is a metonymical indication of their 'breath'. Finally, the victim dies, 'eaten' by the witch.

Metonymy and food metaphor are connected in a ritual called *bɛʃɔ*, during which a magician-diviner (*ŋwimantafɔ*) captures and destroys the evil part of a *rɛ* witch who is responsible for a recent death. This ritual is often organized when the victim is a child. The magician-diviner attracts the witch into a trap, whose main element is a lock of hair from the dead child. This is placed in a half-calabash partially buried in the ground. When the magician-diviner 'sees' the witch in the calabash, he 'destroys' the witch with his machete by breaking the trap-calabash and burying it in the ground. It is said that, after a few months, the witch will inevitably die of an illness specific to this ritual, *mfɔ*, or inflammation and suppuration of organs situated on either side of the depression situated under the lower ribs (infection of the lining of the lungs).

While the phenomenon of bewitchment is relatively well described by the Wuli themselves the mechanism of its action is relatively unknown. The Wuli make no precise link between the different components of a person described earlier and the transformation which takes place when be-

witchment occurs. The only precise information is as follows: witches possess the *gelengu* (an auricle of the heart in the shape of a cockscomb), and this malformation allows them to transform themselves into an owl, leopard or dog and go to the victim's bedside.

What is the origin, the exact nature of the evil entity which changes into an animal? The Wuli think that it is none other than the person himself, who, while invisible, puts on the 'skin' of an animal to commit evil. When they describe this metamorphosis the Wuli mention neither the components of a person, the body, the vital principal and breath, or the *manka*. The witch is both here and there, and that is all. During the ritual performed in order to kill a witch, the invisible entity which is trapped is the witch in person. The only details we have on this matter come from the description of the ritual associated with the death of a leopard. A leopard-hunt is generally only undertaken when one is seen on the outskirts of a village, thus demonstrating that it has been invested by a witch (the last leopard seen in the region of Lus was killed in 1979). As soon as the animal has succumbed to the hunters' spears, its heart is quickly brought back to the village, where the hunter's father cooks and eats it the same evening. The speed of the operation ensures that the witch who had borrowed the 'skin' of the feline and whose 'heart' had therefore mingled with that of the animal does not have the time to retrieve their own 'heart' and escape this death by proxy. This suggests that it is the 'breath', residing in the heart, which leaves the body during the evil wanderings of a witch. We have seen that the evil power of witches is linked to a physiological abnormality of the heart. To be a witch would therefore mean having the ability to separate the 'breath' from the body without harming oneself—unlike non-witches, who would lose consciousness, fall in a coma and find themselves at death's door.

Other Evil Powers

As well as *rɛ*, there are other minor evil powers which give their owners supernatural access to belongings, harvests, game, wine, cattle, etc. The first thing to note about these powers is that, unlike *rɛ* witchcraft, they are active by day as well as by night.

Apart from the *fɔ* power, which we will discuss first, they are not generally the subject of Wuli gossip. They are only considered harmful if their possessors target the territory, harvests or belongings of a village. If they exercise their talents outside Wuli territory, society's attitude towards these supernatural activities goes from reprobation to indifference, and even approbation, because the Wuli think that these powers can bring abundance to the village when they are exercised outside their territory.

To distinguish the possessors of these powers from the *rɛ* witches, who destroy human life, I shall call them 'witch-thieves'.

For each of these minor forms of witchcraft we can establish a precise link between the animal whose 'skin' the witch has borrowed, the physiological abnormality which is the origin of his power, and the nature of the power. These three concepts, indissolubly linked, bear the same name, usually that of the animal, the object of the 'metamorphosis' or 'transfer'.

The ensemble of hosts used by witch-thieves constitute a bestiary representing some of the regional fauna, either carnivores who decimate the livestock or hunt the same game animals as man, or grain- or fruit-eaters who take man's food reserves.

Nevertheless, there is great disparity behind this appearance of unity. There are significant differences between the various forms of minor witchcraft, on both the level of the attitude of the social group towards them and the level of the activities which are attributed to them. The mechanisms through which these witch-thieves steal are different whichever category they belong to.

One person may possess just one of these powers, or several of them or even all of them. Autopsies, which are performed on all the dead—men, women and children—reveal the powers the deceased possessed; each supernatural agency has its power from the physiological 'double' residing in a specific part of the internal organs. We will now examine the different types of these minor forms of witchcraft.

The *fɔ* minor witchcraft: harvests versus fertility

There are three kinds of associated powers under this generic term: *fɔ* itself, *sɔŋbwɔ* and *soləŋba*. They are generally indissociable and allow their possessors to steal harvests of corn, sorghum, vegetables or root crops, as well as crops which are picked in the bush.

The term *fɔ*, which here designates a kind of bird (unidentified), also means work in the fields and sections of the bush that will soon be cultivated. *Sɔŋbwɔ* is the name of another (unidentified) bird and means 'who steals in the bush (*mbwɔ*) by supernatural means (*so*)'. These two kinds of minor witchcraft operate at different seasons: *fɔ*, when the women work in the fields, and *sɔŋbwɔ*, when the harvest is collected from the fields. The first kind of minor witchcraft is therefore associated with cultivated plants and agriculture, the other with plants which grow in the bush and are not cultivated. The 'bush' here designates cultivated fields (*nso*), potential fields (*fɔ*) and the forest or savannah which surrounds them (*ko*). This territory is the agricultural domain of women, but a part of the bush, the palm forest *koti*, which forms a dense belt around the village, is the exclusive domain of the men. Despite the clear conceptual distinction between these different zones, it is evident that in practice they overlap, at least partially. We will return to this division of space in the conclusion.

Solenbe is the name of an imaginary animal and means 'to steal carrots (*ŋbə*) in a supernatural way (*sole*)'. The carrots are planted in the clearings of the palm forests which are part of the male domain.

The *fɔ* witch-thieves are said to exercise their power as a group according to strict rules, the most important being that they must never use the products of their theft themselves but must exchange them with their partners. Moreover, their acts have metonymic force: the witch-thief need only spirit away a 'part' for the 'whole' to be destroyed, perish or fade, making it 'reappear' elsewhere. In concrete terms, all the witch has to do is set his heart on a field of sorghum for the plants to stop growing or perish, whereas the field to which the loot is destined (and which cannot be his) will see its harvest become more abundant.

In general, the 'division of labour' between the sexes disappears when it comes to the sphere of the witches' supernatural activities. Although gathering palm nuts and hunting are male activities, the minor witchcraft which steals palm wine or game can be exercised by both men and women. Similarly, agriculture is essentially a female activity, but men and women can perform the *fɔ* witchcraft which destroys harvests.

This last kind of minor witchcraft is, however, the only one to be analysed in different ways by the Wuli, depending on whether it is exercised by a man or a woman, even though the supernatural actions performed are the same. The female *fɔ* power resides in the uterus, the male *fɔ* power near the liver; *fɔ* women always possess the three powers (*fɔ*, *sɔŋbwɔ* and *soləŋba*), whereas the men only ever possess the first two. *Solenbe* is therefore a kind of minor witchcraft which is inaccessible to men. It is also the only one not to be associated with a real animal. The Wuli describe *soləŋbə* as a long, two-legged imaginary being who digs out the small *ŋbə* carrots (*phlectrenthus esculentus*, previously *coleus dazo*, commonly called 'Hausa potato') at night.

As in *rɛ* witchcraft, autopsy is the only way to discover if someone possessed these powers. In men, they are revealed as two organs (or extra numbers of organic abnormalities?), *fɔ* and *sɔŋbwɔ*, residing in a bag on the right-hand side of the abdomen, near the liver. In women, *fɔ* is composed of three extra organs coiled inside a transparent receptacle, in the left-hand side of the uterus. *Fɔ* and *sɔŋbwɔ* are described as small, elongated white, soft reticules with a mouth and teeth, whereas *soləŋbə* resembles a small snake with a fairly large head and two short legs. These imaginary beings, strange additional organs, are the internal replicas of external animal shapes, real or imaginary, which their possessor can use.

This is how the Wuli imagine the activities of the *fɔ* witches: men and women metamorphose into *fɔ* or *sɔŋbwɔ* birds, then take flight taking either their game-bag or their basket. They necessarily act as a group. When the expedition is finished they gather among the branches of a *sɔ* tree, a gathering place for *fɔ* and *sɔŋbwɔ* birds (*Bombacaceae ceiba pentandia* or Kapok tree). Here they share the loot, along the principle that no witch uses what he has stolen for his own means.

The male and female *fɔ* witches run the same risk as the *ɾɛ* witches. They are vulnerable to the medicines of the initiation societies or their maledictions. But the women who possess *fɔ* witchcraft run an even greater risk, because it is extremely dangerous for them to use the *fɔ* power when they are pregnant. If a mother-to-be joins a *fɔ* or *sɔŋbwɔ* expedition, she has to stop at a *sɔ* tree before joining the other thieves. She places her foetus there on a bed of branches and covers it with leaves to hide it from her accomplices, who would otherwise beat it to death. The mother then rejoins her companions; she will surreptitiously take back her child on her return from the expedition. Nevertheless, the mother and her future child remain exposed until the end of the pregnancy, especially at the time of birth, to the evil actions of the *fɔ*, *sɔŋbwɔ* and *soləŋbə* organs. These cohabit with the embryo in the uterus. The open mouths of these frightening entities can draw in or 'drink' the blood of the child and the water of the placenta, thus provoking a miscarriage. Above all, they can hinder the normal progress of the birth. Each element of this trio has a specific role. When the baby tries to come out, *fɔ* intercepts him and swallows the child's head in its bag-mouth. *Sɔŋbwɔ* attacks the placenta, which it presses and swallows to stop it coming out. If the placenta does not come out after the child, this is explained as the actions of *soləŋbə* biting into the umbilical cord and pulling the placenta back into the uterus. These actions can lead to the death of the mother and child or of the mother only. The placenta which does not come out is greatly feared. Old women who are said to have ritual and therapeutic knowledge and who intervene in cases of difficult birth are called *bi fi mayi*, 'those who loosen the placenta'.

For all these reasons, the Wuli never cut the umbilical cord straight after the birth but only after the placenta has come out. When the child is born at term and alive but, several hours later, the placenta is still inside the mother, the women assisting her will carefully cut the cord and immediately tie two *dɟɛ* (*Solenaceae solanum aculeastrum var. albifolium*) bush fruits to the extremity of the cord which leads to the placenta, so that *soləŋbə,* who is hiding at the back of the uterus, cannot pull it in.

If a woman does not take part in any *fɔ* activity during her pregnancy, these three physiological entities will keep 'their mouths shut' (*finsə wuwu*) and the birth will take place without incident. Although transgressing certain prohibitions or seeing certain secret *ro* objects can also be the cause of miscarriages or difficult births, *fɔ* is generally thought to be the cause of obstetric difficulties.

Among the men and women who possess *fɔ*, only pregnant women are at risk of the entities which are the origin of their power turning against them. The domain of witchcraft appears to contain a specific moral injunction to preserve the fertility of women. Unlike *fɔ* men, women are the only ones to possess *soləŋbə,* the entity which allows them to change into the imaginary animal bearing the same name and to steal *ŋbə* carrots. The Wuli do not talk a lot about this last kind of minor witchcraft, but the

women insist that this practice is the only one to provoke 'fever', a metaphor for the onset of menstruation.

It thus seems that while the practice of *fɔ* and *sɔŋbwɔ* hinders the development of pregnancy, the transformation into *soləŋbə* prevents conception or the first stage of the fertility cycle or provokes spontaneous abortions.

But why does this contraceptive witchcraft consist exclusively of stealing *ŋbə*, which are small roots of no great importance as food? In fact, the cultivation of this plant is regulated by ritual. Each year, the women work in the small fields where *ŋbə* are grown only during the annual ten-day feast called *yu-fɛmpwu-*. This takes place at the end of June or in early July and marks the break between the end of the maize season and the ritual inauguration of the sorghum season. One of the main events of this festival takes place on the third day, the celebration of all the weddings of the year. Two days and two nights of rejoicing follow, during which the young brides sleep in the hut of their mothers-in-law. On the sixth day, the women go to raise the mounds in the fields intended to receive the *ŋbə* roots. That same evening, the newly married couples spend their first night together. The cycle defined by the beginning of sowing and the end of the harvest of the carrots is about nine months. The cultivation of the carrots is therefore closely linked to the first sexual relations of young couples and their fertility. Moreover, the preparation of the root fields is a prerequisite of the preparation of the sorghum fields.

For the Wuli, the fertility of women and that of the earth are closely linked. Here we see a plant, the *ŋbə*, playing the role of catalyst in the future fertility of the sorghum fields, just as the wedding night, which is 'worked' at the same time as the carrots, will be the catalyst of the fecundity of the couples. That being the case, we can understand why to use witchcraft to steal these roots, which symbolize the fecundity of the couples, is an act which endangers witch-thieves during childbirth.

If we compare the destructive acts of the three entities under the generic term *fɔ* (two birds and a small imaginary animal which steals food) on the one hand, with the evil activities of their counterparts lodged in the uterus (two white bags and a small snake which prevent a woman from giving birth) on the other, we notice that on a symbolic level the first are a replica of the second.

We have seen that the *fɔ* bird attacks cultivated plants in the fields, *sɔŋbwɔ* destroys edible wild plants in the bush, and *soləŋbə* plunders the fields of carrots. These small fields are situated in the palm forest close to the village, which is the domain of the men; they therefore have an intermediary position between the female bush fields, away from the village, and the uncultivated forest. This area of palm trees surrounding the village is a liminal zone between the village and the distant bush where the women work their fields. It is also intermediate between the uncultivated wild bush where *sɔŋbwɔ* acts and the fields where *fɔ* acts, because it is the domain of the oil-palm tree, which, according to the Wuli, is neither cultivated nor

wild. As we have seen, during the great annual festival the small fields of *ŋbə* carrots also play a mediatory role between the maize season and the sorghum season, between the fertility of the plants in the fields and the fecundity of couples in the village: premarital, clandestine or 'bush' love is said or wished to be sterile. *Soləŋbə* witchcraft attacks a plant which has little value as food but which plays a key symbolic role.

To return to the action of the three physiological organs lodged in the uterus of witch-thieves. *Fɔ* attacks the child, *soŋbwɔ* the placenta and *soləŋbə* the umbilical cord. The cord is obviously an intermediary between the child and the placenta. The placenta is buried under a tree, generally a banana or plantain plant, in the 'village bush', which is a section of the palm forest surrounding the village and forms the natural border between the residences of two lineages, whereas a dead child is buried behind the house. The umbilical cord is the object of a ritual when the baby first comes out: it is either thrown onto the roof of the house or buried in the same place in the village bush as the placenta. This hesitation is due to the intermediary symbolic position between person and placenta, between village and bush.

The fields of *ŋbə* occupy an intermediate position in the organization of the space of the village territory, which is a counterpart to the symbolic position of the umbilical cord in the midst of the child-placenta duality: the child is linked to the village, whereas the placenta is linked to the bush. The spatial structure, the system of agricultural production and the universe of evil correspond perfectly.

Because of its mediating role within the structure of the village, where the opposition between bush and village plays an important role, the *ŋbə* plant is at the heart of the symbolic framework which links the fertility of plants to the fertility of women; this is reflected in the coincidence between the act of putting *ŋbə* carrots in the ground and the first sexual relations of young married couples (the wedding night of the annual feast). Because fertility is exclusive to women, they are the only ones to have the doubtful privilege of triggering the menstrual flow in their bodies by destroying these tubers in a supernatural way and thereby drying the internal source of their fecundity.

Fɔ witchcraft is the enemy of the emergence of life and can therefore be considered the 'younger sibling' of the formidable *rɛ* witchcraft, which brings death.

Other kinds of minor witchcraft

Let us look now at other kinds of minor witchcraft. Foremost among these is *ka* which consists primarily of stealing wine and palm nuts. This power is linked to the existence of 'pockets' situated on both sides of the heart. *Ka* is the name of a species of fruit-eating bird with a very long beak (unidentified), which is indeed very keen on palm nuts.

There are also a series of powers which enable one to change into an animal: *nkwi* the eagle, chicken thief; *manyapwe* the hippopotamus, who destroys the plantations on the river banks; *maliko* the python, who steals poultry and hunts small game; *ŋgu* the water snake, who likes fish and sometimes destroys rope bridges; and *mbwu* the leopard, not a killer of men this time but a hunter of game and domesticated animals. The power to change into one or other of these animals resides at the back of the rib cage, in certain veins or arteries with a particular shape. If an autopsy shows that these veins contain black blood, the deceased is a witch-thief who has doubtless used their powers.

Ka power and the other powers listed above differ in the supernatural technique used. *Ka* is the only one which acts in the universe of metonymy: if a *ka* bird-witch 'spirits away' a few nuts from an oil-palm tree belonging to a particular family, most of the production of wine and oil from this family's palm trees will dry up, whereas other palm forests will suddenly produce abundantly. By taking some, the *ka* witch steals everything, as do *fɔ* witches.

By contrast, witch-thieves who belong to the second category—the hippopotamus, eagle, snakes and leopard—behave like their non-evil animal counterparts. When a *maliko* witch-thief (the python) attacks a single animal, the remainder of the herd are unharmed. Similarly, when a *manyapwe* witch-thief (the hippopotamus) destroys a few rows of vegetables growing by the side of the river, the whole plot is not destroyed.

Just as in *fɔ* witchcraft, *ka* is a group practice and the *ka* witch-thief must exchange stolen products with part of the loot of fellow witches. Infringement of these rules can lead the accomplices to turn against that witch. None the less, the Wuli make a clear distinction between the activity of *fɔ* bird-witches and that of *ka* bird-witches, even though they both attack foodstuffs of great importance: wine and palm oil are, with maize and sorghum, the most important products in daily and ritual cooking. Moreover, it is said that *fɔ* witches, and especially female witches, are too often tempted by the harvest of their close neighbours—whereas the *ka* witches are more discerning and, rather than destroying Wuli palm trees, they take palm nuts and male inflorescences which produce wine from the forests of other villages and bring them to the palm groves of the Wuli. When a *ka* bird passes in the sky, it is saluted with joy, unlike *fɔ* birds.

The actions of witch-thieves who borrow the 'skin' of the leopard, python, water snake or eagle are also regarded as part good, part bad. The leopard, like the python, can take a goat but it can also consciously kill certain wild herbivores who destroy crops, thereby protecting the crops. The eagle, chicken thief, can choose, just as the *ka* bird can, to attack another village; it is sometime said that two village groups attack each other via the proxy of witch-eagles. The destructive actions of hippopotami are lessened by recalling that they often play gently with children.

Nevertheless, despite the ambiguity between actions approved by society and those which are reprehensible when performed within the village or

the lineage, the nature of these powers remains illicit, secretive and dangerous. Everybody knows that any witch-thief who attacks the belongings of the inhabitants of his own village will in his turn be attacked by the *ro* initiatory societies.

It is therefore surprising to find that these minor kinds of witchcraft are the responsibility of two ritual associations. All lineages have their own *ka* and *kemvre* societies which exist in order to increase the supernatural powers of the lineage's witch-thieves by enabling them to use the ritual objects which facilitate the exercise of their power. The *ka* association activates the power bearing the same name, the *kemvre* association the powers associated with the leopard, snakes, eagle and hippopotamus. The paradox is that although they favour illegal powers, these two societies have a legal and official status. The symbols of *ka* are a bird sculpted out of wood and an engraved terracotta pot used for palm-wine. The symbols of *kemvre* (literally 'the materials of the calabash'), which are linked to all the animals whose 'skins' (fur or feathers) can be used, are three bands of woven cotton material inside a calabash. Each material represents one or several different animals. The colour of the first band of material is off-white and corresponds to the eagle and the hippopotamus; the second, black or red, is associated with the python and water snake; and the third symbolizes the leopard and is striped in white, black and red. Now that European materials are widely available, these bands of traditional cotton materials are often replaced with scraps of modern materials. There is, in each lineage, only one keeper of the calabash containing these ritual materials. Within a local descent group of around forty married men, I have counted some fifteen members of *kemvre*.

Membership of these two associations generally goes from father to son. If a man delays the initiation rituals after the death of his father, the public gossip will be such that he will eventually be attacked by the witches of his lineage. In the *kemvre* association, they will infect him with scabies (*mbe*); in *ka*, it will be a weeping eye infection. These two illness are those which the 'medicines' associated with these associations can inflict on the witch-thieves of other lineages who may attempt to 'borrow' the powers of these objects. The charm associated with *kemvre* is a wild rash-inducing plant (*Urticaceae Laportea ovalifolia*) and scabies here symbolizes the illegal usage of 'skins'. The *ka* medicine includes porcupine spines, which are compared to the spines present in bunches of palm nuts and which can harm the bird who tries to eat them, thus provoking an eye infection.

According to the Wuli, these societies play a positive role because if one of them ceased its activities in a lineage, then the witch-thieves of the family group would turn against the negligent initiates. The symbol objects of *ka* and *kemvre* must be exhibited during the funeral of their members. A sacrifice of chickens and the sharing of palm-wine are required at initiations, as in the initiation into other cultural associations. It is said that the water spirits and the *manka* ghost spirits of previous members cohabit in

the ritual objects we have described above, just as they live in the ritual object of *ro* associations who fight all forms of witchcraft.

The existence and activities of these societies represent an assurance that the witch-thieves of a lineage will not turn against their agnates, *nduma* (the mother's agnates) or *vedʑɛ* (sisters' and daughters' children) but will direct their powers to the outside, far away, preferably outside the village. In counterpart, the efficiency of the powers of the witch-thieves are increased by these symbols of the lineage, whose powers are reinforced by the presence of water spirits and ghosts. In this context, can we still talk of witchcraft? What is surprising is not that there is a code of ethics within the world of witchcraft—there are other examples of this—but that this code should be the result of a transaction between the invisible world and the world of social institutions. From this point of view, by 'taking part' in witchcraft, the *ka* and *kemvre* associations have an attitude which is completely different from that of the *ro* initiatory associations, which fight all forms of witchcraft without exception. Wuli repeatedly told me that the only difference between the *ka* sculpted wooden bird and the *kemvre* bands of cloth was that women can see the first one without danger. In a world where witchcraft is as much masculine as it is feminine but where only men can be members of the initiation societies, this tells us a lot about the respective functions of these two kinds of association. One of them, *ro*, is organized on the level of the whole village and fights all forms of witchcraft when it is turned against a villager; only men can see its ritual objects. The other type of association, grouping *ka* and *kemvre*, which are lineage organizations, can be seen by all, because its aim is to enable witches of both sexes to use their evil talents for the good of the lineage.

Witch-thieves must exercise their talents according to a code defined by these associations. This is not to touch the belongings of the lineage and to use their powers as far away as possible, beyond the village boundaries. The main aim of this charter is to counter the evil aspects of these powers and to lead them into positive consequences for the village. If witch-thieves are foolish enough to harm their own village communities they will, as happens to *rɛ* witches, be attacked by the protective charms of the *ro* secret societies, who fight all aspects of evil power.

Conclusion: Witchcraft, Sorghum and Oil-Palm

The preceding sections have emphasised the clearly negative status of *rɛ* witchcraft and also *fɔ* witchcraft, whereas the status of most of the other minor witchcraft is ambiguous. Whether evil or beneficial, approved or disapproved, they are nevertheless all of an illicit character, and those who

exercise such powers are exposed to many dangers. I will now discuss this strange morality.

Although Wuli exploit to the full the ambiguous powers of witchcraft within the social structure, neither *rɛ* witchcraft, which destroys human lives, nor the minor *fɔ* witchcraft,[3] which can annihilate the fecundity of women, are linked to any association whether legal, lineage or other. They are both too destructive. *Fɔ* is indeed, after *rɛ*, the form of witchcraft which is most disapproved of by the Wuli. This contrasts with the status of *ka* witchcraft, despite its resemblances to *fɔ* already noted.

We have seen that Wuli distinguish between the activity of *fɔ* witch-birds and that of *ka* witch-birds. The first destroys crops and causes difficulties in childbirth, whereas the second creates richness and abundance by bringing to the village wine and palm nuts from other villages. Why do the Wuli suppose that *ka* witches generally resist the temptation to take flowers and fruits from nearby palm trees, whereas *fɔ* witches, especially female *fɔ* ones, succumb to the urge to take crops or bush fruits from their close neighbours? We have seen that these two kinds of minor witchcraft differ only in the nature of their loot: on the one hand, products from the fields (the *fɔ* bird itself), from edible bush plants (the *sɔŋbwɔ* bird) and from *ŋbə* carrots fields within the oil-palm forests (the *solaŋbə* imaginary animal), and on the other, the wine and palm oil which come from the oil-palm forest (the *ka* bird).[4] To question why the contrast between their respective ethical status is to ask what is the difference between the oil-palms and the plants cultivated in the fields or the wild fruits and vegetables collected from the bush within the economic, social and symbolic structure of the Wuli?

To answer this question, let us start with the symbolic status of the oil-palm tree. Unlike the produce from the fields, it is not a cultivated plant, as is shown by the regulation of land ownership. When a plot of land passes from one lineage to another, great care is taken to define what is being transmitted: it may be just the right to cultivate it or it may be extended to the right to gather from non-cultivated wild plants. In the first case, the palm trees cannot be exploited by the person who has received the land, since they still belong to the previous lineage. Palm trees are never planted and grow without any help from men. The Wuli say that they 'follow men', an allusion to the speed with which they spontaneously multiply around any new residential area. The original agricultural myth confirms this status:

3. We have seen that the term *fɔ* is often used by the Wuli as a generic term designating the associated powers *fɔ*, *sɔŋbwɔ* and *solaŋbə*.

4. Even if the observation of the behaviour of these different species of birds showed that one is more destructive than another or that some flew for longer distances than others, this would still not explain the *fɔ*/*ka* antinomy sufficiently.

> Once upon a time, men did not work the land. One day, while making palm oil, a man was taken away by the lightning of the sky. He came back with the seeds of plants to cultivate.

