

**Strenski, Ivan**

1987 *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History*. Cassirer, Eliade, Lévi-Strauss, and Malinowski. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

**Thornton, Robert J.**

1985 "Imagine Yourself Set Down ...". Mach, Frazier, Conrad, Malinowski, and the Role of Imagination in Ethnography. *Anthropology Today* 1/5: 7–14.

**Wagner, Tamara**

2002 *Nostalgia and the Victorian Novel*. National University of Singapore / University of Cambridge <<http://www.victorianweb.org/genre/wagner/1.html>> [04.03.2012]

**Wayne, Helena (ed.)**

1995 *The Story of Marriage*. The Letters of Bronislaw Malinowski and Elsie Masson. Vol. 1: 1916–20; Vol. 2: 1920–35. London: Routledge.

**Young, Michael W.**

2004 *Malinowski. Odyssey of an Anthropologist 1884–1920*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

**Zawadzki, Andrzej**

2001 *Nowoczesna eseistyka filozoficzna w piśmiennictwie polskim pierwszej połowy XX wieku*. Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych "Universitas". (Horyzonty Nowoczesności, 18)

## Title Cups and Ancestral Presence in the Bambui *fondom*, Cameroon Grassfields

Mathias Alubafi Fubah

### Introduction

Ancestral worship looms high in the traditional religious practices of the kingdoms of the Western Grassfields. Propitiating death family members through celebrations and sacrifices is indispensable to the survival and future prosperity of the family in the Bambui Kingdom<sup>1</sup> in particular and kingdoms across the Western Grassfields as a whole. Failure to

propitiate the death is believed to result to misfortune, and this can sometimes retard the future prosperity of the family.

But, just how a link is created between the death and the living and the nature and purpose of such a link is something that has not actually received critical academic inquiry. Although I grew up in the Western Grassfields, I have hardly taken time to investigate how and why it is absolutely necessary for families to be so attached to the death or ancestors to the extent that they believe if they do not venerate them, they will be punished. The opportunity presented itself during my PhD research in 2004/2005, allowing me to attend some of the death celebrations and sacrifices that are geared towards propitiating the death – and to understand how a link is created between the death and their living kinsmen, as well as the nature and purpose of such a link. Through my research and participation in some of these death celebrations and sacrifices in the Bambui Kingdom, I eventually discovered that apart from the natural family relationship, rituals are also performed to strengthen the bond between the death and their living kinsmen before they are buried. Crucial to the ritual of creating a link between the deceased and his/her living kinsmen is the placing of the deceased drinking horn or cup and a flat stone on his or her forehead – in order to transfer his/her power before burial (Fubah 2012, for more on the transfer of power into the drinking horn). The drinking horn and the stone are eventually handed to the deceased's successor as tools for pouring libation to him/her and other family ancestors represented by the objects or those who preceded the last ancestor. In order to understand the nature and purpose of the intermediary role played by the title cup (that allow us to propose that ancestors are present in the title cups), it makes sense to focus on specific aspects in which the title cup is used in propitiating the ancestors and the *raison d'être* behind such practices (Fubah 2012). This article, then, is about the role of the title cup in ancestral veneration in the Bambui *fondom*. It concerns the means and manner in which the Bambui people use the title cup in communicating with their ancestors, especially in times of crisis, such as severe illnesses in the family, or in times of extreme joy, such as the giving of a daughter's hand in marriage. It presents an examination of the title cup and the notion of ancestors and ancestral veneration in the *fondom*, bringing out the different ways in which the Bambui people and by extension Grasslanders view their relationship with the title cup and their ancestors. It is also about how the title cup affects the living, and how it is in turn affected by the dead or ancestors of the lineage.

1 The Bambui *fondom* is one of the many *fondoms* that make up the Western Grassfields, Cameroon. It is located in Tubah Sub-Division of the Northwest Region. A detailed history of the *fondom* has already been presented elsewhere (cf. Fubah 2008, 2012 and Bonu 2012) for more on this. This study is part of the work I undertook for my postdoctoral project at Wits. I am indebted to the many Bambui families that allowed me the opportunity to participate in their celebrations and sacrifices as well as to the anonymous reviewers of the article.

