

community of regional or theoretical scholarship, but the entire volume may be useful in advanced undergraduate or graduate level teaching, with discussion of the different approaches evidenced in each article providing a useful entry point to this field for students.

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**Koloss, Hans-Joachim:** *Cameroon Thoughts and Memories. Ethnological Research in Oku and Kembong 1975–2005.* Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2012. 175 pp., photos. ISBN 978-3-496-02857-4. Price: € 69.00  
 “Cameroon Thoughts and Memories” is the third monograph in Hans-Joachim Koloss’ ethnographic trilogy of two distinct cultures in Cameroon. Uniting memory with experience, Koloss’ longitudinal research in Oku and Kembong encompasses over thirty years, providing the reader with precious insight into the shifting dynamics of these cultures during a time of dramatic change taking place in postcolonial Africa. All told, Koloss completed fifteen trips to the Grassfields / Cross River region between 1975 and 2005, resulting in the publication of two seminal works on Cameroonian traditional institutions: “Worldview and Society in Oku” (2000), and “Traditional Institutions in Kembong” (2008). If we owe it to Phyllis Kayberry and Elizabeth Chilver (1945 and 1958 respectively) for having laid the foundation for studies of Grassfields political and social institutions, then we are equally indebted to Hans-Joachim Koloss for his detailed descriptions and insightful incursions into Grassfields religious traditions, particularly its masquerades and medicine societies. Whereas his first two books were focused primarily on presenting the ethnographic content concerning masquerade institutions in Cameroon, this most recent installment provides an opportunity to not only reflect on the data but on the nature of fieldwork itself, which Koloss suggests is a dying methodology.

The advantages of long-term fieldwork in a particular site are self-evident: an ethnographer returning to the same location for research over a long period of time may become privy to observations not possible on previous visits, on topics not previously imagined. Indeed, Koloss’ motivations in producing a memoir covering three decades of fieldwork in Cameroon is based on his acknowledgement that all too often ethnographic works omit detailed descriptions of the ways and means by which the ethnographer procures his or her data. Koloss sets out to correct this deficiency on his own with the completion of “Cameroon Thoughts and Memories,” a richly photographed-filled memoir which seeks to convey the detailed personal experiences and circumstances that were excluded from his earlier works. This work thus sits firmly in the tradition of ethnographic memoirs that aim to convey the personal side of fieldwork as well as the trials, challenges, and rewards that are the result of decades of interaction and collaboration between ethnographer and subject.

Oku, like many Grassfields kingdoms, is a culture whose very identity lies in its medicines, established by the ancestors and vigorously maintained by a strict adherence to traditional laws. Within this system are numerous

masquerades, or *juju*, that dominate the traditional religious landscape in Oku and are often charged with protecting and/or “animating” the medicine. As storehouses for such knowledge each secret society has its own medicine that has been handed down from its founder, typically an ancestor who created the medicine for the protection and well-being of mankind. Over time the number and influence of secret societies in Oku has increased to the point of it becoming a multifaceted system that “dominates the principal spheres of political, social and religious life” (Koloss 2000: 101). In “Cameroon Thoughts and Memories,” Koloss cites an invitation in 1975 to join *kwifon*, known throughout the Grassfields as one of the most powerful secret societies, as crucial to his research. *Kwifon*, considered the real power behind the throne, represented the traditional government of the land in former times and continues to wield considerable influence today. But joining a secret society is no easy thing; there is often a strict protocol involving initiatory rites and obligations. As my own efforts to join these societies illustrate (Bartelt, *Healers and Witches in Oku*, 2006), following the tradition is paramount: there is a strict protocol to joining a secret society, and one cannot enter a society on the basis of a recommendation alone. Of course, ethnographers working with indigenous cultures the world over have often circumvented these traditions on the basis of perceived status or authority. In the case of Koloss, we learn that he was accepted into *kwifon* without having participated in the requisite initiation rites. Some of my informants in Oku who recall Koloss’ research in the 1970s were not necessarily pleased with how freely Koloss was given access to the secret objects of the *kwifon*. Koloss acknowledges that he photographed the interior of mask houses that were prohibited to outsiders, even though he himself had not been initiated into the house and, therefore, was breaking the traditional covenant. Entering a *juju* masquerade house without having been initiated would be an egregious mistake for anyone, apparently, unless one is an anthropologist!