This tale stresses the fact that the exploitation of palm trees came before agriculture and is confirmed by an episode from the Wuli origin myth which tells us that the water spirits gave to the messenger dog of the first men the fire to cook their food in the form of burning *gansu*, the fibrous remains of the manufacture of palm oil. A variant of the myth, from the Mfumte village of Nchi, tells of a dog who, attracted by the fire over which a water spirit is roasting some palm-nut kernels, stole a firebrand and brought it back to men. Both these variants associate domestic fire with the palm tree and also show us that this non-cultivated plant is none the less part of culture. For instance, apart from its importance as a foodstuff, the oil palm plays an important role in rituals. Palm-oil, which is a basic ingredient of daily cooking, is a sign of fecundity and is used by women in birth rituals, whereas palm-wine (which is spat on objects or people) is linked to the rituals of male initiation associations and generally seals the return to an order which had been disturbed.

The ritual importance of oil palms, with their symbolic status half-way between nature and culture, is enough to justify the existence of an initiation association whose role is to protect this precious tree from the *ka* witch-birds. These witches are restricted by a kinship pact which allows them to 'steal far away'. They are free to exercise their talents against those with whom they have no alliance or kinship relations. They also bring back what they steal to their own village and thereby benefit their own community. Their power only destroys strangers.

It would be useful to compare the action of the *ka* bird with that of the *nkwi* eagle who is linked to the *kemvre* lineage association. It must be remembered that witch-eagles steal chickens and that, in order to respect the pact which binds them to their lineage, they must steal, like the *ka* bird, outside their village. They go further than the *ka* bird, directing their actions toward villages which are in conflict with the Wuli, but using the same supernatural method.[5] We must add that chickens have the same importance as palm-wine in the initiation or reparation rituals. The sacrifice or gift of a chicken together with a calabash of wine are the essential ingredients of any ritual of this type. Moreover, although goats are sometimes required as payment, only the chicken is used in sacrifice: its blood links people to the water spirits. It would therefore seem logical that precautions are taken against the witches who steal chickens by giving them the means to 'steal far away' from the other villages.

5. Nowadays the witch-eagle is rarely evoked is this context, but this might be a consequence of the longstanding prohibition forbidding war between villages.

Apart from chickens and palm-wine, only wild plants which have no value as a foodstuff are used as medicine in the protection and reparation rituals. These rituals are directed exclusively by males. On the other hand, plants that are eaten, whether picked wild or cultivated by women, are never used in any ritual. They are used strictly as food. The *fɔ* women, who steal sorghum and other edible plants, have their own code of practice within the world of witchcraft protecting them from the consequences of their witchcraft. Although *fɔ* is a minor power similar to *ka* witchcraft, it is nearer to the nocturnal *rɛ* witchcraft. Nothing seems to assuage the destructive desires of these two forms of witchcraft, the one attacking the principal food of men and the other their 'breath'. The *rɛ* witches who 'drink the blood' of their victims and then 'eat' them pay for their pleasure by being forced to give their own children to their evil partners. They are true anti-social beings. The *fɔ* she-witch also sees her powers turn against herself and her future progeny, but only when she contravenes the ethical code of the witches. The first pays the price of witchcraft when obeying its evil code, the second when disobeying. The *rɛ* witch 'eats' victims and then gives children to be eaten; the *fɔ* she-witch 'eats' the food of her family or allies, and then herself and her child 'are eaten'.

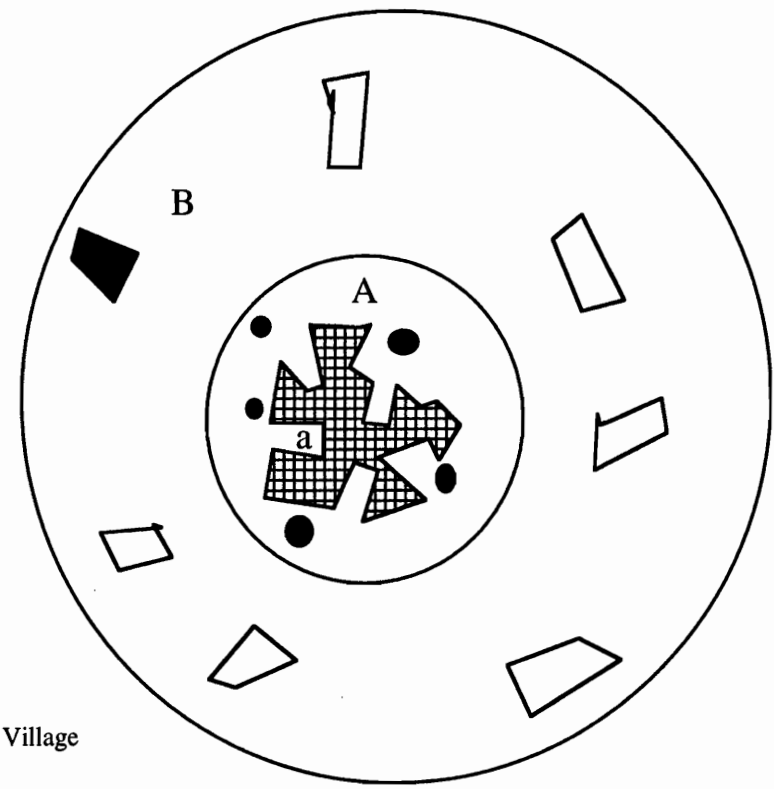
The destructive activities of the *rɛ* and *fɔ* witchcraft follow the circuits of kinship and alliance: they are linked to the internal conflicts of the village. By contrast, the witch-animals grouped under the lineage inscribe their actions within the circuit of external relations between villages.

Thus the constellation of Wuli witchcraft beliefs constitutes an inverted image of the usual communication networks. But in this mirror we can also see human attempts to understand misfortune.

Reference

Baeke, V. 1985. 'Les Objets rituels des sociétés initiatiques chez les Wuli du Cameroun occidental', *Systèmes de pensée en Afrique noire*, Vol. VIII, pp. 177–99.

FIG. 1. Plan of the village of Lus



LEGEND

Village

Small fields of 'carrots' (Coleus)

Fields of maize or sorghum

A Palm tree plantations surrounding the village

B Bush: secondary forest, fields etc.

a 'Village bush'

JASO 26/1 (1995): 43–67

YAMBA SPIDER DIVINATION

HERMANN GUFLER

Introduction

THE Yamba are a people living in the north-eastern corner of the Cameroon Grassfields. Administratively they are part of the Nwa Subdivision of the Donga Mantung Division of the North-West Province of the Republic of Cameroon. Nwa Subdivision was set up in 1963 with headquarters in Nwa. It comprises three areas of almost equal size: the Mfumte area in the North (473 square kilometres), the Yamba area in the centre (491 square kilometres), and the Mbaw area in the South (490 square kilometres) (Yaoundé 1973: 8). According to the last National General Census conducted in April 1987, Nwa Subdivision has a population of 52,896. This was not broken down by ethnicity but the 1970 census gave the Yamba population as 20,555 (ibid.).

The Yamba area consists of extremely broken country. Most of the villages are situated in deep valleys or shallow depressions, but some are perched on hilltops. The hills are covered with grass, which makes the whole area an excellent grazing country for Fulani cattle. The extremely difficult terrain, poor roads, lack of employment, and also the serious problem of cattle destroying the farms have led a great number of people to leave the area. It is estimated that over thirty per cent of the Yamba are living outside their native area. The people remaining in the villages practise subsistence farming, the main crops being maize, cocoa, yams, plantains, bananas, groundnuts and *egusi*. Guinea corn, which used to be one of their staple crops, has lost its importance and is cultivated only on a

small scale in the eastern part of Yamba. The deep valleys to the west and north are dotted with palm trees which provide enough oil for domestic consumption and for sale to the higher Yamba villages to the south and to the Wimbum markets at Ntaamru' and Ndu.

The Yamba area (including Mfumte) was formerly known as the Kaka area and its people as the Kaka people. The name seems to have been given to them by the Fulani slave-raiders from Banyo. Migeod writes (1925: 134):

> As to the name Kaka, the Lom (Rom) people are said to be Kaka because they are settled in the Kaka country. When the Germans first came to Banyo, Tonga (the chief of Rom) said they asked, 'Who are the people who live on those hills? And the Fulbe said, 'Kaka', meaning the nasty fighting people.

And E. H. Gorges, in his assessment report on the Kaka-Ntem area, states: 'The very name Kaka was originally merely a Fulani nickname derived from the frightened utterance of a captured native—Ka! Ka! (No! No!)' (1932: para. 29).

This nickname was adopted by the Germans and the British. The Baptist missionaries, who have been working in the area since the early 1930s, preferred to call it the Mbem area[1] because the name Kaka was repugnant to the people, having been imposed on them by their former enemies and by outsiders. In 1960, the educated élite of the Yamba decided to change the name for the people, their language, and the area to Yamba. The word is used to call the attention of others when somebody wants to speak and can be translated as 'I say' or 'listen to me!' (Jikong 1979: 20; Scruggs 1980: 3).

The Yamba people are a closely related group, living in seventeen independent villages. All attempts by the British administration to make the chief of Mbem, the largest village, the paramount chief of all the Yamba met with fierce resistance. Each village has its own chief, but there are many indications that the present system of chiefship is a recent innovation. All the Yamba chiefdoms claim a Tikar origin, and to have migrated from the east, most often from the Tikar town Kimi (Bankim). However, there is strong evidence that the Yamba are a mixed population of Tikar, Mambila and local origin (Nkwi and Warnier 1982: 16, 154).

The Yamba are patrilocal and patrilineal.[2] They have been largely isolated from the rest of the world because of the inaccessibility of their

1. Mbem, one of the largest Yamba villages, was chosen by the Baptist missionaries as their base.

2. Gebauer (1964: 20) is mistaken when he states that the Yamba are 'matrilineal and matrilocal' (cf. Chilver and Kaberry 1968: 29), misled, perhaps, by the long period of uxorilocal bride-service which precedes the establishment of an independent household.

land and by inter-village hostilities (Jikong 1979: 17; see also Buinda Mori 1987). The villages are divided into hamlets (or 'quarters') which often lie far apart and which have their own 'chiefs'. The hamlets are made up of exogamous units (*boatɛ́*). The lineage heads and the heads and members of secret societies form a sort of gerontocracy and exert social control over their people mainly through these secret societies, the most important of which is *ŋwantàp*.

The language of the Yamba presents certain analytic difficulties. T. R. Scruggs, who has made a study of this subject (1979, 1980, 1981), writes (1980: 6):

> The high degree of independence and separateness of each village, coupled with the different times of arrival of different groups, has led to a large number of different dialects...The degree of similarity and mutual intelligibility varies according to the distance between villages and possibly the time of settlement.

Roger Moss, a Cambridge student acting as a Plebiscite Supervisory Officer in the 1961 plebiscite,[3] gave Chilver and Kaberry a brief vocabulary of 'Mbem' (Yamba) which seemed to place the Yamba language fairly clearly in the Mbam-Nkam group of the Grassfields group of Bantu languages on lexical grounds (Chilver, personal communication; Nkwi and Warnier 1982: 18).

In this article, I will mainly follow the Bom dialect when using Yamba terms, since my principal informant, although a native of Gom village, was brought up in Bom and speaks the dialect of that village. Although the interviews were conducted in Pidgin English, my informant often used Yamba terms.

Ngam is the general name for any kind of divination, but it can also mean 'spider' and the set of leaf-cards used in divination, while *ŋgam fye ŋgam* is the diviner. To indicate the different types of divination one has to distinguish between *ŋgam se* ('divination ground'), which is spider divination, and *ŋgam bo* ('divination hand'), which is hand divination.

Paul Gebauer, a Baptist missionary who worked among the Yamba in the second half of the 1930s, observed that 'the social life of this group seemed largely controlled by a system of divination which engaged the West African earth spider' (1964: Preface). His observations led him to make a study which resulted in the monograph *Spider Divination in the Cameroons* (1964). In this, having revisited Western Yamba many years later, he wrote that 'the *ŋgam* system of divination, like its spider, has gone

3. In the plebiscite of February 1961, the Southern Cameroons and the Northern Cameroons, both under British trusteeship, were asked to choose between achieving independence by joining the Federation of Nigeria or the Republic of Cameroon. This is discussed further in a series of articles published in *Paideuma*, Vol. XLI (1995).

underground ... the clientele of old is no more. The present generation tries to solve its anxieties in new and various ways.'

Having worked for seven years in the same area and among the same people, I cannot confirm Gebauer's statement. Far from having 'gone underground', spider divination and other divination practices are very much alive. In the following pages I want to take issue with several statements made by Gebauer in *Spider Divination in the Cameroons* and to record my own findings about Yamba spider divination. In 1989, I had the good fortune of getting to know a widely acclaimed diviner, Pa Monday Kongnjo of Gom, aged about 70. He became a good friend and when he saw that I was interested in spider divination, he was not only willing but eager to teach me this type of divination, the only one he practises. Over the last three years, we have spent many evenings together. He made me a replica of his set of leaf-cards, used in spider divination, and explained the meaning of the symbols. I have also had the opportunity of observing the actual divination and the process of interpretation many times, not only when he divined on his own behalf but also when clients came to him.

My other informants were Pa Garba of Ngang, a quarter of Rom village, Pa Benjamin Dung of Nkot, Pa Taabi, a Mambila man from Lip just across the Cameroon-Nigeria border who lives and divines in Yamba area, and Nsangong of Mfe. All of them are practising diviners, yet none is a 'professional' diviner making a living from divination. Pa Taabi comes closest to professionalism in this sense, but he is not only a diviner practising several types of divination but also an *ngà ncɔ̀p* (a healer and medicine man).

Gebauer's Spider Divination in the Cameroons *Revisited*

Gebauer has done remarkable work, especially on the arts of Cameroon (see Bascom *et al.* 1953; Gebauer 1979). His photo collection, now housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, is also of great interest and importance. His monograph *Spider Divination in the Cameroons* 'is the definitive work on the meaning of cards' (Zeitlyn 1987: 27). However, some of his claims cannot be confirmed and need revision. Also, as Zeitlyn has pointed out, the book 'is sadly uninformative when it comes to details of the process of interpretation' (ibid.). My criticism goes deeper. First, Gebauer fails to make a clear distinction between *ŋgam bo* (hand divination) and *ŋgam se* (spider divination).

He writes (1964: 38, my emphasis):

> The diviner has *the choice* of operating *the set of cards by himself*, the most common practice, *or of using a spider* to manipulate the cards, a method used in cases of great importance only.

However, *ŋgam bo* amd *ŋgam se* are two completely separate methods of divination and are never combined. There are many diviners who know only one of the two methods. Each method has its own distinct set of leaf-cards. The *ŋgam bo* set is never used in the *ŋgam se* method nor the other way round. All my informants were emphatic on this point. Thus Plates XIV and XV ('spider in action')[4] and the cover photo of Gebauer's book are misleading. They show *ŋgam bo* leaf-cards in the spider enclosure, a practice which is never employed. Although the book is entitled *Spider Divination in the Cameroons* the cards illustrated in the book are all *ŋgam bo* cards. Indeed, *ŋgam se* cards do not feature in the book at all.

Let us consider some of the differences between *ŋgam bo* and *ŋgam se* leaf-cards. The cards of *ŋgam se* are larger in size than those of *ŋgam bo*. The cards in a *ŋgam se* set are much fewer in number. The sets in my possession and the ones I have examined number between seventy and one hundred. A *ŋgam bo* set has two hundred or more cards. Different kinds of leaves are used in making the cards of the two sets. The leaf used to make *ŋgam se* cards has a rough, coarse texture; the midrib runs right through the middle of the card. The leaf used to make *ŋgam bo* cards is as large as a man's hand and feels silky and smooth to the touch; several cards can be cut out of one leaf. Also, *ŋgam bo* and *ŋgam se* sets are stored in different fashions. *Ngam bo* cards are stored in a bamboo container, as shown by Gebauer (1964: 37), whereas *ŋgam se* cards are stored pressed between a pair of tongs made of a bent-over piece of bamboo. The bamboo container in which the *ŋgam bo* set is kept contains other things used in this type of divination, viz. the tail of a squirrel, porcupine quills and some red feathers (*ŋgu*), while the *ŋgam se* set lacks any such paraphernalia. *ŋgam se* cards are made in pairs. Each positive or 'good' card corresponds to a negative or 'bad' card. There are no 'empty' cards. *ŋgam bo* cards are in pairs or in sets of four. The pairs are positive and negative, as in *ŋgam se*. The sets of four are male-positive, male-negative, female-positive, female-negative. Neither set has single or neutral cards. *ŋgam bo* sets have a number of 'empty' cards.

Secondly, it is true that 'diviners do not attempt to file the cards into categories of interest or groups having similar symbolized meanings (Gebauer 1964: 36). But according to my informants, it is not correct that diviners observe 'one single rule, that tops must join tops, and bottoms join bottoms'. In both divination methods, *ŋgam bo* and *ŋgam se*, the positive cards are put together in a pile and the negative ones piled in the same way. The two piles are then placed one on top of the other, thus forming a single stack.

I have, however, met one diviner who does not follow this rule. He is Pa Benjamin Dung of Nkot, a village in western Yamba. But he does not

4. The plates showing the 'Spider in action' (Gebauer 1964: 44), including the photo on the front cover, are 'records of experimentation' (cf. footnote on page 141).

use the Yamba system of *ŋgam se*. He learnt divination from a diviner in Mbat, a village in the Mfumte area. His set of leaf-cards is strikingly similar to the one pictured in Plate XVI ('The Manang Diviner') in Gebauer's book (ibid.:47).[5] Manang is another village in the Mfumte area, quite near to Mbat. Pa Benjamin told me that he just empties the whole bamboo box containing the cards on top of the spider hole without arranging them in any way. The spider will do the arranging itself, he said.

The third major point where Gebauer is incorrect concerns the sticks which are pinned into the ground around the spider hole when divining. He writes (ibid.: 43, my emphasis):

> To *speed up* the method of divination, the diviner *may* place inside the enclosure short pieces of grass, or he may draw lines from the centre of the enclosed ground to the edge of the enclosure.

As will be shown later, these sticks, which represent different persons, groups of persons or places, are an essential part of Yamba spider divination. Without them, spider divination is impossible.

Gebauer documented a number of other divination types practised by the 'Kaka' (ibid.: 30), viz. sortilege, casting of millet seeds, augury, haruspication and autopsy. It is difficult to say whether all these types were practised by the Yamba. When talking about 'Kaka', Gebauer includes among the Yamba villages also villages like Kwaja and Manang which are clearly not Yamba but Mfumte villages. The confusion is understandable when one realizes that almost up to the 1940s, the Yamba and Mfumte areas were collectively known by the common name of 'Kaka'. When I tried to find out whether augury or haruspication was practised in Yamba I usually got blank stares. Plate IV (ibid.: 32), subtitled 'Augury by observation of bird images', shows bird effigies used in the annual *cam* dance. These effigies are of two kinds, those whose body is made of a calabash called *mbon cam* and those carved in wood called *bùbak*. They hang suspended from a rope which surrounds the enclosure where the dancers smear their bodies with a white chalky substance before the dance. The dancers dangle these effigies from their hands on a short string when dancing. That they were used as a type of divination (augury) could not be confirmed.

I suspect that augury and haruspication are practised among the Mfumte but I have had no opportunity to find out. Autopsy, which used to be carried out on every dead person before burial except small children, has been outlawed and is no longer practised.

The divination practices I found among the Yamba are the two mentioned above, namely *ŋgam se* and *ŋgam bo*. Both are widely used, *ŋgam bo*

5. Gebauer failed to recognize this as a *ŋgam se* set (albeit a non-Yamba one). This led him to the mistaken 'first impression' that the set was 'a crude imitation of the real thing seen fleetingly by the imitator' (!) (1964: 139).

being more common in upper Yamba than in the valleys to the west or north. *ŋgam se* is believed to be the most reliable and most trustworthy of all the divination types. It does not lie, they say. *Majara* is also very common. Segments of the wild garden-egg (*Solanum* sp.) are used in this divination practice. I was told that hunters perform *majara* divination to find out where they should go to find animals. In Ngang, a quarter of Rom village, I met an old diviner, Pa Usumanu. His own divination device consisted of a large number of calabash discs, bones, pebbles, claws, beads, small horns, etc. kept in a calabash. When divining, he placed a cowhide on the ground. He then poured the contents of the calabash into a calabash bowl and, swaying the bowl to and fro several times, he emptied part of the devices on the skin in a forward motion. The pieces that fall furthest away towards a pile containing red feathers (*ŋgù*), porcupine quills, the fang of a leopard, the foot of a hawk, a large crystal, the claw of a crab and the jawbone of a snake are read and interpreted. Pa Usumanu was kind enough to give me a demonstration after I had given him a few coins with which he tapped on the calabash to 'wake up *ŋgam*'. Another type which I did not observe but was told was practised is the throwing of small seeds on the surface of water or palm-wine in a cup.

Besides these general types of divination, there are others which are specific to a rite or activity. For example, before a community hunt, the lineage head will perform a rite ('sharpening of spears') at the family hunting shrine called *dzòk si* (literally 'the place of the face', i.e. where the 'face' of the hunter is 'cleansed'). At the end of the rite, the lineage head will call each hunter separately; he will find out through a sort of divination whether somebody has a 'mistake'—for example, having broken a taboo or other transgression. The lineage head will take two elephant-grass stalks and chip off a piece from each stalk. If both of the chips fall face down or face up everything is fine. If, however, one of the chips falls face up and the other face down the big man has to 'cleanse' the hunter, otherwise there is a danger that an accident will happen during the hunt.

Other divinatory practices are specific to rites such as that performed at the end of the ritual performed to 'appease' an ancestor of living memory or for the 'annulment' of a prohibition or instruction given by an ancestor before death, to find out whether the rite had been successful and had achieved its aim.

The commonest reasons for divination are sickness and death. In an area where medical facilities are few and far apart, so that patients have to be carried on stretchers or on people's backs for many hours up and down steep hills, where hospital bills, especially if they involve an operation, are astronomical relative to the means of ordinary people and can throw them into debt for many years, it is understandable that a father or lineage head will first consult *ŋgam* before any action is taken. Should the patient die despite having been taken to the hospital, all the trouble and expense will have been for nothing. My heart missed a beat when Pa Banjamin of Nkot told me that he always divines first to decide whether to take a sick mem-

ber of his family to the hospital or not. If *ŋgam* reveals that the patient will die even if taken to hospital nobody will move a finger. But the underlying reasons are deeper. In the people's view, sickness can be caused by a number of things: witchcraft, the anger of one's in-laws, the breaking of a taboo or one's oath, 'supernatural pollution' caused by the transgression of a prohibition by the patient or a near relative, transgression of the law of a secret society (especially *ŋwantàp*), etc. In any of these cases, the cause of the sickness must first be detected before treatment; even 'white man medicine' can be successful. Divination reveals the ultimate cause of the sickness which in turn determines the action to be taken, very often a cleansing ritual called 'sprinkling of cool water' (*təm nzəp*) by the head of the *ŋwantàp* society.

Other reasons for consulting *ŋgam* are accidents, crop failure or failure in business, theft, barrenness, witchcraft, selection of a new chief, going on a journey, and many other circumstances.

Yamba Spider Divination

I will now turn to Yamba spider divination (*ŋgam se*) proper. As I have already mentioned, *ŋgam se* is commonly believed to be the most reliable of all the divination practices. 'It does not tell a lie.' My present task will be mainly descriptive. The spider myth will serve as a starting-point.

The spider myth

Christopher Moss has recorded the spider myth in a manuscript entitled 'Mbem: Six Months in the Cameroons', written in the early 1960s. Since it is very difficult to get hold of a copy of this manuscript I give here a slightly different version of the myth, as told to me by Pa Monday.

> Once upon a time people went hunting. Then game was in abundance. One young man went to his *tɛtsə* [MF] to beg for a spear so that he could join the hunt. His *tɛtsə* gave him a spear saying, 'Yes, my *monjɛ* go and shoot me an animal.' The young man took the spear and joined the hunt. As he went, a big antelope suddenly jumped out of the bush in front of him. He threw the spear and hit the animal. The antelope ran off with the spear stuck in its side. The young man and other hunters followed it. They followed it a great distance until they came to a hill where the antelope disappeared. They searched everywhere but could not find it. They were at their wits' end. They had followed the animal's footprints and the traces of blood. The hunters gave up and returned to their village.
>
> Next morning, the young man went to his *tɛtsə* to report the loss of his spear. He told him how he had shot an antelope and how the antelope had run off

with his spear. Everybody agreed that he had shot the antelope. They all had gone in search of it but could not find it. The young man's *tɛtsə* went to consult the spider. (In those times, the spider, when called, would come out of its hole and speak to people in their own language.) He called the spider. It came out and having listened to the man's report, said that the young man should put it on his head and cover it with his cap. It would show him the place where the spear was. The young man did as the spider advised. So off they went! They came to the hill where the antelope had disappeared. There was a huge sod of grass standing there. The spider told him to remove it. He moved it and there saw the opening of a hole like a tunnel, which went far into the ground. The spider said, 'Do you see the blood?' He saw it. He jumped down into the hole and went into the tunnel. After some time they reached a 'kitchen'.[6] The spider said, 'Look, there is your spear!' He saw it. It was leaning against one of the corner poles supporting the roof of the 'kitchen'. The tip of the spear was still bloodstained. The 'father' of the antelope had moved the spear from the animal. He had treated the wound with medicine and sealed it. He had also given the antelope some medicine to drink. The animal was healed there and then.