In the few studies that have considered ancestors and ancestral veneration in the Western Grassfields in particular and Africa as a whole, the focus has been on “ancestors as elders” (Kopytoff 1997), ancestors as mediators and saviours in the family (Jindra 2005) to the neglect of the tools that are used in mediating with the ancestors – such as the title cup. This article goes a bit further, presenting not only instances of ancestral veneration but also some of the celebrations and sacrifices in which the title cup is used in propitiating the ancestors. In doing this, I aim to emphasise that it is not only celebrations and sacrifices that are crucial for ancestral benevolence or punishment, but it is also the transfer of the deceased power into the title cup, and the use of the cup as a means of communication with the ancestors that allow me to propose that ancestors are present in the title cup. This perspective draws on and contributes to Igor Kopytoff’s (1997) seminal work on African ancestors in which he argues that ancestors play the role of elders in families. I intend to demonstrate that the transfer of the deceased power into the title cup before he/she is buried is central to the practice of ancestors and ancestral propitiation in the Bambui Kingdom. It is exactly because of this that the title cup is considered the hand that pilots the affairs of the family in Bambui (Fubah 2012) or as one of “the most precious heirloom handed down to the most honourable member of the family from one generation to the next” (Knöpfli 1997: 17).

The article starts by briefly reviewing the importance of ancestors and ancestral propitiation, particularly drawing on my fieldwork experiences in Bambui as well as the relevant literature on ancestral worship in the Grassfields and Africa. This is followed by an examination of some of the celebrations and sacrifices in which the title cup is used in propitiating ancestors. The last part highlights the significance of the title cup as one of the notable objects used in communicating with ancestors across the Western Grassfields.

### **Ancestors and Ancestral Propitiation in the Western Grassfields**

The Western Grassfields of Cameroon is the highland region corresponding to the present-day Northwest Region of Cameroon. It is comprised of over thirty-five *fondoms* or kingdoms with many shared practices and beliefs, allowing scholars to delineate it as a distinct cultural region.<sup>2</sup> Traditional social

norms in this part of Cameroon are an important aspect of the daily lives of the people. In particular, respect for hierarchy is essential and children are encouraged from a very early age on to revere their elders and be blessed or disrespect them and be punished (Fubah 2012). Additionally, titled individuals such as lineage heads and chiefs, *fons*, kings, notables are attributed high levels of innate powers, because they are believed to be closer to the ancestors and can influence the course of events in the family (cf. Jindra 2005; Koloss 2000). Titled individuals and elders are also “believed to live on after death and become ancestors themselves,” also capable of influencing the destinies of their respective families (Jindra 2005: 358). Thus, their power is transferred into a flat stone and a title cup when they die before they are buried. This is done by placing the deceased drinking horn or cup on his/her forehead in order to transfer his power – ensuring that there is a link between the deceased and his/her living kinsmen. The placing of the stone is followed by incantations, saying we are burying you but this “stone will be your head upon which we shall pour libation to venerate you and ask for blessings” (Bonu 2012). Once this is done, the stone is placed in the house near the cooking stones or at a special corner – making the area a family shrine for most ancestral libations. For the drinking horn, the transfer of the deceased power is also followed by incantations, inviting the deceased to go with dry or empty hands and leave behind fresh hands to look after his family and their descendants. The fresh hands in this context refer to the power transferred from the deceased into the title cup while the dry hands stand for the deceased continuous role in keeping the fresh hands even fresher. Put differently, the deceased or ancestor should never relent in his/her efforts to look after the family left behind (Fubah 2012).

The role of elders and ancestors in the lives of their living kinsmen has been the basis of numerous scholarly studies on ancestors and ancestral propitiation in Africa.<sup>3</sup> Kopytoff’s seminal work on “Ancestors as Elders in Africa” reveals that:

Ancestors are vested with mystical powers and authority. They retain a functional role in the world of the living, specifically in the life of their living kinsmen; indeed, African kin-groups are often described as communities of both the living and the dead. The relation of the ancestors to their living kinsmen has been described as ambivalent, as both punitive and benevolent and sometimes even as capricious. In general, ancestral benevolence is assured through propitiation and sacrifice; neglect is believed to bring about punishment (1997: 412).

<sup>2</sup> Geary (1987); Koloss (2000); Rowlands (1993); Kopytoff (1981); Nkwi and Warnier (1982); Jindra (2005).

<sup>3</sup> Kopytoff (1997); Jindra (2005); Koloss (2000).