Koloss claims to be the first – and last – European to be granted access to *kwifon*. He admits to being free to take part in any and all secretive rituals and being able to photograph anything. This admission may come as a surprise to contemporary ethnographers such as myself who work in similar settings that deal with secrecy, medicine, and tradition. It also harkens to the emic/etic debate: can one truly understand the significance of what one is documenting if he or she is not beholden to the same rules that govern everyone else’s behavior? Koloss never had to subject himself to an initiation ritual, a vitally important element of Oku religiosity. He even admits to not believing in the efficacy of the occult in Cameroon, nor did he ever personally experience anything remotely “supernatural.” For someone to call himself an “Oku man,” (61) this is strange behavior indeed. Despite the emphasis placed on tradition and secrecy throughout Oku, Koloss repeatedly refers to encountering (and photographing) the most secretive and dangerous magic medicines of various societies. For an Oku man this would be unthinkable: tradition represents a sacred pact with the ancestors that is never to

be broken, and maintaining secrecy is often cited as key to a medicine's efficacy (see Bartelt 2006).

The thorny issue of access and secrecy raises its head again in 1977, when Koloss brings a cameraman and sound engineer to film, in his words, some of the "best kept secrets in the Grasslands" (74). A total of 20 films, some of them detailing highly secretive rituals that outsiders are forbidden to see, were published in Germany. Although Koloss claims these films are available only to certain scholars (by "certain scholars" does he imply only those who have properly initiated themselves into *kwi-fon?*), I am left wondering how many outsiders have indeed cast eyes on that what is forbidden.

Methodological concerns aside, Koloss' fieldwork in Oku (1975–1981) yielded a wealth of data and insights into traditional Grassfield culture. In "Cameroon Thoughts and Memories" we are reminded that one of Koloss' key contributions in this area was his recognition that *keyoi*, or vital life force, is what underlies Oku relations and indeed informs the worldview of many sub-Saharan African peoples. Together with *nganga*, the term for medicine that appears to have spread from the Grasslands of Cameroon to the Congo and East and South Africa, it can be argued that these two concepts – life force and medicine – continue to define Grassland cultures, and Oku in particular.

Another breakthrough from Koloss concerns the functionality of the actual masks themselves: he challenges the European view of masks as emblematic and instead argues that they are beings *sui generis* – entities all their own. This is evident in the precautions that must be taken when a particular mask is to be removed from its masquerade house or taken out of the country. Koloss acknowledges that on occasion the medicine associated with a particular mask must first be removed or pacified before he was allowed to take them back to Europe, to "kill the power" as they say – a tradition which continues today. Nevertheless it is interesting to read about Koloss' museum acquisitions and not reflect on the debate today concerning artifacts and repatriation. Even Koloss acknowledges that, at least initially, that was of no concern to him. As this subject was not broached in this memoir, one is left to wonder how he feels about it now.

Following his six years of intermittent fieldwork in Oku, Koloss returned to Germany in 1981 where his work on museum exhibitions and his new post as curator for the African Department at the Berlin Museum for Ethnology afforded him little opportunity for any detailed analysis of his material from Cameroon. It was not until 1992, almost 11 years after he left Cameroon, that Koloss was able to return to his material. As many an ethnographer can relate, Koloss was faced with the gargantuan task of turning his years-long research into a finished product. It was here that he settled on an approach that focused on Oku philosophy and worldview as a means to make sense of Oku culture and its myriad masquerades, rituals, and magic medicines. Underlying this worldview, Koloss argues, is the ideal of a society united in harmony, a "social theorem" by which both the egalitarian society of Kembong and the Kingdom of Oku contribute to their respective strength and prosperity.