When the young hunter arrived at the 'kitchen', he saw people sitting there. They were surprised and asked him, 'Where do you come from?' 'I come from up there', he said. 'What business brings you here?', they asked. 'I have come to look for my spear. I shot an antelope and it ran off with my spear.' 'Who has shown you the way?', they asked. 'I know the way', he replied. 'Who has shown you the way?', they asked again. 'I know the way', he repeated. Then they asked, 'Have you seen your spear?' He said, 'Yes.' 'Where is it?' 'That's the one,' he said, pointing to the spear. The old man got up, took the spear and gave it to him. 'Take it and go!' The young man took the spear and left. He went back the way he came. He went and went, and suddenly found himself back at the very 'kitchen'. The old man asked, 'How? Have you come again?' The hunter replied, 'I went the same way I came. I'm sure it was the correct way. But when I looked up I saw that I was right back here.' The old man said, 'Go!' Off he went again. He went and went—only to find himself back at the 'kitchen' again. They said, 'Is it you again?' He said, 'Yes, sir! I thought I followed the same way I came but instead of getting to the exit I'm back here again.' 'Did you not say you knew the way? How come you cannot find the exit?', they asked. At this the old man got up and moved the cap from the young man's head. Down fell the spider! 'Oh!', exclaimed the old man, 'You, this thing, did I not tell you to show some 'sense' to the people up there? I did not tell you to come and show them to me! Why did you show this man to me? You will no longer be able to speak to the people by word of mouth. When they ask you, you may show them only in a "hidden way".' The old man took some earth and threw it on the spi-

6. A 'kitchen' is an open shed with a loft found near compounds or in the farms or palm bushes where Yamba people produce palm oil, shelter from rain or rest from farm work. The sacra of secret societies are kept in the lofts and family meetings are often held there. Thus Pa Monday uses the word 'kitchen' and the 'people of his lineage' synonymously.

> der's back. From that moment on the spider was no longer able to speak to people in their language. Now, when people come to consult the spider, it can only communicate with them through a set of leaf-cards.
>
> The old man told the hunter to go. He left and was soon at the exit. He climbed out of the hole and replaced the sod of grass. Then he went home.

I asked Pa Monday who these people at the 'kitchen' deep down in the ground were. He replied, 'Are they not gods? They are gods. They are there now. Who can see them?'

One thing which the myth seems to bring out clearly is that the spider is not an envoy or messenger of the ancestors but acts on its own, having an independent intelligence. *Ngam* has been given the task of showing 'sense' to people, of revealing hidden things to them. More discussion on what or who the spider is believed to be will follow later on.

Learning spider divination

As already mentioned, my main informant was Pa Monday Kongnjo of Sang quarter in Gom village. He learned spider divination from an old diviner in his village, Damu Monkpu, when he was a young man and not yet married. When his sister Dzefarum, who was married to the chief of Nkwi, another quarter of Gom, fell seriously ill, he went to consult the diviner Monkpu on her behalf. The verdict of the divination and the recommended line of treatment to follow in order that his sister would recover (which she did) so impressed Pa Monday that he decided to learn spider divination himself.

According to Pa Monday, anybody can learn spider divination (except women because 'woman he know he own na whatti? Woman no fit savy palaver for that one!'). Unlike in Mambila spider divination (Zeitlyn 1987: 3) there is no formal initiation and no 'cooking and eating of a chicken by the teacher and pupil in the presence of at least one witness'. The important thing is to get to know the names and meanings of the leaf-cards thoroughly and to learn the interpretation process, which can only be done through repeated observation of actual divinations. During the time of apprenticeship the pupil is also taught how to make his own set of divination cards. There is no need for the pupils to have special gifts, like the gift of 'two eyes' (clairvoyance), nor does he have to experience spirit possession (Gebauer 1964: 29). Pa Monday clearly demythologizes Gebauer's assertions:

> Any man who learns it can do it. He must learn it, go into it deeply till he knows it well. Then he can do it. Because my own [method of divination] has nothing to do with witchcraft. It is a thing [which is done] in broad daylight. It is like going to school. If you study well, will you not succeed? It is the same with my own divination.

Like any apprentice learning a profession, the pupil of divination has to make payments to his master. These payments include money, fowls, small pots of cooked game and 'plenty mimbo' (a lot of palm-wine). In Nkot I was told that the pupil has to kill a squirrel and bring it to his master as part of his payment, otherwise he will not be successful in his divination. Pa Monday dismisses this, saying he was not asked to do so and that he is still a very successful diviner. When the master is satisfied that the pupil knows the cards well and can master the intricate and at first confusing process of interpretation, he will ask for a final payment, which in the case of Pa Monday was £3. From then onwards he may start divining on his own and try to establish his own name as a diviner. There is no society of diviners, according to my informants, nor do diviners enter 'the secret society of *mbir*', a society whose existence in Yamba I have so far been unable to identify (cf. Gebauer 1964: 29).

To be a successful diviner, one must be well versed in, and have deep insight into, the social order of Yamba society, their cosmology and beliefs, their fears and hopes. For me, the study of the symbols of the cards served like a door to the understanding of Yamba society. When Junod (1913) says that the divination devices of the Thonga are 'a résumé of their whole social order, of all their institutions', this also holds true for the Yamba divination set.

In my opinion, too much emphasis is often laid on the need and ability of the diviner to gain a good insight into the client's family background, his relationship with his in-laws, his occupation and health, etc. I do not deny that this can be helpful, but it is certainly not a *sine qua non*. To stress the necessity of gaining a good insight into the client's life and suspicions is to reduce the Yamba spider diviner to a shrewd psychologist who is trying to confirm these very suspicions. The spider diviner is first and foremost, if not exclusively an interpreter (Nicod 1950: 153). It is not he who gives the verdict. He only interprets what the spider has shown him through the leaf-cards. Pa Monday could get quite vexed if a client objected to something or other he said. On one occasion he snapped: 'Is it me who is telling you this? Is it not rather *ŋgam* which is telling you these things? I only tell you the things I see!' (observed divination, 16 July 1991). For the Yamba spider diviner, divination is an intellectual activity which the knowing observer can follow. The scrupulous study of the configuration of the leaf-cards scattered by the spider shows the concern of the diviner to be faithful to what he sees. At the back of his mind looms the fear that if he is not truthful the spider will punish him. 'It will take its hand and lock my eyes so that I will not be able to see anything good again', Pa Monday told me. There is nothing that would point to a direct or special relation between the diviner and some occult force or the source of truth, the spider. Yamba spider divination clearly belongs to the 'artificial' or, as it is also called, 'mechanical' type of divination (Zeitlyn 1987: 23).

The spider

The spider used in *ŋgam se* divination has been identified by Gebauer as the West African earth spider (*Heteroscoda crassipes*) of the *Mygalide* family (1964: 42). Spider divination using the land crab as recorded by Zeitlyn (1987: 6) for the Mambila is not practised by the Yamba as far as my information goes. Pa Monday told me that he had heard about this practice but had never tried it. Spiders are quite common and are often found near compounds, along footpaths or in the farms. Once in Nkot I was walking along the path from the Government School up to the Catholic Mission with Pa Monday. Always alert and on the look-out for the most important 'device' of his divination practice, he pointed out to me two spider holes just next to the footpath which he promptly engaged on the same evening.

The practice of digging out a spider and bringing it nearer home is known but not often done. The diviner knows the spider holes in the vicinity of his compound and will use those if a client comes to him. When he is called to a different quarter or village, the people who called him will show him a spider hole. Women working in the farms, wine tappers and men going to the bush to cut palm nuts invariably see spider holes and will make a mental note of them in case they are needed. The practice of training spiders (Gebauer 1964: 140) could not be confirmed.

Gebauer (ibid.: 42) states that a person who wilfully or accidentally killed a spider was formerly put to death. This could not be confirmed. Pa Monday and Pa Benjamin told me that only a mentally deranged person would kill a spider wilfully and if somebody kills one accidentally, like a woman hoeing in the farm, nothing happens. There is much less mystery, 'sacredness' and awe surrounding the spider than Gebauer would have us believe.

There is a difference of opinion about which of the inhabited spider holes are eligible for spider divination. Nsangong of Mfe and Pa Taabi said that one should not engage a spider the entrance of whose hole points westwards. Elias Taabi and Pa Adamu of Ngang agree, explaining that such holes are inhabited by female spiders, which are unreliable. Pa Monday again dismisses such claims in his blunt way as nonsense.

The *ŋgam se* divination set

Much has already been said about the *ŋgam se* leaf-cards (see above), but it is necessary to add some more information. The sets in my possession and those I have had a chance to examine or trace in my notebook show a number of differences between them. No one set was exactly like any other, except for those of a master and his former pupils. In general, one can say that the differences increase with the distance between villages. For example, the number of cards in a set varies. Pa Monday's set has eighty, Pa Garba's seventy-four and Pa Taabi's one hundred cards. Also

the size and shape of the cards in the different sets are not the same. Pa Garba's set, the most irregular as regards size and shape, shows some interesting features. In some cases the card is the symbol, unlike most of the cards, which are marked by incisions. For instance, the card 'marriage shovel' is shaped in the form of a shovel which was used in the payment of bridewealth. The card symbolizing 'death drum' is also shaped in the form of the drum used at funeral celebrations. Some are composite cards. The card symbolizing 'a bag of salt' has a piece of leaf sewn on top of another with a thread taken from the salt bag. The card symbolizing 'man's bag' has a small piece of leaf sewn on the upper left-hand side with a thin string of raffia fibre, the material which is used to weave such bags. The card symbolizing 'letter' has been cut out of an old tax-ticket.

Another difference lies in the actual symbols. The majority of the cards can, with a bit of experience, be recognized in all the sets, although the design of the symbols may vary to a greater or lesser degree. But there are some symbols which are so completely different that they cannot be recognized without one being told what they represent. Another difference lies in the fact that some symbols found in one set are absent in another. Space does not allow me to make a detailed comparison between the different sets.

All the sets I examined were incomplete. This may be surprising. Before examining a diviner's set of cards I asked him whether it was true that the cards were made in positive-negative pairs—in other words, whether each card 'get e own brother'? They all agreed that this was so. When I laid out the cards in pairs on a mat or table, I invariably found that some of the pairs were incomplete. When I pointed this out to the diviners they readily admitted that it was true but that they had not been aware of it.[7] All made a mental note of the missing cards and said that they were going to replace them. When I asked how cards could go missing, I was told that it sometimes happens that the spider pulls a card right down into its hole so that it cannot be seen. But more often it is due to termites which may eat some of the cards while they are lying in the enclosure during the night. On the other hand, Pa Monday seemed not too worried about the missing cards (although he did replace them) and told me that it really does not matter. The spider can communicate its verdict even when the set is incomplete. But he admitted that it was not the correct thing to do. If the diviner notices that his set is incomplete, he should replace the missing cards.

Another point of interest is that Pa Monday divines with a set of cards not made in the usual way, i.e. cut out of the leaves of a certain forest tree (unidentified), but cut out of plastic material or imitation leather used in

7. If one takes the trouble to arrange the *ŋgam bo* cards illustrated in Gebauer (1964) in pairs and sets of four, one will notice that the 'Makai set' is also incomplete.

upholstery or for the lining of the inside of a car. He told me that he was fed up with always having to replace cards eaten by termites.

Setting the sticks *(titʉ́)*

When the diviner wants to divine on his own behalf or for a client, he will go to the spider hole and clean its surroundings, removing all dirt and every bit of grass growing there. If the hole is on a slope he will cut away the ground above and place it below the hole, thus making a level surface around the hole, taking great care not to disturb the entrance to the hole which during the day is closed with a tight spider's web (*mba'*). Before proceeding to the hole, the client will already have put his problem to the diviner. After preparing the site the diviner's next task will be to decide which sticks (*titʉ́*) to pin into the ground around the hole. He will do this in consultation with the client. Drawing on his wide experience, the beliefs of the people, and, in the case of sickness or death, the possible causes (see above), he will suggest the likely culprits to the client. The sticks are about ten cm in length and are marked in such a way that they can easily be recognized. For example, a straight single twig, a forked twig, a twig with a leaf on it or a small leaf is placed on the ground and a twig pinned through it, etc. The sticks form a circle or semi-circle around the spider hole, spaced about ten to fifteen cm apart and about the same distance from the hole. Each stick stands for a person, group of persons or place as the case may be. Here are two examples which I have observed:

Case 1: One day Pa Monday left Sabongari and went up to Nwa, a trek of five hours. There he fell suddenly ill. He collapsed on the road and unluckily fell on a stone, cracking two of his ribs. After recovering he wanted to find out who was responsible for having 'bewitched' him, i.e. having brought this sudden illness on him. The following sticks were placed in the ground:

- the people of Sabongari: had he done anything to them so that they were angry and had 'bewitched' him?
- the people of Nwa (same reason)?
- his 'kitchen', i.e. his own family people at Gom?
- his *muyu* (in-laws) in Gom?
- Pa Monday himself (was it his own fault?)
- his wife and children staying in Small Kimi (were they in danger too?).

In all, six sticks were placed round the spider hole.

Case 2: Two of Pa Monday's dogs, which he had bought in Sabongari and was trying to sell in Nkot, ran away frightened by a mighty thunderclap when lightning struck nearby. Where have the dogs gone to? There were three possibilities:

- Nkot. Are they still in Nkot?

- Gom. Have they gone to Gom, where Pa Monday had been staying with them for more than a week?
- Sabongari. Have they run back to their place of origin?

These two examples should make it clear that the placing of sticks is an essential part of Yamba spider divination.

In serious cases, sticks may be 'charged'. When a child dies or a person falls seriously ill and the father wants to find out who the guilty party is, he may cut the sticks and then touch them to the head of the dead child or of the sick person before pinning them around the spider hole. No satisfactory explanation for this practice could be elicited. In the case of theft, the suspected or accused parties may be asked to pin their own stick by themselves. The most likely reason for this is that the accused persons are present at the divination and witness the outcome themselves.

Putting the case to the spider

Next, the diviner will put the case to the spider. Kneeling down in front of the spider hole, with his head about a foot away from it, he will address the spider: '*ta-ŋwi, ta-ŋwi, cèp mɛ wa, cèp mɛ wa...*' (Papa God, papa God, tell me, tell me...). The spider is addressed as God. Usually the simple form '*ŋwi, ŋwi,*' (God, God) is used. When I asked Pa Monday whether it was not more correct to call the spider a 'messenger of God' rather than addressing it as God, he was hesitant:

> If you don't call it [the spider] 'God, God, God'—what else [can it be]? God exists! Are they not both one? Yes, call it God. If God and it exist, He tells it, 'go and talk like this'—who can know that?

This statement of Pa Monday is interesting because according to Chilver, one comes across this uncertainty about the meaning of *ŋwi* elsewhere (personal communication; cf. Emonts 1927: 154). It is, one might say, not so much uncertainty but a question of immanence rather than transcendence. This suggestion is further strengthened by the following statement of Pa Monday:

> There is a law, a serious law, which says: you must never watch the spider when it is busy selecting and pushing around the leaf-cards. If your eyes see it you are gone! You will die. You will die just like that without being sick. You must never go and watch the spider at work. Never, never!

God is invisible and must remain invisible. If the spider, at the moment of divination, is 'God for the time being', then one can understand the strong 'law' not to watch it at work. Here, it would seem, lies the basis and ultimate reason for the unshakeable conviction of the Yamba diviner that the

spider speaks the truth. God is the source of all truth, and the spider, at the moment of divination, is 'God for the time being'.

I found another interesting way of addressing the spider in Mfe. Having made the necessary preparations at the spider hole, the diviner speaks into the hole as follows:

> *ŋwi, nə bə̀boŋ, tsok yu nə bə̀boŋ. a ŋga ŋgwèn yi kpʉ tsok fa mʉ. ŋwi nə bʉp, yi ka və̀. ŋga yi ka a kpʉ tsok fa mʉ. a ŋga nzak tsok fa mʉ.*
>
> Good God, tell me good things. If the person is going to die, tell me. Evil god, let him not come! If the person is not going to die, tell me. If there is a case, tell me (interview with Nsangong, 17 October 1992).

A distinction is made between the good God and the evil god. The evil god is told to stay away from the divination and not to interfere. Only the good God can show good things, i.e. the truth.

Having addressed the spider, the diviner now proceeds to explain the case to it. As an example I take Pa Monday's own case when he fell sick in Nwa:

> I come with my own case. I fell seriously ill in Nwa. I almost died. I stand here at your door. This single stick is myself. Whether I have stolen somebody's possession and that is the reason why this 'war' has attacked me—catch my head [i.e. my stick] and tell me the reason so that I may know. This forked stick stands for my family in Ngwen [a sub-quarter of Sang in Gom]. If they are the cause of my sickness come tell me whether they have bewitched me. This stick pierced through a small cocoyam leaf on the ground stands for my in-laws in Nkwi, N. and N. I have married their daughter. If they have held a meeting to bewitch me, 'hold' their stick and tell me the reason, etc. (observed divination, 16 July 1991).

There were still three more sticks, viz. the people of Nwa, the people of Sabongari, and his wife and children, which were explained in the same way. But the above should suffice to give an idea of how the case is explained to the spider. Pa Monday's closing remarks were: 'My death which I (almost) died in Nwa, that is the case I put before you.'

Note the repeated request by the diviner that *ŋgam* should tell him the 'reason' (*fa njo*). More will be said on this point when I discuss the process of interpretation.

Having put the case to the spider, the diviner blows into the hole once or twice. He then places the pack of leaf-cards in an upright stack over the spider's hole, arranged in the manner described above, i.e. the positive cards at the bottom and the negative cards on top or the other way round. It does not matter which part is up and which part down. The spider will make its own selection. Pa Taabi leans the cards on the entrance of the hole like a set of fallen domino pieces but making sure that the hole is covered.

A pot or basin which has no bottom is placed over the whole set-up and the hole on top is covered with a large cocoyam leaf. If there is no pot at hand, twigs or bamboo splinters are bent over the whole device and covered with cocoyam leaves. No palm-wine is sprayed over the enclosure and no insects or leaves are placed under the cards or in the enclosure. Neither client nor diviner have to observe any taboos before divining.

Having made all the necessary preparations, the diviner and client will withdraw or go back to the house. In most cases spider divination is set up for the night, since the spider is a nocturnal animal, but it is also done during the day. The covered enclosure simulates night and makes the spider come out. But I have been present several times when the spider has failed to come out during the day. Several divinations can be done during a single night.

Principles and processes of interpretation

Now comes the most important and most difficult part of spider divination: the interpretation. In the morning or when the diviner, after inspection, sees that the spider has come and disturbed the cards, he will move the pot carefully and look at the result in silence for some time, studying the configuration of the cards in relation to the sticks. Then he begins the interpretation, which can be divided into two parts, the 'verdict' and the 'reasons'.

First, through its verdict the spider points out the guilty party. Negative cards (it must be remembered that they were grouped together) pointing at or touching a stick means that *ŋgam* has 'caught' this person or group of persons. Positive cards pointing at or touching a stick means that the person or group of persons represented by the stick are 'free'. A stick standing empty, i.e. with no cards pointing at or touching it, means that a person or group of persons have had no dealings with the case and are not implicated.

There are a number of other possibilities also, however:

(1) Red earth has been placed on top of a card by the spider. This is an ominous sign, for it augurs death and there is no escape from it. Every diviner and non-diviner alike was quick to point this out to me. Pa Monday told me that when the spider wants to tell the diviner that a sick person on whose behalf the divination is made will die, 'it goes to the bottom of its hole, digs red ground there, then comes up and puts it on the card. Start crying!'

(2) If the spider pulls a leaf-card partly into the hole, it is another bad omen, also auguring death.

(3) If the spider, on entering its hole, places a leaf-card on top of the hole, thus covering the entrance, it means that it is still hiding something. The spider has not revealed everything.

(4) A leaf-card is the wrong way up. This means that the client must 'judge the case' or there will be death. 'Judging the case' usually means that the client or his people will have to call a meeting of all members of the lineage or his in-laws. They will be asked to discuss the result of the divination and will come up with some 'mistake' or transgression of the patient or one of his immediate family members. Following the 'reasons' given by the divination (see below), they will decide on what action to take to remedy the situation, which usually consists of performing one of the many rituals of the Yamba. This, in a rather simplified way, is the interpretation of the verdict.

Having read the verdict, the diviner goes on to give the 'reasons' (*njo*). Here the meaning of the cards comes into play. The diviner separates the leaf-cards according to which stick they are pointing to or touching. He neatly joins them in his hand as they lie on the ground. Then he turns the pack and begins with the top card which originally was the bottom-most card. Taking one card at a time, he will name it and give his comments. All cards receive attention, but some more than others, according to the case in question.

When I observed the reading of the cards for the first time, it reminded me of a panel game in which the candidates were given a list of unconnected words and asked to make up a coherent story on the spot. By interpreting each card, the diviner will give the reason why a death, sickness or misfortune occurred and what must be done to remedy the situation, e.g. that the sick person will recover or further misfortune be averted.

An example may illustrate how the diviner proceeds. One day, Pa Monday suggested that I should ask *ŋgam* to tell me which of four villages would allow me to open a Catholic church in their midst. We chose the village of Bom, Sih, Ntong and Kwaja. The verdict was that Bom and Ntong would refuse, Sih people were divided and Kwaja would be in favour. I must confess that I was rather surprised at the result. Pa Monday had no way of knowing that the chief of Kwaja had approached me several times with the request to open a Catholic mission in his village. A Catholic church had been opened in Sih in 1954 but was closed soon after. So it was quite possible that there were some people in favour and others against. As regards Bom and Ntong, I could not say anything because I had had no chance to find out.

Having told me the verdict, Pa Monday now took the cards pointing to the stick representing Bom (all negative) and began to read them to me. When he had read one he placed it in my hand.

kur nə bʉp 'evil meeting'	As for Bom, they will hold a meeting and discuss your request to build your church there. They will never agree.

dək nə bʉp 'evil war'; literally 'evil war shield'	They will fight against you—this card symbolizes war, evil war. Even if you want to force the issue, they will fight against you. They will refuse to give you a plot.
mbàm nə bʉp 'evil money'	Some people will say they would agree to give you a plot, if at all, they would charge you a huge amount of money. But other people will refuse even that.
rʉm ŋwʉmbam nə bʉp 'evil male witch'	A man who is a proper witch will say that whatever happens he will bewitch you. You will have to enter the grave.
bàm nə bʉp 'evil bag'	Your bag which you hang from your shoulder will be 'open' since you have died [i.e. people are free to search your bag].
ncùm nə bʉp 'evil death drum'	They have already brought out the drum to beat for your death rite. They will take cloth and wrap you in it. Look! Don't you see the cloth? [There was spider's web around the card]. This is *mba'* [spider's web], the spider's own cloth. They will wrap you in it.
mvəp nə bʉp 'evil fowl'	They will eat this fowl on your behalf [i.e. they will feast your death].
fù tsək rʉm nə bʉp 'evil leaf of witches, meat is wrapped in leaves'	They will eat the 'leaf' [i.e. the meat provided for the death celebration] saying that they are celebrating your death.
ŋwantàp nə bʉp 'evil *ŋwantàp*' (most important of the secret societies of men; the sacra of this society)	They will celebrate your death, death caused by *ŋwantàp.*

This is the end of this line. And now to Kwaja. Do you see? All these cards concern Kwaja. Let me show you what they say. Kwaja agrees that you build a church there.

ncu nə bəboŋ 'good door'	When you build them a church, they will open the door by themselves.
kur nə bəboŋ 'good meeting'	They have already held a meeting, at which they expressed their wish that you should come and build a church.
kur rʉm nə bəboŋ 'good meeting of witches'	The witches too held a meeting, all of them joined. They said that they would not bewitch you. They will let you bring the church. All witches agreed to that.
rʉm ŋwaŋwe nə bəboŋ 'good witch woman'	A very strong and evil witch woman says that she too likes you to bring that church.

ŋfəssi nə bəboŋ 'good burial ground' [ancestors of living memory]	Let the ancestors not wake up. Let them agree to have this church in the village. Let nobody refuse, whether *ŋfəssi* or whoever.
mba nə bəboŋ 'good leopard' [witchcraft transformation]	The church is a good church where 'leopard' will not be able to catch people. Look! This card shows a 'good leopard'.
duk luŋgoŋ nə bəboŋ 'good talk of long time ago'	Since a long time ago, people have been talking about you, that you are a leader of Christians and talk well.
mvəp nə bəboŋ 'good fowl'	When you come, they will be happy and kill a fowl and roast it for you to eat.
to nzəp nə bəboŋ 'good crossing of stream'	The stream(s) which you will have to cross going to Kwaja will pose no problems. It will be a good trek.
vəm zum nə bəboŋ 'good pregnancy'	All pregnant women will agree to enter the church.
mbàm nə bəboŋ 'good money'	As they have agreed to have the church, some money will be donated, as is the custom of the church as regards offering.
bàm nə bəboŋ 'good bag'	The bag which you hang from your shoulder is a good bag.
gì nə bəboŋ 'good journey'	Your journey to Kwaja will be without trouble. It will be a good journey.

There were still more positive cards pointing to the stick representing Kwaja, but the above should be enough for the reader to get an idea how the diviner reads the cards, making his explanation suit the case in question. Divining about a journey to be undertaken would follow a similar pattern but it would be quite different in cases of sickness, death and misfortune.

The literal meaning of a card is often stretched and can take on a figurative meaning. Once in Nkot, when Pa Monday's dogs ran away, he divined their whereabouts—whether they were still in Nkot, gone to Gom, or returned to Sabongari. The outcome of the divination was that they were not in Nkot (the stick was 'empty'), had not gone to Sabongari (negative cards were pointing to that stick) but were in Gom (positive cards were pointing to Gom). When Pa Monday went through the pile of cards pointing to the stick representing Gom, he suddenly started. There was one negative card among them, *vàm zum nə bup* 'evil pregnancy'. But in this case Pa Monday referred to it as 'broken last' (burst anus), meaning that something or someone had died. Two days later, I learned that one of the dogs, which had had a long piece of chain dragging from its neck, had strangled itself on the way to Gom. When the dog was crossing a deep gully across which two logs served as a bridge, the chain got stuck between the logs and threw the dog off-balance; suspended in mid-air, with the chain tightening around its neck, it died. Pa Monday told me later on when I met him again that when he saw this particular card he was sure that one of the

dogs had died, although he did not tell me at the time. But I had taken note of it.

At the end of the divination, the diviner will recapitulate his findings in a few words. He will point out the verdict and then give a summary of the 'reasons', especially the line of action to be taken to remedy the situation or to avoid further calamity.

Summing up, we can say that in spider divination the diviner has at his disposal several means to help him in his interpretation: the sticks which already narrow down the possibilities; the direction of the cards (pointing to or touching a stick); and the polarity of the cards (negative-positive). These help him to give the verdict, whereas the meaning of the cards, the symbols, help him to indicate the 'reasons' (*njo*) and the line of action to take.