Kopytoff's observation echoes what most Grassfields scholars have written<sup>4</sup> and it vividly illuminates the situation I encountered in Bambui. Bambui people, irrespective of their economic situation believe consciously or unconsciously that celebrations and sacrifices to the dead are essential for the survival and sustainability of the family. Death celebrations are an important aspect of Bambui culture.<sup>5</sup> It is a culture handed down by the ancestors that their living kinsmen must propitiate them through traditional death celebrations and sacrifices. It is believed that the spirits of the ancestors will continue to loom until a befitting celebration is carried out. If this is not done, misfortunes such as illnesses, more deaths, and disasters will come to the family (cf. Bonu 2012 for more on death celebrations). Accordingly, the "future prosperity of the family depends on blessings from the ancestors and, to please them, the living descendants must perform a death celebration in their honour, one that follows all the cultural prescriptions of gifts to the relatives, involvement of societies and general hospitality" (Jindra 2005: 361). Death celebrations of titled men in Bambui in particular and across the Western Grassfields as whole are followed by enthronement rituals in which a successor is chosen or empowered to officially take over the throne left behind by the predecessor. A ritual called *nikeng* is performed before enthronement. The ritual normally begins with the harvesting and preparation of assorted foodstuff, symbolising the farming activities of the deceased or ancestor, going onto the sharing of the foodstuffs to the public in small baskets. This aspect is followed by the rubbing, dressing, and decoration of the successor with *mbhe-eh* or camwood, beads, and loin cloth. After decorating the successor, he/she is presented to the public – before the throne is handed over. Upon receiving the throne, the successor becomes a title holder and is given the title cup, also known as *edonjendieu* or *edontubepha*, literally translated as the cup of a successor or the cup carrying the head(s) of the dead. Henceforth, he/she bears the name of the deceased or ancestor. The title cup now becomes one of the essential links between the ancestor and his/her living kinsmen – and

is used for pouring libations and making sacrifices to the ancestors whenever need arises (cf. Fubah 2012 for more on the initiation of the title cup).

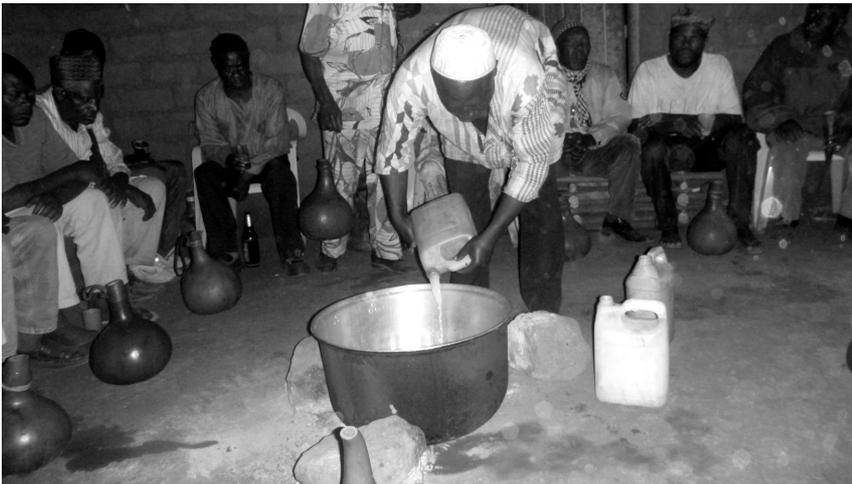
However, not all members and ancestors of the Bambui Kingdom are propitiated through death celebrations and sacrifices. Untitled individuals, including men, women, and children, as well as those who do not have children, are not well respected and certain rituals are not performed in their honour. This is because most untitled individuals are associated with commoners – and commoners are generally considered as people without innate powers. As a result, untitled ancestors do not have the power to influence the destiny of their living kinsmen. As Diduk notes in the case of the Kedjom Keku Kingdom (a neighbouring kingdom to Bambui), it is believed that a "woman continues nothing" after she dies (Diduk 1987: 122, cited in Jindra 2005: 358). Diduk's observation suggests that unlike titled women in Kedjom Keku, untitled deceased women do not continue as ancestors and, therefore, cannot influence the destinies of their living kinsmen. In the Bambui Kingdom, untitled individuals, specifically adults who die without having children, are buried with a flat *ngo-oh* or stone in their hand, indicating that they should go as they came – and should never look behind for propitiation. In fact, they should never turn their eyes to bother their family members or appear to them in spirit or animal form, as is expected from titled ancestors. They are referred to as *eihpheinetuh*, or ancestors without a head left behind or successor to look back to. As a result, title cups are not part of the paraphernalia of this category of untitled ancestors in the Bambui Kingdom. But, in spite of this, some families might still name their children after untitled deceased family members who did not have children, in order to give continuity to the name – and also avoid being ridiculed by counterparts who have done so in their own families.

### Title Cups and Ancestral Celebrations and Sacrifices

A detailed description and analysis of the initiation or empowerment of the drinking horn into a title cup in the Bambui Kingdom has been presented elsewhere (Fubah 2012). Here, it suffices to recall that the title cup is a drinking horn or cup made from the buffalo or cow horn. The title cup is produced as a mere drinking horn or "virgin object" that can be used by any member of the public or that can be transformed through initiation rituals and used as a title cup. One of such initiation rituals is the transfer of a titled deceased power into his/her drinking

4 Jindra (2005); Geary (1986); Fardon (1990).

5 Death celebrations in Bambui in particular and in the Western Grassfields as a whole are done in two phases: the first being the funeral or burial rites immediately after a person dies and the second, also known as second funeral, being the celebration that comes up approximately a year or more after the burial. It is believed that the spirits of the dead continue to loom around after the first funeral or burial until the second funeral is performed. The second funeral is associated with the celebration that allows the dead to transform into the world of the ancestors.



**Fig.:** The Bambui celebration in honour of the dead.

horn before he/she is buried. The essence, again, is that the title cup will eventually be handed over to the deceased's successor to be used in death celebrations and sacrifices in honour of the deceased, now turned ancestor. Thus, in the event that a family or group of families want to engage in any form of celebration, libation is first poured on the ancestral stone (using the title cup) to ask for guidance from the ancestors throughout the celebrations and blessings thereafter. This is because families believe "that ancestors can see what is going on or are at least aware of 'how they [the living] are doing it'" and might influence the course of events either negatively or positively if not consulted (Jindra 2005: 361 f.).

In some of the major death celebrations which I attended in Bambui, I noticed that numerous traditional rites in which the title cup is used are performed prior to the celebrations. In such a celebration for a titled individual, in 2010, family members met in the family compound on the evening preceding the celebration to inform the ancestors through libations. The main action performed was the pouring of palm wine into a pot placed on three stones in the middle of the living room (see Fig.). While pouring the palm wine into the pot, the name or names (in case of many deceased family members) of the ancestors as well as of their children or descendants are mentioned, alerting the ancestors that the palm wine is coming from one or other living kinsmen and is meant for such and such an ancestor. Thereafter, the palm wine is shared in *ba-ati(s)* or calabashes beginning with the family head. The presence of the family head and other titled individuals during this particular event is essential, because it is believed that the family head directly or indirectly communicates the deliberations to the ancestors through the drinking of the libation palm wine

in his title cup – handed down by the ancestors. The sharing is followed by drinking and feasting by everyone present including titled and untitled individuals, thereby marking the official opening of the death celebration. This particular ritual in Bambui is known as *aqueonsinevieu*, or putting the death celebration into the house – meaning the family or families concerned have met and officially declared the celebrations opened. Similarly, a ritual in the form of a family meeting is performed at the end of the celebrations to officially close the deliberations. This part constitutes what Michael Jindra calls "the most serious part of the entire death celebration" (2005: 362). To him, the "family meeting is the summation of the event, the final event that confirms the unification of the family" (362).

Family unity across the Western Grassfields is as important as the death celebration itself. It is the responsibility of family heads and elders to bring the family together. It has been noted that "[a]ncestors bless families that are unified and harmonious, and they curse those that are divided, where 'bad feelings' reign" (Jindra 2005: 362). Accordingly, family members continue to perform sacrifices after the death celebrations in order to show their unity to the ancestors. In Bambui, in particular, family heads are expected to organise periodic meetings with family members in order to assess the state of events in the family and in turn communicate with the ancestors about whatever the family has done wrong or are in need of. For instance, in 2009, I witnessed a situation in one of the families in which a child was seriously ill and the family head consulted a diviner. The diviner told the family head that the sick child's father did not provide all the traditional items his wife had requested for before her father died. Upon investigation, the child's father told his wife's family representative that he had provided everything