Cross-checking veracity

The practice of truth-testing questions put to the spider or administering an ordeal, as recorded by Zeitlyn (1987:10) for the Mambila, is not practised in Yamba spider divination. So, what options are open to the diviner or client if he is not satisfied with or doubtful about the outcome of the divination? Here the opinions of my informants differ. Pa Taabi and Nsangong of Mfe say that one can put the same case to the same spider again, in other words repeat the same divination at the same hole. They maintain that the result will be basically the same, but more details or different aspects may be revealed. Pa Monday strongly disagrees. If one puts the same case to the same spider a second time, it will be annoyed and refuse to come out.

> If you ask the spider twice it will not come out...since it has told you everything already and you know it. If you repeat the same thing although it has already told you, it will refuse to come out. It will say that it has told you everything, and now you ask the same thing again—you want it to come out to tell you what again? It will refuse to come out (interview, 15 July 1991).

The reason given sounds convincing. Does this mean that Pa Monday has no other way of double-checking the outcome of a divination? Not at all! If he is not satisfied he will transfer the case to another hole and put the same case there. He left me in no doubt, too, that the result will always be the same because *ŋgam* never lies.

I had the opportunity of observing a repeated divination. It was the case about Pa Monday's sudden illness in Nwa. I did not witness the first divination, but he told me the outcome before he put the same case to a spider in Sabongari when I was present. The result was indeed basically the same. The spider again 'caught' his own people in Gom. They had 'bewitched' him because he refused to take over from the present lineage

head who was old and blind and could no longer perform all his duties. In Sabongari, Pa Monday discovered an additional reason: he owed some money to one of his relatives!

Some further points of interest

Divining *còŋ*

When the client has done everything he was advised to do by the divination he may come to the diviner and ask him to divine *còŋ*. This means that the diviner should find out whether everything is now 'peace' or whether there is still something which the client has to do. The outcome of a divination is referred to as *còŋ* (peace) when all the negative cards are covered by positive cards so that the negative cards cannot be seen.

Divination and witchcraft

According to Pa Monday, witchcraft can interfere with spider divination, not in the sense that it would confuse the spider so that its verdict is unreliable, but by harming the spider or chasing it away. *ŋgam se* can detect witches. When *ŋgam se* proves somebody to be a witch the diviner must reveal it. This practice brought Pa Monday a lot of enmity and opposition, especially from his own lineage. But he says that there is no way out:

> Divination is able to prove somebody to be a witch. For man it is not possible to do so. When divination reveals that a certain person is a witch...my 'big father' asked me, 'when *ŋgam* catches a witch are you going to reveal it amongst people?' I say, I cannot refuse because my own [divination] is these leaf-cards. Nobody can see *ŋgam* down underground. When it catches a person, saying, 'You are a witch', if I don't reveal it, *ŋgam* will say to me, 'I have told you that you should tell people thus, *why* do you hide it, telling a lie instead? What for?' It will take its hand like this and lock my eyes and I will no longer be able to see anything good again. All my 'kitchen' [people of the lineage] say, 'No, if *ŋgam* catches a witch and you reveal it, it is not good'. They tell me not to reveal it. I tell them that I cannot do otherwise. If I fail to reveal it, 'my talk will not stand up'. If they forbid me to do so, I won't see anybody coming to me with a request to divine for him, because this one inside the ground tells the truth. It does not lie.

This clearly shows that the diviner is in an awkward predicament. Either he hides what *ŋgam* has revealed to him and so is untruthful to *ŋgam and* to the client and will be punished, or he reveals what he sees to be the

truth, thus incurring the wrath of his family and the people accused of being witches.

An exception to the rule

The normal practice in making *ŋgam se* is that the diviner uses all the cards in his set, but I have witnessed one exception to this rule. When I was with Pa Monday in Nkot, he was faced with the problem of having to make two divinations at the same time but having only one set of cards. The two cases in question were the case of the runaway dogs described above and the illness of the daughter of Fo-Ndu, the chief of Ndu quarter of Nkot. Pa Monday divided his set of cards into two sections of forty cards each (i.e. twenty pairs each). He picked out those pairs which were relevant to each case. He used one section at one spider hole and another section at a different spider hole. He could do so, as he later told me, because the two cases were quite different in nature. Had there been two cases of illness, for example, he could not have done it.

Remuneration

Finally, a word about remuneration. None of my informants, as already mentioned, divined for a living, except Pa Taabi. They were either farmers or petty traders. Many of the diviners I know are lineage heads. I asked Pa Monday how much a person had to pay him for a divination.

> A woman pays 250 frs CFA.[8] A man may be asked to pay 300 or 500 according to the nature of the case. If somebody brings you a calabash of palm-wine, you do not ask for money. If a man comes to you to divine about his temporary impotence and the divination is successful in pointing out the cause and the *ngà ncɔp* [medicine man] he has to consult to regain his potency, he will be asked to pay 1000 frs.

Conclusion

In this article, I have tried as far as possible to be faithful to the convictions and practices of the Yamba spider diviner; it is our responsibility as analysts to do so (Zeitlyn 1987: 21). One thing which struck me more

8. The exchange rate with the French franc when the research was undertaken was 50 CFA to the franc.

than anything else while working with diviners is the absolute sincerity with which they practise divination. Their faith in the truthfulness of *ŋgam se* is unshakeable: '*ŋgam* de talk true, e no de talk lie!', runs like a constant refrain through all my tapes and fieldnotes. I have tried to show that the basis for this conviction is their belief that the spider at the time of divination is God, that the spider (equated with God) is the source of the truthfulness of divination. The diviner as interpreter must faithfully convey this truth to the client. No Yamba would accept that 'any diviner worthy of his "fowl" gives an answer acceptable to his client' (Marwick 1965: 92, quoting Monica Wilson).

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JASO 26/1 (1995): 69–79

KEFUH MYIN: A THERAPEUTIC MEDICINE IN OKU

HANS-JOACHIM KOLOSS

The Logic of Medicines in the Oku World-view

In a world-view typical of traditional African societies such as Oku, serious illness and death may be attributed to transcendental powers rather than natural causes. The task of the diviner is to establish the ultimate (or 'occult') cause and to determine the necessary action to be taken. The illness may result from the anger of a spirit or ancestor, or from attacks by witches. Depending on the diagnosis, either particular sacrifices may be necessary, or action may be needed to detect witches and destroy them with powerful medicines. In any case, peace must be restored before treatment begins or action taken.[1]

In Oku, God and the ancestors endow the world with *keyus*, but only so long as their laws are obeyed. *Keyus* may be translated as 'life-power', but also as 'soul' and 'breath'. Not only living beings but also important things, such as the sun, earth, rain and iron, have and need their own *keyus*. It is noteworthy that even medicines, family groups and political communities have *keyus*. *Keyus*, however, is granted to men only when they respect

1. This work is based on ethnological research carried out in Oku and other Grassfield kingdoms during six visits between 1975 and 1981, covering a total period of more than eighteen months.

the law. The Oku ideal is a social group (family, village quarter, secret society or 'tribe') that is united 'in one speech and meaning' (*kesugnen kemock*), 'in one breath' (*kejni kemock*) and, above all, in one *keyus*.[2] Tranquil sleep is characterized by peace and harmony, since witches and evil spirits are held to attack at night. Prayers explicitly ask for good, undisturbed sleep in addition to general blessings.

The ancestors (*kwesaise*) will punish those who disturb the peace of a family. Such punishment is manifest in illness or catastrophes and can be overcome only by expiatory sacrifices, which must be performed by the family head in his compound in the presence of all concerned. Palm-wine is drunk and a chicken sacrificed and eaten. The ancestors will also receive a share. The point is not primarily to eat but to unite a family in dispute. This involves confessions of bad feelings and expressions of regret. The ceremony is called *ntangle*, which strictly means arbitration and the resolution of disputes, without reference to the accompanying sacrifice.

What is most important here is the notion of unity expressed in commensality. In Oku it is an offence to the ancestors to share a meal with an enemy. The logic of this works both ways: the ancestors are appeased by the sacrifice offered at *ntangle*, and this commensality implies that the ancestors are no longer angry with the living.

The Oku concept of *keyus* is fully consistent with the *ntangle* rite. During *ntangle*, ancestors are said to gather at the bottom of the large wine pots (*eking myin*) so their *keyus* enters the wine and mixes with the *keyus* of those who drink it. This reinvigorates the drinkers with *keyus* and links them directly with their ancestors. Some Oku informants elaborated on this by claiming that the ancestors received the *keyus* of the living and were themselves strengthened thereby. Most simply said that the ancestors were pleased to see peace restored and to see that they had not been forgotten.

God and the ancestors, however, do not only reveal themselves to the living directly through blessings and punishments, they also have influence indirectly through the medicines they originally gave to men for their general well-being, and above all for protection against all hostile influences, especially witchcraft. Nearly all extended families in Oku possess a masquerading society whose medicine gives protection against all enemies. For such medicine to be effective, it must be produced secretly and never in the presence of women. New members of the masquerading society and those seeking higher ranks within it need special protective medicines against all the dangers they will encounter. They must also pay their dues in the form of palm-wine and chickens. The rules of the masquerade societies and also their medicines and masks were protected by this 'bad' medicine.[3]

2. For a detailed interpretation of the Oku world-view and a further account of *keyus*, see Koloss 1986 and 1987.

3. For a comparison between Ejagham (Cross River) and Oku medicine, see Koloss 1984 and 1985. For a more psychological perspective on Oku medicine see Krauss 1990. The reputation of Oku as a centre of strong and powerful medicines is such that it is known as

A basic distinction is made in Oku between 'good' and 'bad' medicine. 'Bad' medicines include those that are used to deter witches which can cause death. Many of the masquerading or other 'secret' societies have such 'bad' medicines to protect their sacra buried in the 'medicine corner' of the masquerade society's house. Anyone who looks at forbidden things will suffer the consequences, as will any member who reveals the secrets they have sworn to protect. The main medicine of some societies, such as the military society, is itself a 'bad' medicine. The most neutral gloss for this type of medicine is 'dangerous' or 'deadly'. The societies serve to channel the use of these 'bad' medicines to socially acceptable directions.

God and the ancestors also created 'good' medicines for the welfare of humanity, which masquerade societies possess. Apart from those of the secret societies, these can be produced and used in public. 'Good' medicines are not dangerous. Like 'bad' medicines, they are made in the course of rituals and on the part of ritual associations. Their production is far from merely following a recipe.[4] In all cases palm-wine and food must accompany the taking of the medicine proper. The wine must be served from a pot which is addressed in the prayers, since as we have already seen, the ancestors are held to gather in the bottom of wine pots. The efficacy of medicines stems from their transmission from the ancestors (and ultimately God). Medicines are inherited or created after a dream in which an ancestor asked for the medicine to be made.

The most important of all the Oku 'good' medicines is *kefuh myin* (the medicine of the gods), which is also called *kefuh wan* (medicine for a child) because its main use is to ensure the well-being of children. The importance of the *kefuh myin* palm-wine pots (normally stored in the house of the family head) is also expressed through the use of the term 'house gods' or more literally 'handmade gods' (*Emyin me bomin ne ngoh*), although strictly this appellation is restricted to the seventeen differentiated spirits or lesser gods for whom sacrifices are made by the *Ebfon* (king).

Feyin is the term for the High God in Oku, who created men and the whole world. In the plural (*emyin*) it can designate not only God and the seventeen lesser spirits or gods but also the ancestors. By extension it can be applied to all those who do good. This is the justification for the description of the *Ebfon* as *Feyin Ebkwoh* (literally, 'God of Oku'). The study of prayers from different rituals may clarify the relations between the different aspects of Oku cosmology.

The general term for sacrifice in Oku is *echise myin* (literally, 'to give a good sleep to the gods'). *Echise myin* and *ntangle* are sharply differentiated, the former being only for gods or spirits, the latter exclusively for the ancestors. *Echise myin* consists solely of wine and *fufu* (the maize porridge

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the 'small India of Cameroon', and people travel long distances to be treated there. [Editor's note: India has a reputation in Cameroon as a source of powerful medicine.]

4. Recipes do exist and are kept secret. No attempt was made to study the recipes themselves.

staple), whereas *ntangle* involves animal sacrifice (fowls, or goats for royal ancestors). *Echise myin* is performed regularly once a year, usually in the dry season. *Kefuh myin*, the ritual that I will concentrate upon in the remainder of this article, may be interpreted as a part of *echise myin*, since it concerns the gods in a more general sense. On the other hand, *ntangle* is only performed (in theory) when the ancestors need to be appeased. In reality, however, many people perform *ntangle* without a particular issue in mind save for remembering the ancestors.

Kefuh myin is found throughout Oku, and I now turn to a detailed description of it. *Kefuh myin* is primarily concerned with the health and well-being of children, although it is sometimes performed in order to help overcome the problems of an adult.

All adult men may own *kefuh myin*, acquiring it through initiation from someone who already owns it and who is paid for teaching the neophyte how to perform it. Although it is exclusively men who carry out *kefuh myin*, women play a more prominent role in it than in other Oku medicines. Indeed, it is said that women were the original owners of *kefuh myin*, and it is often inherited matrilineally (from a mother to her daughters). Adult men often have *kefuh myin* for all their wives. It may be seen as a ritual counterbalance to the practice of patrilocal residence (at this stage of marriage) and serves as a unifying medium between the family of the husband and those of his wives.

Kefuh myin is normally acquired though inheritance, and most family groups in Oku possess it. However, some types of 'special' births require *kefuh myin* to be performed, and this may lead to *kefuh myin* being acquired. Twins or breech births are the commonest examples. It is believed that such children are likely to become diviners or healers in adulthood. Diviners also recommend *kefuh myin* for weak and sickly looking children.

The Performance of a Typical Kefuh Myin

The sequence of actions in a typical *kefuh myin* ritual is as follows. First the officiant meets some of the other family members in the house where the *kefuh myin* equipment is stored. Principal among these objects are *eking myin*, *ebseck myin*, and the *bass myin*, which are further described below. Water is used to wash the palm-wine pot (*eking myin*), the gourd for the ancestors' wine (*ebeseck myin*) and the broken calabash (*bass myin*). Each is then placed on three special leaves. Medicine leaves are then prepared, being ground on a grinding-stone. The 'good' medicine is prepared before the 'bad' medicine. Some *egusi* (pounded pumpkin seeds) is mixed with oil and placed in a special container. After this the 'eyes' of the palm-wine pot are repainted and two vertical white lines are drawn on the side of the pot opposite the 'eye'. Then the gourd for the ancestors' wine

and the broken calabash are rubbed with bad medicine. Following this, two small snail-shells and a small stone that comes from the sacred lake of Oku are rubbed with bad medicine and placed inside the pot (they are used for a type of divination later in the ritual). Some vines are twisted round the neck of the pot.

Good medicine is then mixed with some pounded cocoyam, after which a variety of medicinal plants and two 'life plants' (*Dracaena* sp.) are put into the broken calabash. The officiant pours a little wine on the floor at the doorway and greets the ancestors. He then pours the wine into the wine pot. This is the occasion for a long prayer which explains the reasons for performing the ritual and asks the ancestors for their help. Then gum from the African plum tree (*elei*) is burnt in front of the wine pot. The smoke from this gum is said to drive away insects, dangerous spirits and bad dreams. This is followed by another prayer to the ancestors which accompanies 'the cleaning of *emkan*'. Two *emkan*[5] sticks are shaved into the palm-wine as a blessing. The remains of the sticks are then thrown on the ground, their fall being interpreted as an oracle.

Meanwhile the snail-shells floating in the palm-wine have been watched, and their orientation relative to one another interpreted. The best sign is if the tips of the shells are close together. Bad signs are the shells crossing over one another, or floating in different parts of the pot. This is taken to mean that the ancestors are not yet happy, that there are problems that are yet to be settled. The worse sign of all, however, occurs when one of the snail-shells is seen to sink and rise again three times. This is interpreted as warning of a death to come.

The gourd of the ancestors' wine is now filled and closed with a 'life plant'. Once the ancestors have had their share of the wine, the men present start to drink the wine. As each person is served, but before he drinks, a little wine is poured back into the pot in order to allow some of the *keyus* of the person to mix with the *keyus* of the other participants and with that of the ancestors. Next they make *njimte* (a ritual dish of pounded cocoyams and 'good' medicine). Small pieces are thrown into the four corners of the room as shares for the ancestors and a piece into the fire as a 'gift' for the 'bad' spirits. The men present then eat the remainder. After that the broken calabash is filled with water, and some of it is sprinkled around the room and on those present to bless them.

After the part of the ritual reserved to men is over, the women and children are called into the room. They form a line, each touching the person in front, with the principal woman being treated in front holding the hand of the officiant. He then rubs the wine pot, the broken calabash and the ancestors' calabash with more 'bad' medicine. A chicken (called 'the chicken for the child') is brought, given some *njimte* and rubbed with 'good' medicine. Some feathers are removed and stuck to the wine pot, the bro-

5. The *emkan* tree is found in the forest region of West Cameroon. It is used in several rituals in Oku and throughout the Grassfields.

ken calabash and the ancestors' calabash. The chicken is then given to the mother of the ill child. This chicken must never be killed. If it dies it must be replaced. It and its descendants become the property of the child for whom the *kefuh myin* has been performed. Finally the closing acts are performed: the room and all those present are blessed with water sprinkled from the broken calabash. The women and children are given some *njimte* and good medicine. Bad medicine is rubbed on the sternum of the sick child. The same vine that was already twisted round the wine pot is twisted round the neck of each participant. These are left in place for a few days as a sign of having been blessed in *kefuh myin*. Finally the rattle is shaken near to the ears of the children present.

As described, the *kefuh myin* ritual takes from two to three hours. It is frequently performed in the dry season in memory of the ancestors without any precipitating cause such as illness or birth. Either of these will occasion a *kefuh myin* performance which has an additional section, called *ngeo myin* ('the stream of the gods'). This is performed outside the house where the *kefuh myin* ritual has occurred. The officiant sprinkles some of the liquid from the broken calabash on to the ground. He then takes some of the wet soil on the point of a spear and holds it twice to the mouth of the sick child. All present then go to the 'stream', where a basket of medicinal plants is prepared. The *emkan* sticks are shaved over this basket as previously over the wine pot. The ancestors are summoned (often silently) to attend to the ritual as this is done. A ritual doorway (*ebchundah*) is then constructed. A spear and a stalk of elephant grass are stuck into the ground and the tops bound together so that they form a doorway. Two holes are then dug under this doorway and filled with medicinal plants. Between the holes the officiant places two iron implements, a hoe and a knife as used by women for farming.

Iron is held to contain a very large amount of *keyus* because its production is so difficult and dangerous. An implement will also contain some of the *keyus* of all those who have used it, so objects such as old hoes are held to be extremely powerful and are often kept for ritual use. They have a particular role to play when people are to be protected from danger or freed from bad influences. It is believed that during the ritual the ancestors will gather in the implements, just as they do within the wine pot and that the iron implements act like magnets to extract all malign influence from those who pass through the *ebchundah*.

As they pass through the *ebchundah* the participants stand on the hoe and are then washed with some water from the baskets that were prepared for this part of the ritual and with liquid from the broken calabash. Once everyone has been through the doorway, the medicinal plants are removed from the basket and the mother of the sick child puts a plant into each of the holes while holding her hands behind her back. The hole is then covered over with soil in the hope that one of the plants may sprout.

Cowry shells are thrown and the pattern interpreted as an oracle of the success of the ritual. A chicken is then placed between the two holes and

killed with the mother's help. Some of the feathers are stuck into the ground round the holes. Everyone present has some camwood rubbed on their forehead, and they then re-enter the house to lick some good medicine and drink the remaining palm-wine while the chicken is being roasted. Once it has been eaten and the wine finished, the ritual objects are returned to store. The leading officiant is given a chicken and a good quantity of palm oil.

Objects Used in Kefuh Myin

Apart from the wine pot described above, the other objects used in *kefuh myin* are as follows:

(1) *Eking myin* (the wine pots of the gods). Wine pots (such as *eking myin*) are the most important objects in all 'medicine' rites, *kefuh myin* among them. These pots hold the palm-wine which links the participants with the ancestors who are held to gather within the pot (see above). Two circles, described as the 'eyes of God' (*eshea feyin*), are drawn on the *eking myin*, one on the outside, one at the base of the pot. These circles are drawn with a white concoction which is itself a 'good' medicine, and is licked by the participants in the course of the ritual. The interior of the circles is filled in with a different medicine, black in colour, which is described as a 'bad' medicine which must not be eaten. It can be directed by the ancestors against anyone who violates the restrictions that surround the *kefuh myin* rite; for example, it can affect the owners of *kefuh myin* should they omit to perform an annual sacrifice for *kefuh myin*. The participants are rubbed with this 'bad' medicine which will act to extract anything bad from them (this is similar to the treatment of children with a minor illness). When not in use, the *kefuh myin* wine pots are stored in the house of the family head; they are used only for ritual purposes. They are not made in Oku but are purchased from the neighbouring chiefdom of Babessi. If *kefuh myin* has to be performed urgently for a child, a large calabash can be used if the parents do not already own *kefuh myin* and are purchasing it for their sick child.

The masquerade societies and other associations have similar wine pots, which are slightly larger than those used for *kefuh myin*. They are called *eking mkum* (pot of the juju) and they are also distinguished from those of *kefuh myin* by using red as well as black and white to mark the 'eyes' of the pots. The black 'bad' medicine is the same as that used to protect the musical instruments and the headpiece of the masquerades from the gaze of non-initiates.

(2) *Ebseck myin* (calabash for the gods). This is a small, long-necked calabash which holds the palm-wine sacrificed for God and for the ancestors. It is sealed with a 'life-plant' (*Dracaena* sp.).

(3) *Keghen myin* (half-calabash for the gods) or *bass myin* (broken calabash for the gods). This is the blessing calabash which has great prominence in ritual practice throughout the Grassfields. It contains the plants and liquid of the *kefuh myin* medicine which is splashed over participants to bless them.

(4) *Ebsie myin* is a small pot holding a small amount of *egusi* (pounded pumpkin seeds).

(5) *Keal myin* is a dish from which the participants eat *njimte*, a ritual dish made nowadays from pounded cocoyams but formerly from guinea corn and *egusi*.

(6) *Ebom myin* is the cup from which palm-wine is drunk.

(7) *Kecheake myin* is a rattle shaken near the ears of children at the end of the ritual. It is said to improve their hearing.

Case-Studies: Some Kefuh Myin *Rituals*

Having described the general pattern of a *kefuh myin* rite, let us now consider some examples that I observed during fieldwork undertaken between 1977 and 1981. These help to illustrate how the general form of the rite is adapted to the particular circumstances that lead to particular *kefuh myin* performances. The prayers that follow were spoken in an ordinary conversational style, as if addressing a living person present in the room. There is no distinct genre of speech in prayer.

Case 1: Oku-Keyon, 1 December 1977

Fai Bafon had died on 20 July 1976 but there had never been a *kefuh myin* ceremony for him 'to loosen his hands from the medicine'.[6] One of his daughters had become ill, and a diviner diagnosed that her illness was the result of the failure to perform this ritual. The ritual was carried out in the usual way, but in addition the palm-wine pot and the walls of the room were wiped with a chicken to 'drive out the bad spirit of the dead father'. The chicken was later killed and eaten. When the *njimte* was thrown into the four corners of the room, the dead parents were asked to bring all their siblings to bless their sick daughter. The prayer continued. 'The living can do nothing at the moment, only the ancestors can help. The good gods should

6. When the owner of a medicine dies, this ritual must be performed so that the successor can safely use the medicine. The ritual asks the spirit of the deceased to approve and bless the successor.

eat with their mouths, the bad gods with their noses.' This is a common metaphor in this context.

Case 2: Oku-Elack, 29 December 1977

The family of Fai Keming carried out a 'normal' *kefuh myin* without any illness as precipitating cause.[7] Fai Keming made the following invocations in the course of the ritual. While pouring wine at the threshold, he prayed:

> 'Oh gods of this area or the ancestors of this compound, take this wine and put it into this pot. Give us blessings and give us one *keyus* so that we will work together. And give sound sleep to everyone. Stop us from having bad dreams.'

When the wine was being poured into the wine pot, he prayed:

> 'Oh, Chiekoh [his dead mother], call the fathers of this place so that you are the one who is pouring it into the pot. Chiekoh, it is now dry season, give one *keyus* to the family. Tangte, we will harvest coffee and we hope to get much money from the Cooperative through your help. Call Nyamsai and Chiekoh and all of you should come under this wine pot and also Keming who founded this pot [i.e. the first owner of this *kefuh myin* medicine], which was later forgotten by the people. I say it is now dry season and time for harvesting coffee. I say that you should send us blessings and also to the whole world. Send good *keyus* to all of us, because this is the time that people renew the wine pot.'

Finally, when the *emkan* sticks were being shaved over the medicines, he prayed:

> 'This is *emkan*. When it mixes in this pot with the wine, our prayers and our *keyus* will mix. Now it is dry season. It is time for money. We wish every boy and girl to get money so they can buy salt and oil and protect their lives. We do not hate strangers. But send away bad people. Bring us good people who can show us good ways, whether people with medicines or other people. Send away the bad and bring us the good. How is it that other groups have progress but we do not see any development? We are always praying and begging that good luck should come to us.'

Case 3: Oku-Ngashie, 5 December 1978

Fai Mankoh performed both *kefuh myin* and another ritual called *ngeo* myin for a new-born child. Two of the prayers he uttered are as follows:

7. This *kefuh myin* ceremony was filmed (Koloss 1988) and has formed the basis of the documentataion of the main elements of the ritual.

> 'Gods, we are here with children before you. Take away all evil from them and bring them just good things and health. Let them grow up in the way the modern world demands. The world now belongs to the white man. Take away evil and show us the way of the whites.'

As the *njimte* was being thrown into the corners of the room, he prayed:

> ' We call on you, mother of these children, to join us today in making *kefuh myin* for these children. Take this *njimte* [cocoyam] and give it to the other elders so that they may join us too. Let the bad gods take this with their noses and run away with evil far from us. Let the good gods take this food with their mouths and bring us the good.'

Case 4: Oku-Elack, 20 November 1981

Fai Keming performed *kefuh myin* because of the illnesses of one of his daughters and of her daughter. A diviner diagnosed the anger of the ancestors, who felt forgotten because no kefuh myin had been performed for a long time. While pouring the wine into the wine pot, Fai Keming addressed them as follows:

> 'Call all the former medicine men. Take this wine and put it with one *keyus* into the pot. Although I am pouring the wine, it is your doing. If I have forgotten any leaf, put it in for me. I beg you to give these people good dreams and good health. Also the dead fathers of this place should call the gods of this place [i.e. some of the seventeen Oku divinities] to bless these people with their *keyus* and give them good dreams and a sound sleep.'

Case 5: Oku-Ngashie, 22 November 1981

Pa Kegham from Oku-Mboh performed *kefuh myin* after a diviner diagnosed that it would help the treatment of a young boy. While the *emkan* sticks were being scraped over the wine pot, Pa Kegham prayed:

> 'Oh Tambong [an ancestor] this is *emkan*. Call Kinkoh [the father of Tambong]. All of you should meet and clean this *emkan* for us and put its shavings into the medicine for the child. God should send his blessings. Oh mothers of this child and Tango [another ancestor], everything is in your hands, you should join together and send blessings. We know you can see what has happened. So send away bad dreams and give a good sleep to this child. *Emkan*, let Tango call all the mothers of this child and everyone will talk with one mouth.'

My presence along with my interpreter was noted, and my interpreter was explicitly mentioned in the prayers:

> 'Oh, this boy here, you have been made a *nchinda* [i.e. he had become a member of *kwifon*, the most important secret society in Oku as in many Grassfield societies]. These are your blessings. As you are travelling with this white man, may God bless you in all your doings. If the white man gives you anything, let it be of use to you and your family. The world has changed. I hope it is your own good luck (which Oku gave you) and bless too, this white man.'

Conclusions: God is First

Oku believe in functionalism! Peace and social harmony attract the blessings of the ancestors and the supreme God *Feyin*, who is the ultimate recipient of all prayers and the ultimate source of all *keyus*, the life-power. Traditional healers and diviners have a large repertoire of rituals and medicines available to them and great knowledge and experience, but they say that all of these things depend, in the last resort, on *Feyin*, the source of all life. As they say, *mbiy lu Feyin* ('God is first').

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JASO 26/1 (1995): 81–86

THE INITIATION OF THE *DUGI* AMONG THE PÉRÉ

CHARLES-HENRY PRADELLES DE LATOUR

THE initiation ceremony of Péré medicine men (*dugi*) is of particular relevance to this collection of papers since, as I will demonstrate, an element of it is remembered by Péré in the Grassfields of Cameroon who left their original home in the north, at the beginning of the century, in the train of their close allies, the Chamba, to settle finally with Bali-Nyonga, in the western Grassfields. This paper describes the ceremony as a small contribution to the ethnography of the Bali-Nyonga as studied by Sally Chilver.

The Péré of the north, who at present number some twenty thousand, occupy a remote plain in Adamawa Province. This plain is closed off to the north by the Faro game reserve, to the west by the Nigerian border, and to the south and east by the high plateau of Tignère. While a certain number of Péré are gathered into settlements such as Koncha, Mayo-Baléo, Gadjiwan and Almé, the great majority still live in scattered hamlets, the sites of which are changed approximately once a decade. A hamlet generally comprises a man, his wives, children, and married sons, and some of his uterine nephews. At his death, his sons inherit the huts while his nephews inherit the other goods such as granaries, cattle and access to hunting and fishing sites. Thus, while the hamlet is patrilocal, the kinship system is

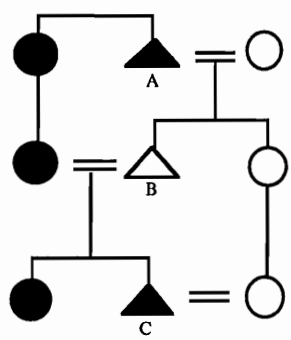
I thank Gabriel Gbadamosi for helping me translate this paper from French into English and for discussing it with me.

firmly matrilineal, with the Péré recognizing about twenty matrilineal clans.

Dugi are medicine men who inherit a ritual store (*dugo*) in which is hidden sacred musical instruments representing a clan's magical force (*gérem*). Some *dugi* inherit only iron bells which are hidden in a *dugo*, a pot placed just outside their compound. Others inherit, in addition to the bells, trumpets made of linked calabashes. In this case, the *dugo* may be a small hut built nearby in the bush. The iron bells are used in curing illnesses, particularly barrenness in women. The trumpets have a prominent place in initiation ceremonies and are also used against sorcerers and played at a *dugi*'s funeral. Although the different *dugi* are ranked, all must undergo the same initiation ritual in order to to use the power of the *gérem*.

In some parts of the plain less influenced by Islam, like the canton of Almé, the heads of certain hamlets are *dugi*. In these instances possession and transmission of the *gérem* settled in the *dugo* reinforce the traditional marriage alliances between clans. This can be seen from the fact that although the *gérem* is the permanent property of a matrilineal clan, its *dugo* is always inherited patrilineally, from father to son. For a *gérem* to remain the property of its matrilineal clan, a *dugi* must marry a patrilineal cross-cousin (a woman of the matrilineal clan of his father). In this way a *gérem* is possessed every second generation by a member of the matrilineal clan, and two clans are linked by repeated matrimonial alliances (see Fig. 1).

FIG. 1. Clan of the *Gérem*



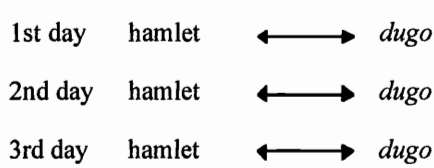
If A transmits the *gérem* (belonging to his clan, shown in black) to his son B, and if B marries his father's sister's daughter, his son C, the next heritor in the *gérem*, will belong to the same clan as his father's father, A. The *dugi,* who are thus obliged to repeat preferential marriage alliances, embody the traditional social order of the Péré; the *gérem* is not only a magical power but also a social law.

It is in this double aspect that the *gérem* presides over the initiation of all young boys. This important ceremony, which I have described

elsewhere (1988), takes place over three days. On the first day, young boys of five or six years old are frightened by the terrifying roar of the unseen *gérem*, 'the animal which is going to swallow them', represented by their elder siblings, who blow on the trumpets taken from the *dugo*. Pursued by the roaring of the *gérem*, which they cannot see, the boys are taken to the hamlet of the *dugi*, who directs the initiation. On arrival, the boys are ritually purified beside the *dugo* (a small hut) and then taken inside a hut in the hamlet, outside of which the *gérem*, seeming to attack, becomes more and more menacing as the night wears on. On the second day, the most important period of the ritual, the novices lie face down on the ground in rows, holding over their eyes 'the leaf of death' which prevents them from seeing the different scenes being played over them by their elder siblings and the *dugi* in order to terrify them. One by one, they mime the devouring *gérem,* the monkeys who scratch and whip the novices with branches, and finally the devastating tornado which soaks and floods them. The boys, holding 'the leaf of death' over their eyes, are blind to the action and may be considered to be at the blind spot of the event, thus in both these senses enacting a symbolic death of the gaze. After this, the *dugi* reveal to them the musical instruments representing the *gérem* and make them swear never to speak of this to the women. The young initiates, thus set apart from their mothers by this exclusive knowledge, learn ritually on the third day to sieve millet beer and play the drums, thereby being reintegrated into social life.

The three phases of this rite of passage are centred on two locations: the hamlet where the children pass all three nights, and the *dugo* around which the initiation unfolds (see Fig. 2).

FIG. 2



The boys are initiated in the very place where the mystery of the *gérem* is located, but they nevertheless remain symbolically of the hamlet.

An adolescent who chooses to follow his father and become a *dugi* must undergo a supplementary initiation, which I have never seen but which has been described to me independently by four experienced *dugi*. As with the ceremony described above, a senior *dugi* decides when to celebrate the initiation ritual, usually when enough novices have let their decision be known. At the last ceremony, in 1985, twenty young *dugi* were initiated. The host *dugi* invites his colleagues to come three days in ad-

vance to clear a 'threshing floor' (*koo*) in the bush near his *dugo* and to prepare the millet beer which will be drunk by the participants.

On the day, the *dugi* novices gather in the *koo*. Crouched on the ground, bare from the waist up and with their heads lowered, they are made to submit to their elder *dugi*. At nightfall they are led out of the *koo* to stand in the open space in front of the hamlet. The principal *dugi* takes the iron bells from the pot, puts them on the ground and pours beer over them, saying: *Fuum mani ai, zoba* ('Here is your beer, drink it'). He then puts on them the mash left over from the distillation of the beer, saying: 'You ask, but why don't you give me the mash left over from the beer? Here it is.' The *dugi* then sits down in the middle of the open space in front of a full calabash of millet beer. One by one, the novices come to offer him 25 Fr CFA and crouch in front of him. For each of them, the *dugi* cuts a piece of creeper (*Cissus quadrangulis*) called *gaamb sembale* ('male medicine') over the calabash with an iron bell. It is said that 'the gérem cuts the medicine', and it is a favourable sign if the small pieces of the *gaamb sembale* dropped into the beer rise quickly again to the surface. The *dugi* then drops into the beer a sprig of grass called *mageré*, which he stirs around with an iron bell in order to see whether or not it comes to rest in front of the novice before him. He repeats the process as often as is necessary for the *mageré* to stop in the required position, and, as in the conduct of therapeutic cures which use exactly the same procedure, the *dugi* may occasionally ask questions of the novice to shed light on some difficult areas of his life. When this has been successfully concluded, the *dugi* takes the calabash and places it on the head of the novice, saying: 'Let your body be strong.' The *dugi* then makes him drink some of the beer and rubs his right hand with the *gaamb sembale*, saying: 'If a person is sick you will take the *gérem* to work on them. When you are a *dugi* you will rub on the medicine as I have just done with you, so that the sickness goes.' After this procedure is complete, there is a short break. The novices then again offer, each in turn, 25 Fr CFA to the officiating *dugi* and he repeats for each of them exactly the same ritual, only this time with the *gaamb kaanlé*, 'female medicine', which is made from the bulbs of wild hyacinth (*Pancratim hirtum*). Both parts of the ceremony continue into the night.

At first light, each novice picks up a stone, places it on his head and puts it beside the *dugo* in a heap. The stones are used by the elder *dugi* to check on the number of initiates and to see whether they have all paid their dues. The *dugi*, armed with whips made out of grass rope, thrash the bare torsos of the novices who must not flinch in spite of the weals raised on their skin. After this test of courage, the novices cross the *dugo*, entering from the east, 'where things begin', and going out to the west, 'where life ends'.[1] The initiates continue on into the bush accompanied by their elders, and in order to participate in the last part of the ritual each of the ini-

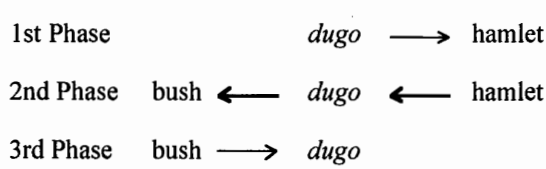
1. The Péré bury their dead with feet pointing to the west.

tiates gathers three pieces of wood: *kiinbo* (*Savadora persica*), *kitari* (*Unes piliformis*) and *samvorum* (*Brenadia salicina*).

On their return to the *dugo*, initiates and *dugi* hold each other by the shoulder in a long line, while the officiating *dugi*, at the head of the line, sacrifices a young chicken and then ties it, with his own three pieces of wood, by a long string to the supporting post on the right of the entrance to the *dugo*. It is in this way, using wood, chicken and string, that the *dugi* makes the *som*, also known as *saang waalé*, 'the strong taboo'. The *som* is supposed to make the intestines of wrong-doers come out through their anus, as occurs to the chicken when the *dugi* wraps the string tightly around its body. When the *som* is thus attached to the *dugo*, all the participants in turn rub on it pieces of *gaamb sembale* (male medicine), saying: *mani a kuma lo, fun mani voma* ('You, you stay here, let your body be strong'). Thereafter each of the initiates makes his own *som*, which he takes home with him and places in his front yard or in a *dugo*, if he already has one. Finally, to close the ceremony, the initiates weave a small bracelet of grass called *tung* (*Andetia simplex*) as a sign of their initiation, which they will wear on their wrist until it falls to pieces.

Inasmuch as the initiation of young boys is a rite of separation, that of young *dugi* is one of assimilation. Even though the two rituals are not comparable in purpose, their respective relationships to the hamlet and the *dugo* are significantly reversed. If the first rite revolves around the hamlet, to which the young initiates return to sleep every night (see Fig. 2), the second rite revolves around the *dugo* outside the hamlet (see Fig. 3).

FIG. 3



These relocations during the three phases of this second rite, makes it clear that the novices set out from the *dugo* and return there at the end. In understanding the significance of this in the initiation of a *dugi*, it should again be noted that during the central part of this rite the novices pass through the *dugo*, which thereby acts as a kind of gateway between the village and the bush. This demonstrates the *dugi* as belonging to two worlds. As can be seen with the *dugo* and the *gérem*, by their double mode of transmission (patrilineal and matrilineal), they are social, belonging to the hamlet, whereas by virtue of the access they give the *dugi* to the power of the bush, they are wild, powerful and not at all a part of the social structure. They, like the *som* or charm, are magical. Magic is always in this sense, ambivalent, being both of the social order and outside it.

After eleven months of fieldwork among the northern Péré, I passed through Bali-Nyonga in order to meet the leader of the southern Péré. He was very easy to find and very approachable, dressed in European clothes with a large umbrella tucked under his arm. I greeted him in the language of the Péré, but he no longer knew it, so we spoke in pidgin for the rest of the interview. His name was Dinga. His father had also lived in Bali-Nyonga, but his father's father had lived in Bali-Kumbat, some fifty kilometres to the east. Considering himself to be the direct heir of his father and grandfather, Dinga had become patrilineal and had completely forgotten the matrilineal clan system of the north. Neither his mother nor grandmother were Péré. For this reason he did not know the name of any of the matrilineal clans. A little taken aback at the beginning of this interview, I asked him if he knew anything about the *gérem*. His face lit up and he answered yes. 'So,' I enquired, 'you have some trumpets made out of calabashes?' 'No,' he said, with surprise. 'But you have iron bells?' 'No, not at all,' he continued to insist. 'In that case, what *is* the *gérem* for you?' To this he answered very indirectly, and it was only because I already knew about the *gérem* that he consented to tell me. It still took me some time to understand that for him the *gérem* is a charm which is made by sacrificing a chicken, around which are attached three small pieces of wood. 'But that's the *som*!' I exclaimed. 'No, it's the *gérem*,' he replied. Clearly, he no longer knew anything about the initiation of the *dugi*, but the most secret element of that ceremony had stayed in the memory of the southern Péré.

So why is it that the *gérem* has become the *som* for the migrant Péré? The Chamba, who are what is known as 'joking partners' of the Péré of the north, also use trumpets made of calabashes as sacred instruments. The Chamba of the south still use them in the celebration of the *voma*, which takes place at the beginning of their new year. It can perhaps be suggested that, given their even closer relationship with the Péré in the south, these trumpets could no longer constitute a token of separation for the Péré between themselves and others. The sacred, or magical, property of their word *gérem*, linked to these trumpets, has been transferred to the *som* of the *dugi*, or 'strong taboo', where it can again constitute the distinct, and secret, social identity of the southern Péré.

On this journey south, I was surprised to see how quickly a tradition could be forgotten—excepting certain elements, within only three generations. What we study is very fragile.

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JASO 26/1 (1995): 87–98

HISTORY OF THE MAMBILA CHIEFDOM OF MBOR (SONKOLONG)

JEAN HURAULT

Introduction

At a time still impossible to date precisely, but possibly several centuries before the conquest of the Adamawa plateau by the Fulani (FulBe), the Mvwop lived on the southern border of the Mambila plateau, at an average altitude of 1700m. Some groups began to found colonies on the Tikar plain, 1000m lower (average altitude 750m), possibly being attracted by resources unknown on the plateau, viz. palm oil and fish.

At the foot of the escarpment they found some groups of Mambila and other small populations of diverse origins. These combined to drive out the Tikar who occupied almost all of the plain. The association of these elements gave rise to three chiefdoms, Somié (Ndeba), Sonkolong (Mbor) and Atta (Ta).[1] In the text which follows I concentrate on Sonkolong but include its links with Atta. The two chiefdoms are said to have been founded by two brothers and to have kept strong links. In 1899 they were attacked simultaneously and suffered similar disasters.

1. The names Songkolong, Atta and Somié were given by the FulBe but are now in common use.

Methodology

I have adopted a global approach to these disorganised populations, now defunct, using the methodologies of geography, ethno-history and demography. The collection of oral tradition can be significantly improved by a preliminary study of the topography and environmental conditions. I therefore think it necessary to undertake a detailed survey of the landscape of the villages under study with the help of competent guides. Specific traditions may associated with particular features of the landscape (such as springs, ravines or outcrops), and while notables would not mention them in general conversation, they are, nevertheless, important pointers in the search for the past. In principle, a thorough knowledge of the topography creates a common understanding between the investigator and the notables, reducing the risks of omissions and mistakes.

In the absence of archaeological research data, oral traditions must be analysed together with archive documents (where they exist) as well as the results of direct observation. In this case, traces of fortifications and occasionally buildings have helped the historical reconstruction. The data for this paper was collected between 1981 and 1985 during research on the geography and demography of the western Adamawa highlands. The main objective of my research on the Tikar plain was to determine the effects of the slave raids from the Fulani kingdom of Banyo which probably began as early as 1830–40.

Topography

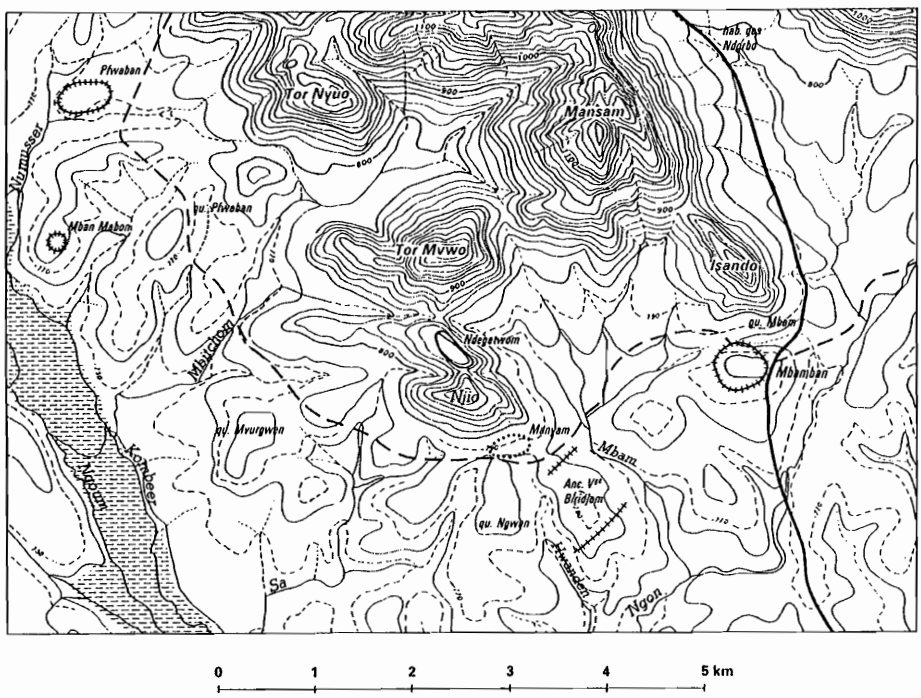
The territory of Sonkolong is dominated by the granite mountain range which surrounds it and whose summits, Njio, Tor Mvwo, Mansam and Tor Nyuo, rise above the plain by some two hundred metres (see Map. 1).

This site offers three advantages: proximity to the rocky heights, which can be used as refuges; year-round availability of drinking water; and the superior quality of the soil at the foot of the mountains.[2] This accounts for the sites of the ancient villages of the Ndobo, Kpatschula and Pfwa (Ndégétwom) as well as the successive sites of the Sonkolong chiefdom, Mbamban, Manyam and Mvurgwen. A very old trade route linking the Nso' country to the present Banyo region goes along the southern slope of the mountainous massif. This path was used by the Fulani of Banyo in their raids against the Nso'. From the height of Njio mountain the Mambila, entrenched at Ndégétwom, were able to see the raiding parties

2. At the end of the dry season the secondary streams are dry, except where they are fed by springs situated at the foot of the mountains. The good quality of the soil is a result of the alluvia brought down from the slopes.

well before they themselves were attacked. This path was later turned into a road during the period of German rule.

MAP 1. The site of Sonkolong



This map (scale 1: 80,000) is based on the 1: 50,000 map of Banyo (sheet 1d) resurveyed by J. Hurault (1981–5)

The Succession of Chiefs

There are two lists of the chiefs of Sonkolong. The first is that of the principal notable of Sonkolong, Mgbwé Ndégétwom, who was born around 1915 and has been my main informant. The second list came from Garba-Bani, who settled in the village of Yaji. He had been a soldier in the German army and was about 100 years old when I interviewed him on 18 January 1983. His chief-list was agreed by the chief of Sonkolong, who made a typescript of it on 7 July 1982. However, it seemed to me that despite his great age, this informant was not entirely reliable. He had not been brought up in Sonkolong (arriving there around 1920) and then had to leave around 1930 after being accused of committing murder by witchcraft.

Moreover, he had the reputation of fabricating stories or at least not always giving the same version of his recollections. I have therefore chosen the list given by Mgbe Ndégétwom Séo, which was agreed during a meeting of the notables convened on 2 February 1985. I have indicated its main differences with Garba Bani's list. The latter, nevertheless, contains certain useful elements, particularly an estimate of the length of reigns.

	NAME	SON OF[3]	NOTES
A	Gwalé	?	
B	Yabon	?	Took the chiefdom to Ndégétwom from Mbamban
C	Wé (Kélamé)	?	
D	Yé	A	Agreed to become tributary to Banyo. Committed suicide by hanging himself.
E	Kéa	A	
F	Nju (Ndijolomo)	E	Is said to have had a very short reign.
G	Wakatsha	?	Name mentioned in Garba Bani's list. The notables have heard this name but cannot place it.
H	Londam	D	Chief at the time of the attack by troops from Banyo. Is said to have been captured and executed in Banyo.
I	Yaji (Yilayor)	E	Opposed to Londam, took refuge in Banyo. Was then imposed as chief. Contracted leprosy and had to leave the chiefdom. Died in Banyo.
J	Kémé	C	Removed by the Germans because he had sold some of the people in the village. Imprisoned in Banyo. Is said to have retired to Pfwa.
K	Gwa	I	Took the chiefdom to Manyan. Was chief when the British arrived in 1915.
L	Kèr	I	Stayed in Manyan, where he is buried.
M	Bawuro	I	Took the chiefdom back to Mbamban where he is buried.
N	Gwa (Hamidu)	L	Reigning since 1961.

Garba-Bani's typed list, dated 7 July 1982, is as follows:

(1) Goualeu son of the prophet Goualeu (came down with wings)
(2) Yaboon son of Goualeu
(3) Kea son of Yabon
(4) Yie son of Yabon
(5) Ndijolomo son of Yie
(6) Wakatcha son of Yie
(7) Lodam son of Yie
(8) Yialayor son of Yie (twelve-year reign)

3. The filiation of the chiefs before Yaji is not absolutely certain.

(9) Keme son of Wakatcha (four-year reign)
(10) Goualeu son of Yialayor (seventeen-year reign)
(11) Mgbekeme son of Wakatcha (two-and-a-half-year reign)
(12) Kea son of Yia (fifteen-year reign)
(13) Baourou son of Yia (thirty-seven-year reign)
(14) Gouah Hamidou son of Kea, acceded in 1961.

The same note tells us that Mgbekeme used to make human sacrifices and that he sold his subjects as slaves. There seems to be some confusion between Kémé and Mgbekeme, who may be one-and-the-same person. Indeed we know, through precise traditions, that Kémé was removed and imprisoned for involvement in slave trading towards the end of the German period. If we accept Garba-Gani's chronology, this would have taken place after 1930; but this is not feasible, since at that time the Tikar plain was under French administration.

The lengths of the reigns cannot be accepted as stated. It is an established fact that Gwa was nominated during the German period, therefore before 1915. Also, the total duration of reigns numbered above as 10, 12 and 13 comes to 69 years—yet there are only 46 years between 1915 and 1961.

Phases in the History of Sonkolong

First phase: the chiefdom in Mbamban

This first phase may have lasted several centuries but only a few events are recalled. The Mvwop Mambila encountered the Pfwa Mambila on the perimeter of the Ndégétwom massif. They also found other smaller groups who had been pushed back by the Tikar and who paid tribute to them, the Kpatshula, the Ndetom and the Ndobo. Their ethnic origins are uncertain and their languages have been lost save for a few words. These archaic populations were probably the ancient occupiers of the plain. They had to unite with the Mvwop Mambila to drive out the Mbiridjom and Mbirikpa Tikar. The latter left for what is now the region of Sabongari, twenty kilometres to the north-west. The Mbiridjom rebuilt their village thirty kilometres to the south, where their descendants still lived in the 1980s.