except for a tin of palm oil (about 20 litres), because he did not have enough money at the time. But because the rightful person, who was supposed to be given the palm oil, was dead and now an ancestor, the child's father was unsure about whom to present the palm oil. Because the child's life was at stake, the family head had to pour libation and update the ancestor about the illness and what the diviner had told them as well as what they were planning to do in order to address the issue. For the purpose of pouring libation, the family head again is required to put some palm wine into his title cup, make some incantations, and then pour the palm wine on the ancestral stone as a sacrifice to the ancestor. Thereafter, the child's father was requested to bring the tin of palm oil which was then shared between the relevant family members. Immediately after the sharing ceremony, the child's illness began to improve and he finally recovered – leaving the family convinced that without the libation they would have lost the child. The necessity of these libations is so strong that any attempt to stop some families from performing them is met with sanctions.

But how exactly does the living communicate with the ancestors? Kopytoff has noted that

[c]ommunication with the dead takes the form of a conversational monologue, patterned but not stereotyped, and devoid of repetitive formulae. One speaks the way one speaks to living people: “You, [such and such], your junior is ill. We do not know why, we do not know who is responsible. If it is you, if you are angry, we ask your forgiveness. If we have done wrong, pardon us. Do not let him die. Other lineages are prospering and our people are dying. Why are you doing this? Why do you not look after us properly?” (1997: 413).

The above extract illustrates the type of things that family heads or elders say when they are communicating or pouring libations to the ancestors using the title cup, suggesting, as I have already indicated, that ancestors are believed to be present in the title cup or that the title cup is a representative of the ancestors. Thus, title cups in Bambui in particular and the Western Grassfields as a whole are known to have played and are playing a pivotal role in strengthening and/or weakening the relationship between ancestors and their living kinsmen.

Just as the title cup is used in communicating with ancestors prior to and after death celebrations, it is also used prior to and after weddings and twin celebrations, both in bringing the two families together and in linking them with the ancestors or in putting them apart if the ancestors fail to give their blessings. For instance, diviners are consulted and libations are poured to ancestors whenever a young

man's family come asking the parents of a young woman for their daughter's hand in marriage in Bambui. In most cases, family heads are contacted by the young woman's family immediately when a request is made for their daughter's hand in marriage. Secret family meetings are held and people are sent out to make inquiries in order to ensure that the young man and his family are not only the right choice for the living but also that they are accepted by the ancestors. As investigations are going on, libation is also performed by the family head, using his title cup to inform and seek the ancestor's opinion and advice on how to go about the marriage, first whether to accept the request or reject it completely. In such an instance, in 2008, I overheard a family head communicating with his ancestors, after a request was made for one of the family sibling's hand in marriage. His conversation took the format described by Kopytoff above and went as follows: “*Beta-ahbah ni bi miwaha-ah, beh fiti-eh a-a mbu-u beih-ngeh beh-bieuh teh bezeh a-a zueh moyini-weh le-eh a-a nko-obehe le-h*” (That the ancestors of the family, including men and women represented by the ancestral stone and title cup, should let them know if the young man and his family are the right people for their daughter). After the libation, the young woman's family continued monitoring events (especially those related to the marriage request rites, such as exchange of palm wine and gifts), both in their family and in that of the young man in order to see if anything bad was going to happen. As this was going on, responses from the two diviners consulted about the future of the marriage came back saying the young woman and man were meant for each other and that the future was going to be bright. However, this was in spite of the fact that the young woman was still reluctant to accept the proposal. Eventually she would accept later, because she did not want to offend the ancestors and be punished, or to disrespect the findings of the diviners. Diviners are also considered as people with direct links to the ancestors. However, when I met the young woman again in 2012 and asked, how she was getting on with her husband, she told me that the young man was not the right choice for her, but that she had accepted because of tradition and that she was trying her best to make things work. One can only hope that the ancestors will intervene and bless her marriage since they did not, and still, have not shown any signs of disapproval.