A new organization, founded on a kind of symbiosis, was formed around the Mvwop Mambila. The autochthones retained their chiefs in the guise of notables of the new chiefdom endowed with religious functions.[4] The Pfwa desired autonomy and left Ndégétwom for the old Mbirikpa site, five kilometres to the north-west, where they created the fortified village of

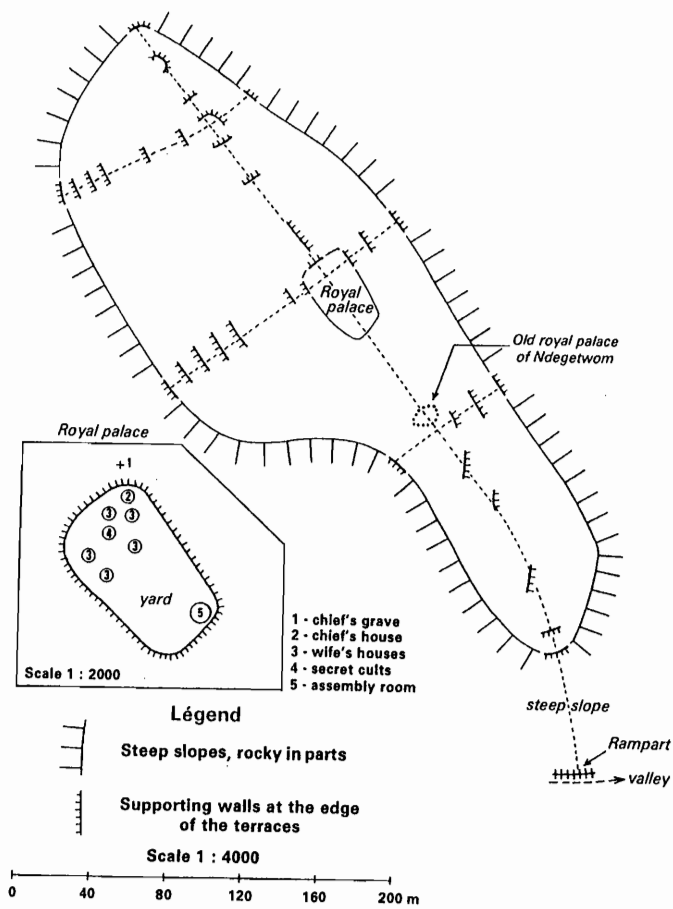
4. This is why the Kpatshula start the *sua* rites each year.

Pfwabang, the trench of the Pfwa. But some of them remained behind and their chief, Mgbwe Ndégétwom, became the main notable.

Second phase: Ndégétwom and the fight against the FulBe

When the FulBe began their raids on the Tikar plain, chief Yabon left the Mbamban site and assembled the population at Ndégétwom. He was the founder of the chiefdom and is buried there (see Fig. 1), as is his successor Wé (Kélamé?), of whom we know nothing else. It seems that it was during the reign of Yé, son of Yabon, that Sonkolong became tributary to Banyo, in circumstances which are not remembered.

FIG. 1. The site of Ndégétwom



Topographical survey by Hurault, 1.2.1985

Each year, messengers from Banyo came to demand slaves. The numbers demanded were represented by small sticks attached to strings: long ones for adults, short for children, white for males and black for females. We cannot be precise as to the scale of these annual demands. The Mambila of Sonkolong tried to fulfil these demands by raiding the Tikar or the Bamum but they were forced to give up some of their own children and the village faced depopulation.

On 30 January 1983 the notable Mgbwé Ndégétwom Séo related the death of chief Yé as follows:

> One day he assembled the notables in the central courtyard of the chief and told them that he was of no use anymore but had to choose children in the village to give to the Lamido of Banyo. It was better that he should die. He hung himself from a tree, followed by his first wife. The notables wanted to follow him. All of them, men and women, more than twenty people, hung themselves from the trees bordering the courtyard of the chiefdom.

This act of collective despair does not seem to have moderated the demands from Banyo. Chief Kea, brother and successor to Ye, had still to deliver slaves.

After him came Nju (Njolomo), who is said to have reigned for only one month. His successor is said to have been Wakatsha, about whom nothing is known.

Then came the reign of Londam, son of Yé. He had been in conflict with Yaji, son of Kéa, who took refuge at the court of the Lamido of Banyo. It is said that he preferred to give as slaves his rival's close relatives. He was not liked by the people.

The population of Sonkolong may have reached two thousand at that time. That of Atta was of similar importance (see below).

The attack on Ndégétwom

In 1899, roughly two years before the arrival of the Germans, the envoys of the Lamido demanded an unusually large number of slaves (one hundred, it was said). Chief Londam refused. We do not know exactly what happened in Atta but the two chiefdoms were too closely linked to take opposite positions. The Lamido Umaru sent a punitive expedition, but it was during the rainy season and he did not succeed in gathering enough men. His troops attacked Ndégétwom but was pushed back and had to retreat.

The following dry season, Umaru sent a large expedition to attack Sonkolong and Atta in turn. After several assaults his forces managed to get over the defensive wall of Ndégétwom. When they saw that the attackers had penetrated the village, many inhabitants, including young men and women, hung themselves. In retaliation for their losses the soldiers of

the Lamido killed many people. It is said that they tied old men to bundles of roofing straw and burned them alive. When they assembled the prisoners, many refused to leave and were killed on the spot, men and women alike.[5]

Chief Londam, whom the population hated, had left the village after the first unsuccessful FulBe attack and had taken refuge at Kwa, a small village dependent on Atta. There are several versions of his death. In one, the troops of Banyo, having occupied Sonkolong, turned to Atta and forced the chief to hand over Londam, who was then either killed immediately or taken to Banyo and strangled in the prison of the chiefdom. However, in the second version, which is corroborated by the typescript of 7 July 1982, Londam escaped the search by the assailants. Yaji, who was imposed as chief of Sonkolong by the Lamido Umaru, forced the chief of Atta to give Londam over to him. He then sent him to Banyo, where he was executed.

The village of Atta was attacked a few days after Sonkolong, its defensive positions overcome and the survivors raided. The inhabitants of Atta have no precise tradition recalling the course of the conflict. The Banyo troops left the country without leaving any detachments behind but simply gathering prisoners from both villages and going back home.

Djao, an ex-servant of the Lamido born around 1884, whom I interviewed in the 1970s, had seen the expedition return. According to the accounts of the participants, they did not bring back more than three hundred prisoners, some having escaped during the journey. He remembers that he heard someone say, 'we have not brought back many slaves, but we have killed many'. Horedjo Abdoullaye, who was born around 1902 and is presently the oldest notable of the Banyo chiefdom, reckoned in his youth that the numbers were between two hundred and three hundred. According to data which dates from after the first census, no more than four hundred people from both villages would have escaped death or capture. Some of the survivors went back to the plateau, to the territory of the original Mvwop, which was by then almost uninhabited. Others hid in the forest. Yaji, who had been nominated chief of Sonkolong by the Lamido Umaru, regrouped a small core of the population in Ndégétwom. It appears therefore that some eighty per cent of a population of four thousand had been destroyed in order to bring back two hundred and fifty slaves, which, at that time, was regarded as perfectly normal.

Sonkolong in the German period

The German authorities confirmed Yaji as chief of Sonkolong, and the population which had escaped the raids was able to regroup around him.

5. These accounts are fully confirmed by the traditions of the Banyo chiefdom. Suicide was a common response of raided populations, either by hanging or by refusing to be taken into slavery and being killed on the spot.

However, they suspected that he had given the Lamido the idea for his devastating raid while he had been a refugee in Banyo. He contracted leprosy and had to leave the village to search for a cure in Banyo, where he died. His successor was Kémé, son of Wé, who took the chiefdom to Mvurgwen, to the south-east of the Tor Mvwo mountain. As conditions now seemed safe, there was no more need to stay in such a constricted site as Ndégétwom. As mentioned above, Kémé was dismissed by the German authorities following accusations of slave-dealing and was imprisoned in Banyo. After his release he went to Pfwa, where he died. He was replaced by Gwa, son of Yaji.

As soon as they were established in Banyo, the Germans began to transform the trade route which linked Nso' to the Vuté country into a road, setting up a network of staging posts. One of these was situated at a place called Manyam, near the river Mbam, and was maintained by the inhabitants of Sonkolong. This is why Gwa established the chiefdom at Manyam.

Sonkolong since 1915

We know little of the two chiefs called Gwa and Ker, who both lived in Manyam, where they are buried in individual tombs protected by shelters of corrugated metal. However, in 1921 a census was conducted by the administrator F. Lozet, the oldest document we can refer to for the French period. The 1953 census, conducted with the greatest of care by the administrator J. Sablayrolles, is the last document which records an homogenous Mambila population. It shows that half a century after the massacre of 1899, the population of Atta and Sonkolong, with its low birth rate, had reached a level roughly equivalent to a quarter of the numbers estimated for the end of the nineteenth century.

The archival documents[6] give the following figures for Sonkolong:

Date	Adults (male)	Adults (female)	Children	Total
1921	80	63	57	200
1927	58	59	84	201
1930	60	61	82	203
1934	48	47	66	161
1953	132	125	281	538

In 1955, with the help of Mr Joseph Dountio of the Centre Géographique National of Yaoundé, I conducted a demographic study of Atta. This study showed that the birth rate was very high, reaching an average of 8 children per woman who had reached menopause (Hurault 1969, 1970).

6. Governmental archives, Yaoundé, APA 11.901, Census of the Banyo subdivision by F. Lozet and files within APA 11.782B (references communicated by David Zeitlyn).

After 1953, the French administration put a lot of effort into introducing the cultivation of Robusta coffee to the Tikar plain. These plantations became fully productive around 1958–60 and entirely transformed the economy of the Mambila villages in the plain, which up to then had depended on subsistence agriculture. Roads were also built, bringing in an influx of migrants of many different ethnicities. The population increased greatly, as can be seen in the 1983–84 census conducted by the newly created Bankim sub-prefecture:

Sonkolong	2314
Atta	3810
Somié	1650

At the present day the Mambila are in a minority in these villages and are mixed with Tikar, Yamba and Hausa. More detailed research would be needed to determine the exact number of Mambila, but it appears that their number has doubled since 1953.

Appendix: Fortified Sites Linked to the History of Sonkolong and Atta

The fortified sites of Sonkolong and Atta have been the object of fieldwork, topographical surveys and aerial photography. For reasons of space, only one of these surveys will be presented here.

Apart from the site of Ndégétwom, where the remains of buildings have been observed,[7] I have evaluated population densities for old villages of the Banyo highlands (which are low by comparison with the compact habitats of the 'Kirdi' of north Cameroon before they came down to the plains). For Banyo I have allowed:

areas of habitat without granaries:	4.0 persons per 100 square metres
habitat with granaries:	2.0 persons per 100 square metres

The first figure can be applied to the fortified camps of the Vuté where the villagers took refuge during short raids only. The second can be applied to the fortified villages, where the population lived permanently with all its grain reserves.

7. Cultivation, together with the action of termites, has the effect that defensive ditches are quickly filled in as soon as the forest is cleared. Walls are less affected. The height of what remains is the most significant indication of the time at which a site was abandoned. Over the whole of the Tikar plain, the fortified sites—which according to specific traditions were used against the FulBe—still retain some of their walls (reaching a minimum height of between 0.80m and 1 metre), although the state of the ditches is variable.

For the Mambila of the plain we can accept that the main part of the crop was stored in the fields (mostly consisting of root crops, which were left in the ground). Assuming that half the cereal harvest was stored within the village, I have allowed an average density of 3.0 persons per 100 square metres. This evaluation process is, of course, merely a first approach to the problem and was only applied to the smallest of the fortified sites. For the more important villages, I have taken into account the space which was clearly reserved for defensive, social and religious use as well as communication routes. The fortified area of Mbamban, where Sonkolong was first established, had a circumference of 1,200 metres and a surface area of 19 hectares. My calculations suggest a population of 4,300 people.

Ndégétwom

At the end of the twentieth century, the population of Sonkolong had entirely regrouped at Ndégétwom, at the summit of a semi-rocky ridge detached from the Tor Mvwo granite massif. Most of its perimeter is protected by very steep slopes and the site is only accessible via the southern pass, which links it to the Tor Njio mountain. This pass had been barred by a ditch and a wall.

Before the arrival of the Mbor Mambila, Ndégétwom had been occupied by the Mambila Pfwa. A small number of them still live in Sonkolong and still recall the site of their chiefdom.

Nowadays the site of Ndégétwom and the surrounding mountains are covered by a dense forest with an undergrowth of urticaceous plants which make clearing the sites difficult. The survey I undertook on 1 February 1985 with a compass and measuring line was restricted therefore to the line of the ridge and three perpendicular tracks. I found evidence of careful terracing—the work of individuals, since the levels of the terraces do not line up with one another. They are delimited by dry stone walls which frequently reach a height of 5 to 6 metres and even 10 to 12 metres where the slopes are very steep. The areas inside are well levelled.

The royal palace was sited at the summit, on a levelled area in the shape of a trapezoid surrounded by the supporting wall of the adjacent terraces. This site is 45m long and 22–26m wide. It is probable that it spread towards the north to another terrace because the communal tomb of the chief is outside. Moreover, we know that there were forty huts for women, barely fifteen of which could have fitted on the main terrace. The eroded walls of the chief's house (diameter 4m) could be seen in the area which had been cleared properly, together with five huts for women, a hut for secret cults and the hut used for the gatherings of notables (diameter 5m). There also was a small space used for ceremonies, where chief Yé and his notables had hanged themselves. The layout is cramped, showing the need to use every available space.

We can attempt an evaluation of the population density by using the women's huts only. They had a diameter of 3.50 to 3.80 metres, which seems to have been a common size at that time over all of western Adamawa and can be found among the Vuté of Banyo as well as the Mambila of the plateau. The average distance between the centres of the huts was 5 to 6m. On this basis, the habitat areas could number 3.0 huts per 100 square metres, corresponding to six people at the rate of two people per hut (one adult and one child). According to local traditions there were no gardens. Grain was stored in the roofs of the huts but most of the crops were stored in the fields. If we accept that fifteen per cent of the surface area could have been taken up by supporting walls, pathways, cult areas, and probably some areas in dispute, the population could have reached 5.1 persons per hectare of overall surface, i.e. 2,000 people for a total surface area of 3.92 hectares. I estimate that there was a population of around 4,200 within the fortified site of Mbamban. It is therefore possible that the population decreased slightly following the first raids by the Banyo troops or because of epidemics.

The fortified sites of Atta

It seems that at the time of the struggles against the FulBe, all the Sonkolong population gathered at Ndégétwom. At the same time the Atta population was distributed over three defensive sites (see Map 1) with a total surface area of 8.5 hectares. One of these, at the summit of the Tor Gar mountain was very narrow, the other two less so. By referring to the settlement patterns of the extreme north of Cameroon (among the 'Kirdi') we can find a likely figure for the population density. If we accept that the areas without buildings could have occupied fifteen per cent of this site, the population could have been 7.2 x 300 = 2,160. This size of population would have been similar to that of Sonkolong.

Reference

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JASO 26/1 (1996) 99–104

ELDRIDGE MOHAMMADOU ON TIKAR ORIGINS

DAVID ZEITLYN

Introduction

ELDRIDGE MOHAMMADOU has recently published (1990) a detailed overview of the history of the groups in Southern Adamawa. This is the first survey to be published since the International African Institute survey volumes of the 1950s, and the work is a testimony to Mohammadou's considerable field-work throughout the area. Although specialists may differ with Mohammadou with regard to the details, both he and his publishers, ILCAA,[1] should be praised for making this synthesis available. It challenges the workers in the field to improve their data and to take account of the wider context, both historical and geographical. This contrasts with the specific focus of anthropologists concerned with single groups. So, for example, Mohammadou challenges Tardits' account of Bamun history (1980) by putting it in the general context of the history of pre-colonial Cameroon. This allows him to take into account their interaction with neighbouring populations in a wide historical perspective. Mohammadou does not subscribe to any crude version of diffusionism nor to the narrow views of a local socio-political auto-genesis or the systematic belief of spontaneous generation. In another publication, he concludes: 'This short-sightedness in historical perspective seems to us to be directly inherited from the inadequacies of the African historiography of the colonial era whose domi-

1. Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (Tokyo).

nating tendency favoured ethnic and partitioned histories of Africa. It is high time that the present generations rediscover the great underlying and fundamental unity of the history of Africa in general and that of the history of Cameroon in particular' (1986: 271).[2]

The origin of the Tikar, which has recently been discussed by Fowler and Zeitlyn (1996), is a case in point: the issue of Tikar origins has been a leitmotif of studies in the Grassfields, and although resolved in general terms for the Grassfield groups themselves (Chilver and Kaberry 1971; Jeffreys 1964; Price 1979), the identity of the Tikar remains something of a historical puzzle. There are, in fact, two questions of origin. Unfortunately, a failure to distinguish between them has led to the persistence of the problem in the literature. How we should explain the Grassfield polities that claim a Tikar origin is a separate question from the origin of the Tikar people living on the Tikar Plain, who speak the Tikar language.

Hence, it seems fitting to present Sally Chilver with a summary of Eldridge Mohammadou's work on Tikar origins, as a tribute both to Sally herself—who has so often produced epitomes of work otherwise inaccessible and distributed copies to her colleagues along the 'Kingston Road Samizdat network'—and to Eldridge Mohammadou. Mohammadou is explicitly concerned with wider regional issues. The summary below is my own synopsis (or epitome) of Mohammadou's summary of his argument (Mohammadou 1990: 287–99).

Eldridge Mohammadou's Survey of Tikar History

The main question at issue is the origin of the founders of the dynasties and the palace institutions of the different Tikar-speaking groups. How much credit is to be given to claims of Mbum origin? To answer this, a variety of evidence must be considered, including oral tradition and historical linguistics. The nomenclatures used by different groups, both for themselves and, for example, for the Mbum, provide another source of evidence.

The main hypothesis is that the Tikar kingdoms of the middle Mbam arose from invasions of Bâré-Chamba in the second half of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. There are two subsidiary hypotheses. First, the sequence of the formation of the Tikar kingdoms and their overthrow dates from a more recent period than has been previously supposed. Second, following from this, the ethnonym connot-

2. Readers should also note that Mohammadou's regional perspective has led to an interesting difference in opinion about the explanations for the 'demographic crisis' of central Cameroon, which appears to have been severely depopulated in the nineteenth century. Whereas Hurault (e.g. 1969) identifies the FulBe as the main agents of this change, Mohammadou sees them as latecomers following in the tracks of the Bâré-Chamba.

ing the political and cultural 'Tikar' only dates from this period. The connection with the Mbum is then a secondary re-interpretation.

Historical summary

The Bâré-Chamba preceded the FulBe and were pushed south by them in their turn. Passing by the towns of Tibati and Banyo, they then pushed south in the corridor formed by the Mbum and Kim rivers to the south-west of Tibati. This resulted in the first generation of Tikar kingdoms. They then moved west, founding Nditam on the way to Fumban, Nso', Bafut and Baleng. Subsequent waves of Bâré-Chamba invaders attacked these first-generation kingdoms and also founded second-wave kingdoms such as Ngambe, Béŋ-Béŋ, Kong, Ina and Wé. Chronologies for some of these chiefdoms (based on chief lists) give foundation dates as follows: Bankim 1760–80; Nditam 1767–81; Ngambé 1788–1809; Kong 1795.

Nomenclature

There are four series of names:

(1) Tìkár(í), Tikr, Tìkálí, Tìgár, Tìgâ, Tìgé, Tìgê, ngír (Tí-ngír)—used by some of the Tikar kingdoms and by Mbum of Tibati from whom the FulBe borrowed the term 'Tikar', e.g. Ngambe and Nditam.
(2) Tìmù, Tìmù, Tùmù, Tùúm, Twùmwù—used on the Tikar Plain around Bankim and among the neighbours of the Tikar on the plain: the Mambila and Kwanja.
(3) ʈɔ̀ɔ̀ŋ, ʈwɔ̀ŋ, ŋtɔ̀ɔ̀ŋ, ŋtwɔ̀ŋ—used in the small kingdoms between the River Mbum and River Kim, such as Ina, Wé and ŋbɗŋ-ŋbɗŋ.
(4) ŋdom, Ndòmé, Ndòmɬ, Ndòbɬ, Ndòb′, Ndobw′, Ndobe, Ndòbò, Ndòbà, Ndòb, Ndòp—used by Vuté both in the north around Banyo/Tibati and in the south around Yoko, as well as in the Grassfields themselves.

There are two base roots for these names: Tí for the first two, Ndób or Ndó' for the second two. Ndób/Ndó is the oldest.[3] The base root is dó or dɔ̀. It should be noted that the /b/ affix is the plural in the surrounding Mambiloid languages (it occurs as both an prefix and suffix in different Mambila dialects). In particular, when repeated on either side of a proper name it denotes a group. Hence, in Mambila bɔ̀ ɔwe bɔ̀ are the Kwe people (the Kwanja). Therefore, we can explain Vuté or Vútɨb as deriving from bɨTíbɨ or vɨTíbɨ (bɨ - Tí - bɨ) —that is, the Tí.

Turning next to Tí, the second root. Tùmù is taken to derive from Tí-mò, which can be glossed as 'the Tù person', or 'the Tí'. It should be

3. For example, Koelle 1963: 20 gives the Tikar for person as *ndób/budób*.

noted that both Tùmù and Ndób are used in Bankim, while Tìgê and Ndòmé occur on the left bank of the Mbam at Ngambe, Kong and the Bâré-Chamba term for 'chief'. Hence, Tì-gâ is the Chief of the Ti. The Ti (and their chief) conquered the Ndòb/Ndom to create the Bankim kingdom. The conquering chief then installed his followers on the right bank of the Mbam River. These were known as the Ti of the Chief, i.e. Ti-ga or Tikar.

One of the goals of the following historical reconstruction is to explain the relationship between the Bâré-Chamba chiefs (gá) and the population called Tí.

Historical reconstruction

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, central Cameroon from Mbum and Djérem in the north (Tibati) to the Mbam and Sanaga rivers in the south (from Bafia to Bélabo) was occupied by a Bantu-speaking population called Tí or bàTí. At this point the Vuté were on the Tignère Plateau. The Ndombɨ (ancestors of the Tikar) were in the zone between Vuté and the Ti (to their south)—that is, on the edge of Adamawa from Ngoundal to Tibati as well as the Banyo Plateau. Although different ethnonyms are used, it should be stressed that the Ndombɨ and the Mbum of the high plateau of Ngaoundere formed a cultural continuum.

The descent of the Vuté to the south pushed the Ndombɨ further south still, in part on to the Yoko Plateau and into the Middle Mbum as well as on to the Tikar Plain. This southwards pressure forced a corresponding movement of the Tí to their south. The southwards movement of the Vuté separated the Ndombɨ from the Mbum. The Vuté took the Tí town of Tibati, and while retaining their own language they adopted the denomination of the autochthones, Bàtí or Bute/Vuté. This occurred in the middle of the eighteenth century. It was at this time that the first raids of the Bâré-Chamba left the Upper High Benue.[4] One branch went west and founded the Jukun kingdoms and the Chamba chiefdom of Donga, etc. Another branch came down on to the Tignère plateau to Tibati, where it split into three parts. From Tibati subsequent raids left in different directions: to the west, in the direction of the Mbum headquarters and the Banyo Plateau; to the south-west, in the corridor formed by the Middle Mbum and the Kim, to the Tikar country; to the south, towards Yoko and the Sanaga; to the east, between Djérem and Lom, towards Pangar and Bétaré-Oya.

These raids are now scarcely remembered in comparison to the FulBe raids of the nineteenth century. The raiders proceeded in a succession of leaps, pushing refugees before them, marrying and settling where they had conquered, thereby changing their ethnic identity. But they are characterized by their use of horses, poisoned arrows and being accompanied by a large group of smiths. Also, the extreme nature of the raids marked a

4. This is well before the beginning of the Sokoto Jihad.

change in the patterns of warfare in the region. These raids, like those of the FulBe who followed them, were marked by burning, pillaging, and the massacre of both old people and those they could not enslave.

In fifty years this changed the whole of central Cameroon. The autochthones fled south, depopulating the central zone to the benefit of the central forest and the Grassfields. Hence the Chamba raids caused the last savannah Bantus to cross the Sanaga river, as well as resulting in the arrival of Ndobe (Tikar) people in the Grassfields.

Sociologically speaking, what happened was that the predominant segmentary, acephalous societies were replaced by different chiefdoms with different degrees of centralization which facilitated the formation of five dynasties. Some of the Ti clustered into small groups on the right bank of the Sanaga and retained the name Bati. Tibati itself, a chiefdom formed of a mixture of Vuté and Ti before the Chamba conquered it, was ripe for Chamba expansion. Some of these Tibatí chiefs (Ti-gâ) fled the Chamba towards the Tikar Plain, where they found small chiefdoms of the Ndombi, which they conquered, forming their own chiefdoms on that foundation, e.g. Bamkim. Conquered by invaders, these autochthonous chiefdoms gave rise to the 'Mbum origin' story.

What of the Mbum themselves? Since the FulBe conquest, the Mbum have been found near Tibati (the frontiers follow the River Mére and its tributary the River Mawor). Consider the possibility that the Mbum were on the Adamawa Plateau before the Vuté and were already in the Tibati area beside the Ti when the Vuté arrived. In that case, they would only have been pushed a few kilometres further east when the Vuté took their place. The central Mbum group were the Wari, centred on Àsòm or Sòm (now called Mballassom). Granted this, the origins of what are now called the Mbum can be explained with a double hypothesis. First, Mbum migrations to the Ndómbɨ occurred before the Chamba invasion. These must have reached the Mbam/Kimi confluence and founded 'Tikar chiefdoms' among the indigenous Ndómbɨ before the middle of the eighteenth century in the course of which they adopted the Ndómbɨ language.

This is the locally held version of events. There are no external forces motivating the migrations, nor the export of the 'Tikar model' to the Grassfields. However, the suggested chronology poses problems for this version of events, suggesting that the Mbum migration coincides with the arrival of the Bâré-Chamba. Also, this would be an exception to the Mbum tradition that all their expansion was peaceful, that they did not wage war until the FulBe arrived. But the Tikar tradition says that Kimi was founded when Tumu asked the Tikar to cross to the left bank of the Mbam to protect them from the warring Kwanja. This leads to the second hypothesis, which, counter to the former version of events, concerns the manner in which the 'Tikar model' was diffused towards the Grassfields. The diffusion from a single source of small groups led by minor princes is implausible, their success in conquering unlikely. What you have is segmentary lineages adopting a migratory ideology and a style of fighting from some immi-

grants. But this is likely to have occurred over a long period of time and not from a single source. However, the Bârê-Chamba invasions of the second half of the eighteenth century can explain all these phenomena.

Bankim was the oldest and strongest dynasty founded by the first invaders from the north, midway between the Adamawa Plateau and the Grassfields. Before becoming a major trade route linking these poles, the Mbam-Kim corridor was the main route for successive invasions of Bârê-Chamba. It was these which in a half century exported the 'Tikar model' to the Grassfields, including the Bamun and the Bamiléké.

The motive for this expansion is to be found in the militarism of the Bârê-Chamba. They had military superiority in the form of horses, bows and poisoned arrows. They were accompanied by an important group of blacksmiths and thus could renew their arsenal as they went. However, as they assimilated elements of the groups they had conquered, their expansionist dynamism gradually diminished. Hence the Chamba invaders who formed the Bali kingdoms in the Bamenda region around 1830 are the last of a long series.

Thus Mbum migration is rejected as a key to explaining Tikar history. Simple chiefdoms were installed among the Ndómbì by Mbum elements before 1750. Only after this, in the period of the Chamba raids, did the Tikar dynasties of the Middle Mbam emerge.

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LETTER TO V. G. FANSO

SALLY CHILVER

In November 1992, Sally Chilver wrote to the historian Dr (now Professor) V. G. Fanso of Yaoundé University discussing Eldridge Mohammadou's theories. In this letter, she drew his attention to the series of publications of the Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo, which is available free to serious researchers.[1] *The following pages reproduce the main body of that letter since it not only includes a serious critique of Mohammadou's position, but also well conveys the importance of Sally's continuing correspondence with scholars from all round the world, many of whom find her letters the best (and sometimes only) way of keeping up with developments in Cameroon studies.*

I thought I ought to draw your attention to the Tikar part of [Mohammadou 1990] in case you have not got it, and attach an epitome of his argument.

Well, I don't go along with it, but Eldridge Mohammadou's work is never to be sneezed at. He puts all his cards on the table, his sources are always clear, he never neglects archival or early ethnographic sources (in four languages), and he provides plenty of texts. When he advances a hypothesis, he makes a clear distinction between types of evidence. His book

1. Available from The Publication Service, African Languages and Ethnography, Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Nishigara 4, Kita-ku, Tokyo, Japan.

on Garoua, published by Bordeaux University/CNRS, is an important contribution and deserved the prize it received. He always makes one rethink one's own inferences, both on larger issues and on significant detail.

Now both Ian Fowler and I, from different standpoints, have been looking around for evidence that a raid or series of raids preceded, with quite a long time-lapse, the invasions of the Ba'ni associated with Gawolbe. There is some apparent convergence of traditions:

(a) the flight of an early Bamum ruler to Nkogham and his burial there (recorded by Tardits);

(b) the flight, on similar lines, from Kovvifëm to Taavisa' of Fon Nso';

(c) Babungo traditions of the invasion of the 'Montë', associated with the arrival of the refugee Ntuur master-smelter who helps start the improved furnace type (recorded by Fowler 1990);

(d) the insistence of the smaller Ndop chiefdoms that the first raiding long preceded the arrival of Bali-Kumbad;

(e) Western accounts of the passage past Bafut of raiders towards the Katsina Ala valley, sometimes called Muti or Mudi (Hawkesworth and others; Garbosa; Geary); and

(f) Tiv accounts of early disturbances in this area caused by mounted raiders (the Bohannans and R. G. Armstrong).

The past evidence has been examined by Richard Fardon (1988), from whose work we can tentatively pick up a possible set of precursors, the Péré. These are identifiable with Garbosa's Pyere; the Peli of the Bali chiefdoms (who still keep their own flags, e.g. Ga Konntan of Bali-Gham, Ga Sabum/Ga Muti of Bali-Kumbad), also known as Konntan; and the Potopo or Kotofo, the ruling stratum of the Kutin in the southern part of the Koncha lamidoship.

It is a pity that more work has not been done in the Furu–Mashi–Nser area, though. Having said that, we must also be aware, in comparing later and earlier accounts of apparently the same events, that oral tradition rearranges the past in terms of the present, that event time may be either telescoped or extended, that common story-telling conventions influence oral history, that names and ethnonyms suffer many kinds of corruption and displacement. Moreover, we now have to consider what Jack Goody calls the interface between literacy and orality and be on the look-out for the feedback from early European conjectures and Islamic historiography re-emerging at a later date with an aura of authenticity. Material now collected (say post-1970) will now also be influenced by unquoted pamphlet literature which has passed into gossip, e.g. Rabiato Njoya's pamphlet. These feedbacks can often be spotted and call for the same arts from the ethnohistorian as from, say, the student of Shakespeare's history plays; they are surface problems. There are the deeper ones which affect both informant and recorder, the 'cultural concepts' which affect the production of history anywhere and the polemical or didactic uses it can be put to, such as the definition of particular social identities. Seldom mentioned is the

common abhorrence for a vacuum in the record, oral or written. This tends to get filled up in various ways, for example, by plausible hypotheses (the evolutionist paradigm, the Hamitic hypothesis) or by plausible fictions which may become politically or artistically important, e.g. the fake Ossianic corpus for Europe's Celts. I am probably as guilty as others.

Eldridge Mohammadou advances his hypotheses clearly and modestly. They are directed to the solution of the 'Tikar problem', which Kaberry and I (1971) tried to convert into a non-problem for the benefit of the Grassfields Bantu linguists by suggesting that the dissemination of institutions from point to point, rather than the migration of peoples, could account for a lot. Mohammadou explicitly rejects our hypothesis. If we accept his, we have to fit in the processes of state formation in Bamum, Nso' and Bafut, to take the three biggest, into some 60–70 years; well, not impossible, but a tight fit. The chronology, upon which much hangs, is based on the assumption that the reported septennial king killings of Mbum were regular and real and adopted by the Tikar, or some.

The present Kimi rulers' claim to be Mbum is, he agrees (with Hagège and others), to be mistaken, and thus if Kimi had a Mbum dynasty it must have been prior to 1750. Nevertheless he retains a septennial chronology for the Kimi king-list after the presumed arrival of the new Tikar dynasty, which, he explains, may come from the general direction of Mbum but is 'really' Bare-Chamba, and neither Tumu (the autochthones) nor Mbum. Since much of the argument hangs on this chronology, one is bound to say it is a slender thread.

It then follows that if the Bamum and Nso' dynasties (and those of Bafut, Baleng, etc.) are 'really' Bare-Chamba ('Tikar'), they are of very recent origin—elder cousins of Bali-Nyonga and Bali-Kumbad, as it were—and that we can dismiss antecedent sites and legends: the 'miraculous princes' established themselves by force of arms. It may well be that Mohammadou has dealt with some of the cracks in the argument in earlier publications (e.g. 1986) which I don't have.

But I find it more disturbing that we are told, in the style of Champaud (1965), of Tikar-Ndobo 'waves of migration' that, after the settlement of Bankim/Kimi, roll over the land, first after 1760 or so and then again after a second Bare-Chamba arrival, and rapidly form chiefdoms out of the earlier 'segmentary and acephalous' polities of the Grassfields. All this happens without leaving any linguistic traces (except in the Bali chiefdoms, of course, where, with the help of the Fon's secretary, A. W. Daiga, vocabularies of Wute, Mbum (Nyamnyam), Tikali (Tumu), and distinct 'Mbam-Nkam' languages close to Munggaka could be collected as late as 1960). And would one not expect some more loan-words, supposing such a lightning linguistic conversion of the conquerors by the conquered?

So there are, to my mind, too many interlinked hypotheses for comfort.

Now for plausibilities: that the pre-Fulani raids galvanized a process of compaction, resisting and greater centralization (as Warnier in Nkwi and

Warnier 1982 had already suggested) in the Grassfields is entirely plausible. So is the proposition that the Bare-Chamba arrived in two main groups and that the, or a, or some of the earlier lot encamped, or settled among or near the Tumu-speaking 'Tikar' groups. The rough dates he suggests for the arrival of the earlier contingents is not implausible per se; though one would like more cogent reasons than either his (or mine). Nor can one quarrel with the proposition that the insecurity and fear inspired by raids occasioned movements of groups to safer areas. One recalls, for example, the story collected by P. F. Lacroix from the Banyo Lamido that the raids he ascribed to 'Dingdings' (Dingyi? i.e. Chamba) softened up the opposition to Mwömbwö of Bamum, enabling him to incorporate and enserf many of the 'Pa Ghet' chiefdoms or send them fleeing across the Nun.

It is easy to pick holes in other people's work and cavalier to do so when the writer has covered so much ground one has not tackled oneself and has made a prodigious study of the literature and archives. One should try to offer a better alternative. One would certainly have to concern oneself with onomastic questions viewed historically and in the light of the history of 'Tikar' ethnogenesis. But if one is concerned with 'real history' and not 'mentalities' one would also have to concern oneself with questions he barely touches: the linguistic evidence and its interpretation, such evidence as we have from archaeology, palaeobotany and biogeography, climatic records, even equine veterinary science. A life work, too late for me to start!

In so far as the Chamba themselves are concerned, it would be hard to go beyond what Fardon (1988, 1991) has written, except on the Donga and Nigerian border side, but perhaps too late for that. Much of the 'Tikali' evidence will have vanished under the barrage lake for good, apart from the snippets rescued by Hurault. But to return to a point Fardon makes about the transformation of the Batta, Chamba, Wute, Péré and some Mbum and Tumu-Tikar into predators, a south-north look at the Arabic literature might reveal some clues. Can we explain the trajectories solely in terms of an expanding slaving frontier, leaving burnt-out areas behind, or, in the second push, solely in terms of Fulani pressure? Should we neglect Frobenius' reports, and those of the Chronicles of Bornu recording a series of eighteenth-century droughts and famines—there are some Mandara ones too. Can the palaeoclimatologists help?

Finally, one wonders why it is assumed as axiomatic that the peoples of the Grassfields were incapable of inventing and developing chiefdoms for themselves and were relatively primitive? Two decades after the last Bare-Chamba raids, Barth's trader informants (appendix to Vol. 2, 1857) give a different picture of 'Mbafu'.

I've said nothing in detail about Eldridge Mohammadou's handling of the Ti which he equates with the Bantu speakers of the Mbam and Sanaga areas. If he is right, they must be distinct from Koelle's Pati, the Kpati who turn up in Takum, the Bati of Bali-Kumbad, the Ti-Gawolbe of Bali-Nyonga and their 'brothers' who wandered to Banssoa. Given that Nyong-

pasi was supposedly a Chamba on his mother's side, his father Pati (the Chamba proper have a complicated double unilineal descent system), the plot thickens and one might say that there is a 'Pati problem'. So my priority for archaeological research might now be that part of south-west Bamum called Kuparë, though one can't be dead certain that it was the Kuti or Tsën of Bali tradition, said to be the base to which elements of Gawolbe's army returned. There is more than one Kuti.

There are two odd omissions from Eldridge Mohammadou's bibliography. One is Thorbecke's four-volume geographical survey of the trans-Mbam Tikar–Wute area (1914–24), and the other is the original, fuller, edition of Barth's travels (five vols.). He only quotes M. P. (Frau) Thorbecke's book, which is odd, given the other early material he has dug out. Also missing is Hurault's brief report in Africa (1988).

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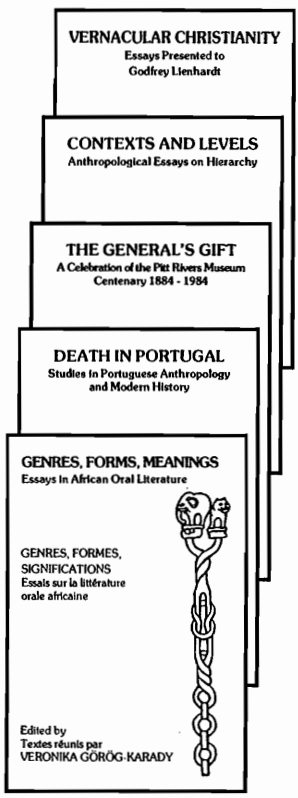

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BOOK REVIEWS

BEN FINNEY, *Voyage of Rediscovery: A Cultural Odyssey through Polynesia*, Berkeley, etc.: University of California Press 1994. xviii, 400 pp., Figures, Appendixes, Bibliography, Index. $30.00.

The polemical object of this book is Andrew Sharp's claim that Polynesians were technically incapable of purposeful voyaging beyond three hundred miles of open sea and that they had therefore populated Oceania through accidental landings by drifting boats. Computer studies have been made to test the plausibility of Sharp's drift hypothesis, but other means were also needed. By the 1960s Polynesian voyaging canoes had disappeared and their navigation practices were largely forgotten. Finney and others decided to reconstruct their canoes and means of navigation. They first built a double-hulled Hawaiian sailing canoe in the 1960s, which they tested in Santa Barbara and Hawaii for its ability to sail against the wind. Having successfully completed those tests Finney eventually moved to the University of Hawaii, where he found new companions, with whom he formed the Polynesian Voyaging Society. Finney and others in the society set about designing and constructing a larger double-hulled canoe intended for open-sea sailing. The resulting design was a compromise between speculative reconstruction and the need to use modern materials. In 1976, a mixed crew sailed this boat from Hawaii to Tahiti. Since no traditional Polynesian navigators were available, they invited Mau Piailug, a master from Satawal in the Caroline Islands, to guide the boat without the use of modern instruments over the crossing of more than 2,200 nautical miles of open sea. The voyage involved making up the five hundred miles by which Tahiti lies farther to the east than Hawaii against prevailing winds. Despite the fact that he was sailing in foreign seas and under part unfamiliar southern skies, on the thirtieth day Piailug accurately predicted imminent landfall in the Tuamotus. As he returned to Satawal from Tahiti, the crew made the return voyage using modern instruments. Favourable winds meant that this trip lasted only twenty-two days.

Subsequently a young Hawaiian, Nainoa Thompson, trained himself in traditional navigation techniques and in 1980 guided the canoe to Tahiti and back, without any external confirmation of position during the voyage. Using satellite tracking for comparison with Thompson's continuously up-dated dead reckoning of position, the team was able to compile evidence concerning the cause and effects of any errors. For the first time in centuries, a Polynesian navigator had guided a canoe between Hawaii and Tahiti and back, which also constituted a widely appreciated act of cultural revival. Hawaiians kept the canoe sailing in local waters as a floating classroom for teaching schoolchildren and others about the boat and its technology. Then in 1985 the vessel

set out on a 12,000 nautical mile voyage of two years' duration which was to take it to Tahiti, Rarotonga and New Zealand and back, via Samoa.

Finney and his co-authors have written this book in an uncontentious and easily accessible style, judiciously distinguishing what has been proven by these voyages from what has not. They give very useful discussions of the historical, archaeological and anthropological issues relevant to the developing debates about Polynesian navigation and settlement, as well as quite compelling accounts of the voyages and the reactions to them by the inhabitants of the islands. Although a rather different book, this account of experimental voyaging in the Pacific is a worthy companion volume to Thomas Gladwin's *East is a Big Bird* and David Lewis's *We the Navigators*, which explored traditional navigational techniques in Micronesia and prepared the way for the projects described here. What is most encouraging is that the authors have demonstrated that there are practical ways of exploring sailing skills for which there are no longer living witnesses. They and the sailors who sailed the canoe have greatly increased the probability that long-distance intentional voyaging by ancient Polynesians will be accepted as fact in modern scholarship.

R. H. BARNES

LIONEL CAPLAN, *Warrior Gentlemen: 'Gurkhas' in the Western Imagination*, Providence and Oxford: Berghahn 1995. ix, 181pp, Index, References. £26.00.

The quotation marks in the subtitle of the book are important to note: this book is about the constructed category of the 'Gurkhas' as represented in military and regimental histories, Anglo-Indian fiction, and in contemporary British imagination. Caplan tells us in his Introduction that the 'military writings, which are authored principally by British officers who have served with Gurkhas, may be said to constitute a particular mode of "orientalist" discourse, in as much as they pass as an authoritative and superior body of knowledge about "others" which these others can or do not possess about themselves, and also in the sense that they essentialize these others through generalization about their inherent natures' (p. 1). Caplan clearly shares Said and Clifford's 'disaffection with the tendency to conflate and thus essentialize European representations of non-European others [and this] underlies the present essay' (p. 2). But while Caplan points out that the subjects of his book are constituted in the very process of writing about them and can thus be understood best as a fiction, he does not subscribe to the view that nothing exists outside the text. Caplan does not take the 'the literary turn in anthropology' but 'attends to the textual strategies and devices employed by military writers, while constantly referring them to the politico-military settings in relation to which they are produced and reproduced, and in the contexts of which their meanings become more readily understood' (p. 10).

In Chapter 1, the author provides the background to the problem with an account of the nature of the encounter between Nepal and imperial Britain and the dynamics of the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814 to 1816 during which the British first 'discovered' the Gurkhas. Although Nepal lost the war, the British discovered the fighting qualities of the Nepalese army. The British gained large tracts of hill districts as a result of a treaty signed after the war and gradually recruited Nepalis into the Indian army, organising them along regimental lines. This process lasted over several decades, during which time the category of 'Gurkha' slowly came into being. Unfortunately, Caplan does not tell us explicitly what this term connotes till quite late in the book. The Gurkhas were praised as a quintessentially martial race, with qualities of bravery and stealth in jungle warfare, who made playful and cheerful soldiers, and were loyal if a bit simple-minded.

Chapter 2 deals with the 'ecology of military service', i.e. the socio-economic conditions which forced a section of the Nepali population to seek their livelihood outside the country because of the internal pressure of land and increased impoverishment. This is a fruitful and interesting discussion which points to the real reasons why Gurkhas join the army, rather than remain with an innate martiality. Caplan also discusses the growth of the remittance economy in native villages as a result of the soldiers' earnings and the altered power balances they create.

Chapter 3 is a detailed discussion of the background of the officers who led the Gurkhas and of the socio-cultural profile of the Victorian elite which joined the East India Company's army. This leads on to the central chapter of the book, which is about representing the Gurkhas. It is a striking feature about the discourse on the Gurkhas that it is produced almost exclusively by the British officers who commanded them. Based on regimental histories and interviews with retired officers, Caplan provides a picture of the distinctive identity of Gurkha regiments and their rituals and customs. The overwhelming feature of all literary representations of the Gurkhas is the high degree of essentialism, Nepalis being contrasted with the 'effeminate races of the South', masculine hillmen with feminine plainsmen, the terse, energetic language of the Gurkhas, free-spirited yeomans as opposed to humble, cringing low castes. Caplan points out that this sort of discourse is in keeping with Victorian racial theories, despite the analytical problem of applying a single term 'Gurkhas' to the peoples of the middle hills of Nepal. 'The area was settled by ethnically and linguistically diverse populations, occupying different locations in a national caste hierarchy, and distinguished internally in terms of numerous economic and cultural criteria. On the whole, most military authors disregarded this heterogeneity in their assumptions about the uniformity of Gurkha customs and traditions, and of course in their stereotypes of Gurkha character traits. Most significantly, differences were rendered insignificant by the premise of a common 'biology' which transmitted the collective martial inheritance' (pp. 119–20).

An important additional reason behind this stereotyping was the Indian mutiny of 1857. As the Bengal Army had mutinied and the Gurkhas and Sikhs had remained 'loyal', it was no coincidence that the former were labelled weak-spirited in contrast to

the martial races of the Gurkhas and the Sikhs. This is an aspect of the discussion which Caplan could have made more of. By providing a comparative framework with the other 'martial races' of India, principally the Sikhs and the Pathans (who are only mentioned in passing), the study could have revealed much more of the historical-colonial context that Caplan intends to provide. Clearly at one level the Gurkhas are like the other martial races, but at the same time they occupy a unique place in the British imagination. Caplan's book tells us more about the latter than the former.

Chapter 5 has a rare discussion of the notion of 'courage' in general and among the Gurkhas in particular. Caplan draws on Western philosophical definitions to delineate existing notions of courage in the Western imagination and by extension among the British officers. He then tries to explicate local notions of courage among the Gurkhas themselves, particularly in light of the fact that they do not valorize honour and violent action (unlike the Pathans and Middle Eastern societies, for instance) in their cultural repertoire. The result of this discussion is an interesting conclusion: bravery among the Gurkhas is recognised as a virtue only when rewarded by British honours.

The most interesting contribution which Caplan makes to the discussion is to see the Gurkhas as a mirror image of the Victorian schoolboy. Qualities of 'humour, good breeding, honesty, sportsmanship, courtesy and relaxed attitude to religious practice, taken together added up to the portrait of the Gurkha soldier as young gentleman' (p. 147). The Gurkhas were warriors as well as gentlemen, and it is this combination that makes them unique in the military history of British India.

Caplan certainly achieves his desired objective: 'through situating the depictions of these soldiers by their officer-chroniclers in the complex, changing historical and politico-military conditions of military India, semi-colonial Nepal, and post-imperial Britain...our understanding of the Gurkha Project is enhanced' (p. 158). Warrior gentlemen will be of interest to scholars of colonial and post-colonial institutions, gender and constructions of masculinities, ethnographers of Nepal and South Asia and to historians of the Raj. But its approachable length and style makes it interesting reading for all.

MUKULIKA BANERJEE

RASMUSSEN, SUSAN J., *Spirit Possession and Personhood among the Kel Ewey Tuareg*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995. xii, 179pp., Index, References. £35.00 ($49.95).

Spirit Possession and Personhood among the Kel Ewey Tuareg is a welcome and vital contribution to the anthropological study of possession, also revealing the necessity of an in-depth knowledge and appreciation of ethnographic detail and the impor-

tance of focused and detailed fieldwork. The analysis begins with the complete description of one particular woman's experience of spirit possession and a discussion of her biography and local interpretations. Throughout the analysis which follows, case histories are quoted to illustrate particular arguments. While Rasmussen's writing style can be rather laboured and dense, perseverance is rewarded by an insightful discussion of possession, which is in turn used to illuminate social and cultural processes among the Tuareg of Niger. Spirit possession has long been a popular topic in the anthropology of religion, and with this publication, it gets a much-needed reappraisal and update. Rasmussen places her work firmly amongst that which is currently rethinking traditional anthropological approaches to possession. In doing so she has provided a logical framework for the examination of possession from within a particular culture.

The Tuareg are a nomadic people of North and Sahelian Africa whose society is hierarchically stratified and who used to be slave-owners. Women traditionally held considerable power, even to the extent of choosing the paramount chiefs. Increasing sedentarization, especially since the droughts of the 1980s and the restructuring of the traditional nomadic/slave-owning economy, has resulted in increased pressure on the status of women. This pressure is further compounded by Islamic practices concerning inheritance and power which conflict with traditionally more equitable ones. Tuareg society can thus be seen in terms of a series of conflicts: between nobles, blacksmiths, and former slaves; between men and women; between Muslim and non-Muslim practices; and finally between age groups. In her book, Rasmussen undertakes a detailed analysis of spirit possession from the point of view of the aesthetics, style, imagery and local discourse surrounding the ritual, which leads her to argue that possession 'metaphorically encapsulates the ironies and contradictions of being a Tuareg' (p. 7).

Following an excellent introduction, in which Rasmussen clearly outlines her aim to 'explore how far possession imagery connotes docile endurance and how far it generates critical social commentary' (p. 2), initial discussion of spirit possession ritual or Tande n Goumaten is approached through a case-study of the possession of one particular woman. Spirit possession afflicts women almost exclusively and can be inherited through the female line. It is described as a feeling of isolation, as being 'in the wilderness', and denotes feelings of desolation and depression, expressed through physical symptoms such as muteness. It is treated by a Tande n Goumaten ceremony, which involves a revealing discourse between the patient, singers, the player of the Tande drum and the audience. The patient begins the ritual while lying prone under a blanket. She then rises to her knees, dressed in the indigo veil, traditionally associated with men, and holding a man's sword. She dances the 'head dance', a delicate and graceful swaying of the head, then the neck and finally the whole upper body. The imagery of the swaying branches of a tree is a potent symbol in Tuareg aesthetics. Throughout, the singers and drumming combine with comments from the audience of a joking nature to bring about the final collapse of the patient from exhaustion as the spirits who were dancing leave her body.

Both male attire and bridal imagery alluding to inverted and liminal states are used as significant images during the ceremony. Possession does not afflict every woman and frequently occurs either just before or after marriage, or later, when a woman's daughters are getting married. It is then that many women who were acclaimed singers and musicians find themselves socially restrained from those very activities which brought them attention and satisfaction, at which point they become the patient. 'There is a common thread throughout the various local explanations: the secret repressed sentiments underlying the public cure' (p. 87). Marriage and illicit love are seen as involving the repression of true feelings and as thus providing the potential for possession to occur. Rasmussen dissects the ceremony in all its aspects and examines every possible trigger of social tension which can lead to possession. The whole concept of Tuareg aesthetics and its importance in interpreting the culture is related to traditional knowledge and power systems. Possession as approached through the conflicts in Tuareg society 'may be interpreted as a struggle for the control of Tuareg identity at both symbolic and political levels' (p. 91).

Brief but imperative explanations of Tuareg cosmology, society, class structure, composition and social mobility are left till near the end, along with details of kinship roles and relationships. The salient points being related to the Tuareg attempt to maintain traditional class distinctions despite the freeing of slaves and changing economic circumstances, which are increasing social mobility and blurring traditional relationships. The prosperous are no longer necessarily the nobles. Possession songs are given a thorough inspection, their melodies and rhythms being evaluated as well as their words.

This book should take its place on any reading list dealing with the topics of religion, cosmology and possession, both for its useful methodological approach and for placing its discussion of possession squarely within the cultural aesthetics and wider issues facing Tuareg society, by which it is bound.

MARIE-CLAIRE BAKKER

DANIEL DE COPPET (ed.) , *Understanding Rituals*, London and New York: Routledge (EASA Series) 1992. viii, 116 pp., Indexes. £9.99.