The emphasis on libation to the ancestors as well as consulting diviners prior to a marriage in Bambui is also based on the belief that without this, the couple might never be blessed with the fruits of the womb. The birth of a child, a year or two after mar-

riage, is a sign that the ancestors have approved and given their blessings to the couple. As one Bambui elite puts it: Our ancestors would have been disappointed if we did not allow our daughter to get married to this man. Look at what has happened: she has given birth to a baby boy barely ten months after her marriage (Pa Peter Ngu, pers. comm., April 2012). As usual, libations are performed before and after birth to update and thank the ancestors. The birth of twins to any family in the Bambui is highly regarded and respected by everyone, including members of the traditional elites and commoners. In Bambui, as in many other villages in the Grassfields, *bennui*, twins or children of God, are considered special and extraordinary children with supernatural powers, capable of controlling the destiny of the families to which they belong as well as that of the village. In neighbouring Kedjom Keku, all twins are associated with *nyingong* (spirit or God – Diduk 1993: 556). As a result, “their innate powers are likened to those of the *fon*, to whom the twins are not obliged to show the same level of humble respect as ordinary people” (Forni 2001: 196), but are still closely monitored because of the belief that they have the potential to harm themselves or their relatives if not well looked after. In Bambui in particular, it is believed, that if twins are not respected and treated well, they may bring misfortune to their siblings, parents, and relatives or may become ill and die. As a result, certain rules and regulations associated with twins are obligatory. Amongst some of the notable norms are:

- Respecting the traditional names of the twins, which must be given following the order in which they were born, that is “Bih” or “Che” for the first girl and the first boy and “Mbuh” or “Angong” for the second girl and the second boy.
- Performing rituals based on the order in which they were born (beginning each ritual with “Bih” or “Che” and ending with “Mbuh” or “Angong”).
- Using relevant objects for each of them and also placing them at the appropriate spot.
- Performing regular annual rituals as required by tradition.
- Ensuring that their presence is recognised and respected in all sociocultural festivities both within the family and across the village.
- Respecting *nkeng* or the “peace plant” as the generally accepted symbol for twins across the Bamenda Grassfields.
- Isolation of the twins and their mother from the public for the first six months or so (pers. comm. Mami Meyahnui Angella, December 2004).

When they attain a certain age, say between three and four years, the *abe-ehbennui*, or traditional celebration of twins, is organised in order to appease and contain their supernatural powers. The celebration which normally lasts a week or two, in Bambui, for example, is attended by the families of the twin parents, twin ritual specialists, all village *tanyis* and *manyis*, or father and mother of the twins, members of the traditional elites, and other well-wishers or close friends. As with all traditional celebrations, libations are performed by the family head using his title cup to thank the ancestors for blessing them with twins and also to invite them to join in the celebrations. Ancestors can participate in the celebrations through displaying some signs that are interpreted as indicating their presence at the occasion. For instance, Michael Jindra quoted a Kom man, telling him that a seer came up to him during one of the death celebrations and said his father-in-law was present at the occasion. “The seer even pointed to a bird singing on a branch and told the man that it was his father-in-law enjoying the event” (Jindra 2005: 362). Stories of this nature abound across the Western Grassfields and Jindra’s observation is just one of them. In Bambui, certain species of birds singing not only during celebrations but also during particular moments of the day (midday or midnight) in particular places (in the home of an individual or on his/her farm) are interpreted as ancestors passing a message to their living kinsmen. Accordingly, such signals are followed by libations on the ancestral stone using the title cup as well as visits to the diviner to find out the nature and purpose of the message – and what needs to be done to appease the ancestors.

Closely associated with the practice of interpreting animal signals as indicating the presence of ancestors is the ritual of the protection of space or sacred places across Bambui. Sacred places generally are considered to be homes or sanctuaries for spirits, gods, and ancestors. “What is known as a sacred site carries with it a whole range of rules and regulations regarding people’s behaviour in relation to it, and implies a set of beliefs to do with the non-empirical world, often in relation to the spirits of the ancestors, as well as more remote or powerful gods or spirits” (Carmichael et al. 1994: 3). For instance, the tombs of late *fons* or kings in Bambui are considered sacred places that deserve to be respected and propitiated. Other sites, including those found in springs, waterfalls, lakes, thick forests, and echoing rocks are scattered across the kingdom and are also given the attention they deserve. Notable sites in Bambui include Ntcha ntunui, Ntcha fegho-oh, and Mbo-o-mayah. Villagers go to these sites pe-