The six papers in this volume all derive from a panel held at the first EASA conference in Coimbra in 1990. The editor, Daniel de Coppet, is perhaps most deserving of recognition for having led the way in applying the ideas of Louis Dumont on hierarchical opposition and value to the analysis of ritual. De Coppet himself, who provides only the Introduction, refers to these ideas in the context of his own suggestion that the distinction between the ritual and non-ritual 'constitutes the social dimension par excellence' and as such forms 'the necessary and sufficient condition for the comparison

of societies—that is, for the practice of anthropology itself' (p. 2). While what constitutes the non-ritual as well as the ritual varies cross-culturally and is thus socially determined, to adopt any other position would be Eurocentric—for the distinction itself is universal. Moreover, ritual is important in demonstrating a society's values, in the sense intended by Dumont.

This does not prove to be a prescription for the whole book. The one paper that actually proceeds in this fashion, and then the ideas involved are left implicit, is Jos Platenkamp's complex analysis of Tobelo ritual, in which ritual is seen as circulating objects, persons and values through the society. Two papers closely related to each other, by Charles Malamoud on Vedic and Brahmanic India and by Raymond Jamous on a Muslim group of north India, highlight the significance of cross-sex sibling links in ritual and exchange ideology and their persistence even after their respective marriages have physically separated brother and sister. Michael Cartry examines cross-references between different Gurmanceba (Burkina Faso) rituals in what is the most autobiographical paper of the collection. David Parkin not only reverses Lévi-Strauss's privileging of myth over ritual, he also sees ritual action as always performative, unlike words, despite their frequent importance in ritual. *Pace* Austin, it is less that words are performative than that certain stages in the rite become, or are made, appropriate for them. He also links the practice of bodily mutilations and divisions to a notion of agency which replaces Western individual self-determination with social control through ritual.

All these approaches see ritual as doing things, in a manner derivable, inter alia, from Durkheim and van Gennep. The remaining paper, while not denying this, challenges head-on the Durkheimian assumption of closed societies confirming their existence through the conformity-inducing seduction of ritual. Gerd Baumann uses his fieldwork experiences in a multi-ethnic suburb of London to show that rituals readily incorporate outsiders, who can range from the casual bystander to members of a different ethnic or religious group, and that they can also put forward demands for change as well as encourage conformity. Instead of the Durkheimian ritual community, we should be talking about the ritual 'constituency', or rather a number of such constituencies, each with a separate interest in the same rite. Baumann falls short of rejecting Durkheim's approach entirely, but he puts the burden of proof on the latter's supporters in this instance. Perhaps the suggestion may be regarded as supplementing rather than replacing conformity-based approaches. This is the most thought-provoking paper of a thought-provoking collection.

ROBERT PARKIN

CURTIS M. HINSLEY, *The Smithsonian and the American Indian: Making a Moral Anthropology in Victorian America*, Washington, DC, and London: Smithsonian Institution Press 1994. 319 pp., Photographs, Figures, Bibliography, Index. £13.95.

This is a paperback reissue of Hinsley's *Savages and Scientists: The Smithsonian Institution and the Development of American Anthropology, 1846–1910* (1981), its title now politically corrected. The original subtitle gives a better picture of the book's subject. Hinsley starts with the founding of the Smithsonian in 1840, resulting from James Smithson's bequest of $515,000 to the United States for the establishment of an institution 'for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men' and from the four-year voyage of the United States Exploring Expedition under Charles Wilkes beginning in 1838.

From its founding the Smithsonian became involved in controversy surrounding the proper care of the collections brought back from that expedition. These controversies in turn involved differing perspectives over whether the Institution should be devoted to the democratic display of national greatness, largely through the work of amateurs, or whether it should be concerned with careful scientific study of its collections. As Hinsley remarks, 'Through much of the nineteenth century, the number of men who shared serious scientific aspirations exceeded the capacity of the society to provide opportunities for full time pursuit of those interests.' The institutional structures for professional science, and for anthropology, developed rather late, and the Smithsonian played an important, if rather chequered, role in it.

In 1846 Henry Rowe Schoolcraft agitated Lewis Henry Morgan and others into taking an interest in the anthropology of American Indians and sent a proposal to the Smithsonian for an investigation of American ethnology. The publication in 1848 of the first volume of the *Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge*, devoted to Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley by Ephraim George Squire and Edwin H. Davis, initiated its support for scholarly work on American archaeology. The finished version of the book bore the heavy stamp of the Smithsonian secretary Joseph Henry, who edited out what he deemed unfounded speculation. Following the Civil War the Smithsonian's involvement with anthropology was significantly increased with the foundation of the Bureau of American Ethnology at the instigation of its first director, the one-armed leader of the first two expeditions through the Grand Canyon, Major John Wesley Powell, friend and follower of Lewis Henry Morgan. Its Annual Reports and Bulletins made public the valuable linguistic and ethnographic work of its contributors, who had no formal training in these subjects and were subsequently criticized for their inevitable amateurism by the Boasians.

The members of the Bureau became attached by a variety of means, some simply by showing up and being persistent. Many were torn between the desire to spend their time in the field doing research and the requirement to satisfy political bosses by work on the episodic and long-drawn-out project which eventually became the *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*. There was continuing tension between demands that they produce surveys of use to the public and its representatives in Congress, and

their individual interests in scholarship. Powell made the case for government-supported anthropology but paid the price of seeing that support exposed to the whim of political fashion. When asked to sign a petition calling for an investigation into the responsibility of the army and the Bureau of Indian Affairs for the Wounded Knee massacre, both Powell and Otis Mason refused. Mason allegedly said, 'We never express ourselves vehemently upon political matters. It isn't healthy to do so.' Powell refused because it would embroil him in controversy with the Secretary of the Interior. Powell, in fact, was then under attack from critics of the Geological Survey, from which he was soon forced to resign. In his declining years, he also ceded power and budget to the director of the Smithsonian.

Following his death in 1902, his lieutenant and chosen successor, the hapless William John McGee, was forced from the Bureau after an humiliating investigation by Smithsonian officials into the management of the Bureau under Powell and himself. Among other charges, their report accused them of careless and possibly corrupt purchases of manuscripts from Alice Fletcher and Franz Boas, who for a period kept himself afloat by selling linguistic manuscripts and notebooks to the Bureau for a total of $4,000. Powell was replaced by a reluctant and exhausted William Henry Holmes, who served from 1902 to 1910.

Members of the Bureau struggled to create professional standards where there had been none, and many of their achievements were remarkable. They were caught between demands from politicians and Smithsonian officials to produce practical results and their own desire to pursue open-ended research. Hinsley gives useful sketches of the various, sometimes colourful, sometimes dry and dusty characters involved, and he attempts to relate his description of their activities to the changing scholarly and social issues and circumstances of their day. I have already found his section on J. Owen Dorsey useful in my own work, and the book's reissue is welcome. It provides the best ready account of an important aspect of the history of anthropology.

R. H. BARNES

MARCUS BANKS, *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions,* London: Routledge, 1996. viii, 210 pp., Bibliography, Index.

It is not uncommon, as an anthropology undergraduate, to feel that your chosen subject bears little resemblance to everyday life, particularly when a word which you thought meant something to you (e.g. 'kinship', 'gender', 'ethnicity') is abstracted beyond all recognition by different authors in apparently conflicting ways. Partly for this reason, Marcus Banks's *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions* should become an important book for students, since, as the title suggests, a genuine attempt is made to step outside the academic field in order to assess the contribution of sociological

and anthropological discourse on 'ethnicity' to the treatment of social differentiation in British and American society at large. By quoting his own, ambivalent conclusion near the start of the book, however, the author makes it clear that the reader is to expect neither a 'once-and-for-all' answer, nor, necessarily, an end to disillusionment on the subject of 'ethnicity'. Instead, we are promised 'a book about reading, a book for consulting, a starting place before going on to read the original sources and, for the potential fieldworker, before going on to try to find ethnicity in the field' (p. 9).

In an unpatronizing tone which characterizes the entire book, Banks introduces his subject by pointing out that the web of meanings which has grown up around the term 'ethnicity' over the last thirty years is simply too large and complex for the undergraduate to unravel merely through reading primary sources: a guide is needed. Chapter 2 identifies three distinct schools of thought on the subject of 'ethnicity' with great clarity, and should become a standard reference for both teachers and students of the topic. It also sets up a dichotomy between 'primordialist' and 'instrumentalist' views on ethnicity, the juxtaposition of which forms the analytical core of the book. This provided a useful paradigm for approaching the vast literature covered by the volume, although the association of particular authors, texts and opinions with one theoretical stance or the other seemed constraining at times. Aside from these key terms, however, jargon is largely forsaken, as is the positive tone of many other texts which mislead students into seeking chains of continuity between different authors where few in fact exist; 'the wheel', as Banks (p. 2) puts it, 'has been invented several times over'.

In Chapters 3 and 4, which deal with the topics of race and ethnicity in the USA and Britain, the author touches open-mindedly upon the work of political scientists, sociologists and social psychologists, with which I was largely unfamiliar. The comparison of American and British writing on the subject was therefore useful as an introduction and, in itself, as an illustration of the need to account for academic theories as products (rather than mere descriptions) of the different social situations which they address, as well as of the disciplinary conventions they represent. A view of ethnicity as an academic construct rather than necessarily a social or psychological fact pervades the structure of the book, posing an important warning for prospective fieldworkers.

Chapter 5 ('Ethnicity and nationalism') again provides a crystal-clear summary of the main relevant theories, which will be invaluable to students either as a prelude or a supplement to primary reading. While the important question 'Do majorities have ethnicity?' is addressed, however, the problem of powerful minorities is largely neglected. By omitting the boundary mechanisms of social élites from his discussion of the relationship between ethnic groups, nationalism and the state, I felt that the author missed an opportunity to sharpen his account of the tacit association of 'ethnicity' with weak minority groups or 'groups demanding something from the state' in much anthropological literature.

Whether we like it or not, ethnicity is, as Banks puts it, 'out there' as a feature of both academic and non-academic discourse, and in the penultimate chapter a critical understanding of ethnicity and nationalism, developed through a broad survey of the

academic literature, is brought to bear upon two highly revealing treatments of social divisiveness by the British media and public. What this seems to reveal is that while anthropological constructions of ethnicity have failed to provide a coherent tool for cross-cultural sociological analysis, they have indirectly lent a veneer of legitimacy to the popular resurrection of a narrow-minded primordialism which obfuscates more than it reveals about social change and conflict, and itself contributes to the erection of social boundaries.

With this in mind, Banks's conclusion could have made more of studies (e.g. by Gluckman) which have succeeded in describing and accounting for social differentiation with no recourse to an abstract autonomous theory of ethnicity, in order to make a strong case for the abandonment of the concept in anthropological discourse. However, having pointed out that ethnicity's coffin is riddled with nails, the author refrains from consigning it to the ground. As promised, this is not 'a book for reading', but a 'book about reading', long on debate and short on ethnographic detail, a balance which Banks modestly characterises as 'all bread and no jam' (p. 8). The combination of breadth with clarity (the book is only 210 pages in length), lack of dogma and extensive references means that plentiful jam is assured, at least, for newcomers to the subject.

DAVID WENGROW

PETER RIVIÈRE, *Absent-minded Imperialism: Britain and the Expansion of Empire in Nineteenth-century Brazil*, London and New York: Tauris Academic Studies 1995. 194 pp., Illustrations, Map, Bibliography, Index. £39.50.

The author, renowned for research and numerous publications on the social anthropology of the Guiana Indians, has in this, his most recent work, turned historian. Using data from church, government and missionary society archives, Brazilian and British, he investigates the 'Pirara incident', a dramatic, colourful event in nineteenth-century British Guiana diplomatic history.

In 1838 the Revd Thomas Youd founded an Anglican mission in the Makushi Indian village of Pirara in the hinterland of British Guiana (now Guyana). He intended it to be the salvation of the Rupununi Indians, but instead provoked an active phase in the Anglo-Brazilian dispute over the position of the frontier between the Essequibo River and the Rio Branco. The Brazilians from Fort São Joaquim on the Rio Branco occupied Pirara, causing Youd to withdraw, and during the ensuing international incident the British Government dispatched a military force to retake it. The journey up the Essequibo took a month, and after an occupation of six-and-a-half months the British withdrew. The incident ended with the Agreement of 1842, whereby Britain and

Brazil neutralized the disputed territory until the line of frontier was settled. In 1904 the Rupununi District, including Pirara, was recognized as British.

This study is a micro-history, with a blow-by-blow account of events and a skilful coordination of circumstances and personalities: the two military protagonists who were at Pirara, and the unfortunate Protestant missionary who, while wishing to reinstate his mission, found himself hosting his opposite number, the Carmelite Friar José dos Santos Innocentes. A British Boundary Commission headed by Robert Schomburgk was also present. These dramatic encounters took place before an anxious Makushi audience and involved elaborately courteous exchanges of visits, flamboyant display and hospitality. Meanwhile, communication difficulties and long delays in receiving information from their distant outposts beset both governments. There is an Appendix with a useful chronology of major events. Reproductions of paintings by Edward Goodall, the artist accompanying Schomburgk, depict Pirara and its concourse.

A history in depth, with a short time-scale, allows for a close examination of individuals, institutions and their motivations, and one of the author's most interesting discoveries is the role of individuals in the Pirara incident. Schomburgk's correspondence with the Royal Geographical Society revealed that the Brazilian Commandant at Fort São Joaquim had owned an Indian house in Pirara, in which he frequently stayed and from which he traded. An investigation into Thomas Youd's foundation at Pirara showed that neither the government nor the Church Missionary Society had authorized it. His visits to the Rupununi were meant to be exploratory only. It was the conjunction of these two circumstances in a touchy area of Anglo-Brazilian relations which acted as a catalyst in escalating a full-blown boundary dispute.

Rivière finds the motivations of the British Government to be more obscure. He notes a lack of interest in a commercial future in the Rupununi and also a lack of reference to territorial expansion and sovereignty. There was dismay at the costs which the military occupation of Pirara had incurred. He concludes that territorial gain was a secondary consideration for Britain, a means to an end only, and concern about sovereignty over Pirara was expressed 'less in terms of disputed territory and more as a worry over the protection of British citizens who, it was feared, would be enslaved if Brazilians were left in control of the territory' (p. 170). Having abolished slavery, the British were pressurizing Brazil to follow suit. Both Schomburgk and Youd reported a forcible recruitment of labour by Brazilians entering the Rupununi, and this had aroused considerable feeling. Humanitarian and anti-slavery considerations were certainly part of the motivations in the Pirara incident but there was also Christianity and the driving ideology of the evangelical movement. British missionaries travelled to remote areas to propagate the Christian gospel and bring spiritual salvation and civilization to pagans. They carried their culture and the imperial flag with them. It is indicative that when Sir Henry Light, the governor of British Guiana, recruited the reluctant Youd to accompany the military to Pirara, he trusted that 'Pirara would flourish again and become, under her Majesty's protection, "a focus of Christian light to the aborigines"' (p. 88). A President of Para saw this motivation too and had re-

marked that the British, having abolished negro slavery, were now showing themselves attentive to the salvation of souls, 'occupying territory in order to save the souls of the inhabitants' (p. 177). This powerful promotion of Christian and Victorian ideals might be compared with the promulgation of democratic institutions and human rights by the West, which similarly pervades international relations today.

I am not convinced that the Pirara incident should be labelled a case of 'absent-minded imperialism' as the book's title states and as is discussed at the end of the text. Even the attribution of 'a certain lack of attention' is perhaps unjustified, given the state of knowledge of the hinterland and its Amerindians at the time. To reach the interior Amerindians from the colonial settlements of the coast entailed long and dangerous river journeys. A systematic exploration and mapping by Robert Schomburgk, begun in 1835, was still proceeding. At Pirara in 1838 Youd had placed himself well beyond the sphere of regular British communications and administration.

Rivière notes that the 1842 Agreement (the text of which I would like to have seen reproduced) excluded a political and military presence from the disputed territory, but not a religious one. He remarks: 'It remains a mystery that Brazil as much as Britain failed to take advantage of this clause in the agreement. It is of course possible, even likely, that neither country's heart was much in the affair' (p. 136). In fact, a longer historical perspective shows that the Anglican Church retained an undiminished enthusiasm for a Rupununi mission. During the second half of the nineteenth century a series of itinerant clergy visited and toured Makushi villages, conducted church services, taught and delivered the sacraments. A permanent mission was established at Yupukari in 1908, but not before Makushi leaders had several times built a church and missionary residence in anticipation of the arrival of a priest which the Church promised but could not deliver. Uncertainty over the political status of the Rupununi was one factor, but more crucial were problems of communication and logistics and a lack of Church resources and personnel. In the Potaro valley, in the 1870s and 1880s, other untenable missions were established, and failed for similar reasons.

A significant outcome of the Pirara incident and subsequent agreement was that the Makushi were left to live their customary, independent life for over half a century. Competition for their allegiance protected them from forcible labour recruitment and gave them government-sponsored Captains and presents! They played host to touring missionaries and a variety of exploratory and scientific expeditions, and they themselves travelled down-river to work in the timber concessions and visit colonial settlements to barter their goods and services. Attending mission churches and chapels, they absorbed Christian knowledge, took it back home, and adapted it to their own beliefs. This led to a variety of enthusiastic movements, reported in contemporary literature from 1845 on and culminating in the formation of today's Hallelujah religion. Significantly, this was founded by a Makushi who accompanied two clergymen to the lower Demerara in the late 1860s or early 1870s.

There is no systematic treatment of the Makushi in this work, but much interesting and useful information on them may be gained from it. Notably, we can appreciate how the Pirara incident foreshadows the subsequent division of Makushi lands and

their loss of independence. Recognized as the rightful owners of the soil, their lands having been in possession of their ancestors down the ages, they were even denoted a sovereign nation. However, it is also clear that neither Britain nor Brazil thought that this would remain the case. The governor of British Guiana reiterated that the territory belonged to the Indians who 'glad of British protection would yield to its power'. He also remarked that the territory claimed might be useful to Great Britain (p. 145). This is one more example of circumstances in which indigenous peoples and their territories have become absorbed by powerful nation-states not through military conquest but through a gradual domination accompanied by various inducements and justified by moral imperatives. The British thought that Indian welfare could only be ensured if they were to come under British protection and become British citizens. The price paid was loss of independence and much of the indigenous culture, the colonization of ancestral lands and the annexation of its resources.

This book, which puts the years of the Pirara incident on the historical map, is a valuable contribution to the history of the Guiana hinterland and to an understanding of the urge to imperial expansion there. It is also a very useful and interesting study for students of the Rupununi Indians, since the events described show the beginning of a series of social and cultural processes that are still unfolding. It makes excellent reading.

AUDREY COLSON

JOAN MARK, *The King of the World in the Land of the Pygmies*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1995. xvi, 276 pp., Index, Map, Illustrations. £28.50.

This is the story of an American who went to Africa, fell in love and never mentally returned home. A Boston Brahman, Patrick Lowell Putnam (1904–1953) attended classes in anthropology at Harvard and participated in its expeditions to Africa. That determined his lifecourse. Shortly afterwards, he went back to the edge of the Zairean rainforest, home to bands of pygmies, in order to establish a camp there. He built an infirmary, a hotel and a rearing station for local exotic animals, especially the okapi. Playing host to wealthy tourists and visiting journalists in search of sensationalist copy, he had the pygmies whom he befriended and whose language he learnt stage spectacles of their lifestyle. He also made money by selling animals to Western zoos, masks to Western museums, and—when the market was right—local commodities to Western traders. When none of that provided enough, he begged from his patrician father. By the 1950s his health was so poor that it affected his behaviour and he spent his last year as a half-crazed tyrant destroying what he had created.

Such a good story can be read in many different ways. First, it is the psychological report of a neglected child whose adult version surrounds himself with people he

loves and who in turn love him. Secondly, it is a postcolonial critique of those who helped the indigenes and simultaneously helped themselves. Thirdly, it is the tale (of Haggardian excess or Conradian darkness) of a self-exiled failure who had to go to an outpost of Empire in order to establish a petty kingdom of his own. Fourthly, it is the story of an incurable, diseased romantic whose first wife dies on him, whose second wife divorces him, and who dies on his third wife—all the time having local wives as well. Finally, it is an example of the popularization of anthropology. Putnam knew pygmy ways extremely well but never wrote anything of consequence. Instead, he assisted anthropologists (above all Colin Turnbull) and helped to feed the Western fascination with tropical hunter-gatherers physically distinct from Europeans.

It is a many-stranded tale of its times and Mark tells it well. Her book aids our understanding of the complexities and contradictions of the colonial encounter and serves to place the production of anthropological knowledge in its cross-cultural contexts. For these reasons anthropologists may benefit from its reading.

JEREMY MACCLANCY

JUNE HELM, *Prophecy and Power among the Dogrib Indians* (Studies in the Anthropology of North American Indians), Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1994. 172 pp., Appendix, Reference, Index. £28.50.

ARMIN W. GEERTZ, *The Invention of Prophecy: Continuity and Meaning in Hopi Indian Religion*, Berkeley, etc.: University of California Press 1994. xxi, 490 pp., Photos, Charts, Maps, Appendixes, Bibliography, Index. $40.00.

The Dogrib are Athapaskan-speaking peoples of the Mackenzie District of the Northwest Territories in Canada. The present work is not a study of Dogrib culture, but an account of five personalities involved in 'the Dogrib prophet movement' of the late 1960s and early 1970s, plus the author's principal informant and assistant. The first part of the book, 'Three Styles in the Practice of Prophecy', offers no explanation of the movement as such but instead describes the way three prophets presented themselves and the responses of the people around them, exploring the quite various ways the prophets came to prophecy and the rather different reactions they caused. As she comments, 'the ethnography of the Dogrib prophet movement makes rather tame telling'. There were no millenarian dreams, and their prophecy was entirely in line with Catholic expectations. The several chapters of the second part of the book explore the implications of the term *ink'on*, sometimes translated by the Dogrib as 'luck' or 'magic', by means of anecdotal narratives by her assistant Vital Thomas, whose autobiography forms the final chapter. There is a brief appendix on Dogrib leadership.

Geertz's book is empirically more substantial and intellectually more ambitious. Analytically it is eclectic, drawing inspiration from the post-modernists to the likes of Victor Turner, Roy Wagner and Max Weber. Prophecy can be a large topic, as it is in this book, and Geertz makes too many analytic points about it to permit narrowing his message down to a single interpretation. Nevertheless, perhaps the main theme of the book is that despite claims to precognition, Hopi prophecy is not really precognitive. Prophecies frequently appear decades after the facts referred to in them and in any case incorporate contemporary events into a traditional framework of discourse having to do with the Hopi emergence myth. This framework is common to all Hopi and is independent of the political content given to it at any particular moment. As a form prophecy is collective, and Geertz even argues that there are prophecies but no prophets. This position is somewhat paradoxical, since the book analyses a series of prophecies made by specific men for, apparently, specific political reasons in the period from 1830 to 1989.

Hopi prophecy centres on the prediction of the end of the world in the emergence myth and is often associated with destructive acts intended to bring about the end of the world or steps taken to ameliorate its consequences, depending upon the viewpoint of the individual prophet. Prophecy is political and propelled by the dynamics of Hopi factionalism. Geertz incorporates a good deal of Hopi political history into his account, down to and including Hopi political use of flying saucer cults and the question of interaction with Indian hobbyists, 'hippies', New Agers and other American and European well-wishers and imitators. One late chapter is devoted to such 'cultural madness'. As the preface makes explicit, this book too is intended to play a political role as a corrective to the attitudes of those listed above and as a critique of Hopi traditionalists and their White supporters. It contains a formidable scholarly apparatus, as well as materials drawn from a wide variety of media. There are many histrionic people in this book, and Geertz evidences histrionic touches too, perhaps inevitably when so many before him have been tempted to assume the guise of the salvation-providing White Brother of Hopi myth. The reader comes away, if not entirely convinced of every individual argument, then at least with a sense of having been very thoroughly introduced to the complexities of contemporary Hopi life.

R. H. BARNES

R. H. JOHANNES, *Words of the Lagoon: Fishing and Marine Lore in the Palau District of Micronesia*, Berkeley, etc.: University of California Press 1992. xi, 245 pp., Map, Tables, Figures, Photographs, Appendixes, Bibliography, Index. $15.00.

Originally published in 1981, this is the paperback edition of a book by a marine biologist about fishing technology and knowledge on Palau. Johannes claims that the

elder fishermen of Palau have an extensive understanding of the behaviour of very many species of tropical fish that vastly exceeds what is known to marine biology. His aim is 'to discover what Westerners can learn about tropical marine ecosystems and their resources by investigating the knowledge and actions of native fishermen and by observing their impact on these resources'. Having gone to Palau with an ecological hypothesis, he soon found that political, cultural and economic factors made his biological explanations inadequate. 'I gained more new (to marine science) information during sixteen months of fieldwork using this approach than I had during the previous fifteen years using more conventional research techniques'.

The book is written in an easily accessible style, while presenting much of interest to laymen, biologists and anthropologists. It was pleasing, for example, to find that Palau fishing kites use the same spider-web lure to entrap needlefish as did those which once were found in the Solor Strait in eastern Indonesia. Never having seen one, I was most grateful to find that Johannes had included a photograph of such a lure. Johannes begins with a description of Palau fishing methods, both ancient and recently introduced. He next discusses yearly, monthly and daily rhythms of fish and fishermen, with much attention to spawning behaviour and a good discussion of the adjustment of the local lunar calendar to the star calendar. He then takes up traditional conservation methods, the question of improving reef and lagoon fishing and (with P. W. Black) fishing in the South West Islands. Subsequent chapters cover island currents, fishhooks, and fish species. A final chapter assesses claims concerning the unexpected habits of various varieties of fish, such as the cornet fish, which sticks its snout between the jaws of the moray eel in order to eviscerate the eel (true), and the octopus, which allegedly gives live birth in trees (biologically impossible, though often witnessed by Palauans). An Appendix is devoted to reproductive rhythms, spawning locations, good fishing days and seasonal migrations of fish. A second covers the lunar rhythms of crustaceans, and a third describes the use and construction of a variety of fishhooks. There is a glossary of Palauan words and another of Toba words. From an anthropological point of view the book is an invaluable contribution to the study of local technical knowledge and is of considerable comparative interest. It is attractively decorated with drawings of fish made by an anonymous Palauan and first published in 1929.

R. H. BARNES

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