riodically to participate in rituals officiated by the king (who is considered the chief priest) or a notable designated by him. The rituals are always accompanied by the exchange or presentation of gifts (such as palm wine, food items, camwood, and even animals) to appease the ancestors and also to ask for blessings on the community. As Warnier (2007: 121) maintains in the case of Awing, a micro-kingdom, which is part of the same linguistic group as Bambui, annual sacrifices are made to the ancestors and deities of the village at Lake Awing to appease and ask for blessings. The sacrifice at Lake Awing involves the slaughtering of *ewe* or goat at the lakeside and throwing its meat into the lake for the various ancestors and deities believed to be residing beneath the water. The ritual is normally preceded by the recitation of some of the issues or problems that the kingdom or village would like the ancestors to address for them. Thus, before throwing the various portions of the *ewe* meat into Lake Awing, Ngoo Ngeu, the King of Awing, would invoke the dead elders:

Do protect the country. There is a disease (sore joints) that spreads and I am here to appeal to you. Besides, some of the inhabitants have destructive medicines with them. We pray to you to protect us all, the Awing people, from such wrongdoers ... we want boys and girls (Warnier 2007: 121).

It is believed that after such offerings all the problems that the kingdom and its people were facing would disappear or be addressed by the ancestors. This practice is not unique to Awing – it is common across the Western Grassfields – and each kingdom is known to perform theirs wherever their dead elders reside. But the most important thing here is that the king begins and concludes the ritual by pouring libation to the ancestors using his title cup. Thus, the title cup is omnipresent when it comes to issues associated with the pouring of libation to the ancestors, or gods, or spirits of the kingdom across the Western Grassfields.

### Concluding Remarks: The Significance of the Title Cup

The aim of this article was to examine the nature and purpose of the intermediary role played by the title cup in families across the Western Grassfields. I have shown throughout the discussion that the title cup is indispensable to most celebrations and sacrifices associated with ancestors and ancestral propitiation. The discussion has revealed that, just like Kopytoff's work on "Ancestors as Elders in Africa,"

the title cup is also associated with elders and, by extension, with ancestors in the Bambui Kingdom in particular and the Western Grassfields as a whole. Accordingly, my assertion that ancestors are present in the title cup is well justified.

Having established that the title cup is undeniably a representative of the ancestors in the face of their living kinsmen or an intermediary between the ancestors and the living, I have reiterated that its significances to families across Bambui in particular are manifold. Thus, as soon as the title cup is handed over to a titleholder, i.e., the *fon*, subchief, or family head, he is henceforth seen as the rightful successor to his forefathers (Knöpfli 1997: 17). As successor to his forefathers he is expected to use the cup in accordance with the "will" of his predecessor or late father and in line with the rules governing the title cup. Such roles allow the family head to use the title cup either for pouring libation to the ancestors in times of crisis in the family, such as illnesses, for example, or in times of extreme joy, such as the giving of a daughter's hand in marriage. He is also expected to use the title cup to curse a family member who is seen as disruptive to peace and unity in the family.<sup>6</sup> It is expected that the entire crisis will disappear after the relevant libations are made to the ancestors. In addition, joyful celebrations, such as the giving of a daughter's hand in marriage or the birth of twins, are preceded by the pouring of libation using the title cup in order to thank and seek the blessings of the ancestors on the couple. In effect, the title cup is an instrument of empowerment as well as of disempowerment for the family or families in possession of one.

In present-day Grassfields, the title cup is continuing to gain grounds, especially as ancestral propitiation continues to be popular among families, but with very little or no scholarship on the nature and purpose of the title cup as an intermediary between ancestors and their living kinsmen. Our knowledge of the cup is restricted, thereby making it difficult for scholars to open up and strengthen the possibilities for a more critical debate on an aspect of culture that is so vital to the people. Thus, by highlighting the nature and purpose of the intermediary role played by the title cup in rituals associated with ancestors and ancestral propitiation in the Western

6 To curse someone using the title cup, the title holder puts some raffia wine or palm wine into his cup, calls the person's name, recites his crime, and then pours the palm wine on the ancestral stone inviting the ancestors to curse him or her until such a time that the person may decide to apologize. To cleanse the curse, the titleholder performs a similar rite, but this time getting the person to drink from his cup rather than pouring the raffia wine on the ancestral stone.

Grassfields, I have provided the backdrop against which a link is created between ancestors and their living kinsmen, pointing to some of the reasons for the survival and sustainability of ancestors and ancestral propitiation in the region. What needs to be done now, is to assess the nature and purpose of the title cup beyond the realm of ancestors and ancestral propitiation.

## References Cited

### Bonu, Barnabas Chungong

2012 *A Short History and Traditions of Bambui. 1700–2012.* Bristol: Reignton.

### Carmichael, David L., Jane Hubert, and Brian Reeves

1994 Introduction. In: D. L. Carmichael, J. Hubert, B. Reeves and A. Schanche (eds.), *Sacred Sites, Sacred Places*; pp. 1–8. London: Routledge. (One World Archaeology, 23)

### Diduk, Susan E.

1987 *The Paradox of Secrets. Power and Ideology in Kedjom Society.* Bloomington. [PhD Dissertation, Dept. of Anthropology, Indiana University]

1993 Twins, Ancestors, and Socio-Economic Change in Kedjom Society. *Man* 28: 551–571.

### Fardon, Richard

1990 *Between God, the Dead, and the Wild. Chamba Interpretations of Religion and Ritual.* Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

### Forni, Silvia

2001 *Moulding Culture. Pottery and Traditions in the Ndop Plain. North West Province, Cameroon.* Torino. [Unpubl. PhD Thesis, Università degli Studi di Torino.

### Fubah, Mathias A.

2012 Title Cups and People. Relationships and Change in Grassfields Art. *Anthropos* 107: 183–195.

### Geary, Christraud

1986 Burying “Mothers of Crops.” Funerals of Prominent Women in Weh (Cameroon Grassfields). (Paper presented at the 29th Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Madison, Wisconsin, October 30 to November 2, 1986.)

1987 Basketry in the Aghem-Fungom Area of the Cameroon Grassfields. *African Arts* 20/3: 42–53, 89–90.

### Jindra, Michael

2005 Christianity and the Proliferation of Ancestors. Changes in Hierarchy and Mortuary Ritual in the Cameroon Grassfields. *Africa – Journal of the International African Institute* 75: 356–377.

### Knöpfli, Hans

1997 *Crafts and Technologies. Some Traditional Craftsmen of the Western Grasslands of Cameroon.* London: The British Museum. (British Museum Occasional Paper, 107)

### Koloss, Hans, Joachim

2000 *World-View and Society in Oku (Cameroon).* Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag. (Baesler-Archiv, Beiträge zur Ethnologie, Neue Folge, Beiheft, 10)

### Kopytoff, Igor

1981 Aghem Ethnogenesis and the Grassfields Ecumene. In: C. Tardits (dir.), *Contribution de la recherche ethnologique à l’histoire des civilisations du Cameroun – The Contribution of Ethnological Research to the History of Cameroon Cultures.* Vol. 2; pp. 371–381. Paris: CNRS.

1997 Ancestors as Elders in Africa. In: R. R. Grinker and C. B. Steiner (eds.), *Perspectives on Africa. A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation*; pp. 412–421. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

### Nkwi, Paul Nchoji, and Jean-Pierre Warnier

1982 *Elements for a History of the Western Grassfields.* Yaounde: Dept. of Sociology, University of Yaounde.

### Rowlands, Michael

1993 Accumulation and the Cultural Politics of Identity in the Cameroon Grassfields. In: P. Geschiere and P. Konings (eds.), *Itinéraires d’accumulation au Cameroun*; pp. 71–97. Paris: Karthala.

### Warnier, Jean-Pierre

2007 *The Pot-King. The Body and Technologies of Power.* Leiden: Brill. (African Social Studies Series, 17)

## The Phenomenon of Festivals

### Their Origins, Evolution, and Classifications

Waldemar Cudny

## 1 Introduction

Festivals have been present in people’s life for ages; they are a reflection of broadly understood human culture (Falassi 1987). Some of the existing festivals appeared hundreds of years ago (Sofield et al. 1998; Roemer 2007). They consolidate social groups from the smallest, like the family, through larger ones, such as tribes, towns, or housing estate communities, to the largest groups inhabiting individual regions or countries (Duvignaud 1976). Festivals have developed in the context of social and economic changes occurring in the world over the last few centuries (Frey 1994). They flourished after the Second World War, when a great number of new festival events appeared (Segal and Giorgi 2009). Derrett (2000), Arcodia and Whitford (2006) claim that festivals are currently among the most dynamic elements related to leisure and tourism. The factors of such rapid festival development partly coincide