Koloss' impressions upon his return to Oku after 15 years away from the field are also of great value. Through his eyes the reader is invited to witness the dramatic changes taking place in Cameroon and throughout most of postcolonial Africa. It was 1996, and rising inequalities, unemployment, and an increase in crime were becoming the norm in the more urban areas, whereas modernity and its malcontents were just beginning to make inroads into the outlying villages. But Oku, as Koloss was relieved to find out, remained practically unchanged since the 1970s, with one exception: the previous king, Fon Sentieh, who had ruled since 1956, had died and a new king, Fon Ngum III, was enthroned. A Western educated academic, Fon Ngum understandably desired to bring Oku into the modern world, but in Oku this also brought the distrust of some of his subjects. Among Fon Ngum's controversial initiatives was to bestow the title of *fai* on Koloss, a title that until then had never been bestowed upon an outsider, much less a European. In Oku, the honor of *fai* was traditionally bestowed only upon select influential and esteemed heads of Oku families – something Koloss clearly was not. Koloss admits to being taken completely unaware by the honor, and to his credit he acknowledges that it is not something that an ethnographer necessarily aspires to, for it spells the end of one's time as an "ordinary man" in the Grassfields and would thus make ethnographic inquiry among "ordinary" folk much more difficult.

The return trips to Oku 1996 and 1997 allowed Koloss the opportunity to investigate a few open questions, including the "true" history of the Oku people. In Koloss' earlier attempts at researching Oku history, Oku people, insofar as they were interested, simply reiterated the mythic version of their history that was promoted by the palace. The sudden upheavals brought about by the new king and the new economic realities led some to reassert old palace ties and land rights, allowing Koloss the opportunity to record a more accurate and complete understanding of Oku history for arguably the first time. While change was occurring, by no means did this imply that tradition was giving way to modern ways. As we have seen elsewhere in Africa with regards to the modernity of the occult (Comaroff 1993; Geschiere 1997; Bartelt 2006), Oku turned to tradition to deal with these changes a trend that continues to this very day.

Koloss returns to Oku one more time before publishing his seminal work "Worldview and Society in Oku." In 1998 he met with Fon Ngum III in order to ensure that he has not revealed too many secrets nor included photographs of objects and rituals that by traditional decree are not to be seen by certain groups (typically outsiders and women). In the end, Fon Ngum not only gave Koloss assurances that the book was okay, but also insisted that some controversial elements be retained in the book, even though they "basically touched upon secrets" (128). Apparently, in order to circumvent this dilemma, they agreed not to let the book become known in Oku for the time being.

Koloss' memoir concludes with a reflection on his time in Kembong, an egalitarian society approximately 300 km southwest of Oku, where he had conducted an ini-

tial survey trip in 1980 followed by more extensive fieldwork in 2004 and 2005. In Kembong, Koloss continued his research into the masquerade and medicine societies, but this time focused on the egalitarian political system – providing an interesting contrast to the divine rights and privileges of Grassfields kingdoms such as Oku. Here Koloss takes the opportunity to expound on the relationship between fieldwork and theory, arguing that there can be no gathering of data without theoretical reflection.

Finally, as should be expected of someone who has published now three significant works on the Grassfields spanning over 30 years, Koloss considers how his previous works on Oku and Kembong were received and he takes the opportunity to address his critics, in particular those who pointed out a lack of theory in his work. A staunch defender of fieldwork, Koloss stresses its significance as the only true form of ethnographic research. Koloss also takes aim at more recent research on the Grassfields, in particular that of Nicolas Argenti who did fieldwork in Oku from 1992–1994. As with earlier reviews of his own work, Koloss' critique of Argenti also has to do with the relationship between fieldwork and theory. Koloss accuses Argenti of formulating theory based on personal conviction rather than rigorous fieldwork, in particular Argenti's insistence that the collective memory of the slave trade is embodied in the masquerades. However, there is an irony in Koloss' criticism of Argenti, as one is left to wonder how might Koloss' insights have been affected by his personal convictions, particularly his penchant for not subjecting himself to the very traditions he is researching?

Of course, had Koloss not published his memoir, we might not be critiquing his methodology. Koloss thus deserves credit for his candid approach to "Cameroon Thoughts and Memories," as it provides the interested scholar a wonderful bookend to Koloss' three decades of fieldwork while laying bare the pitfalls and blessings that accompany the ethnographer's foray into the field. Indeed, throughout the book we are treated to personal stories that for this reviewer represent the heart and soul of Koloss' memoir. Koloss provides a glimpse into the day-to-day life of the ethnographer that too often does not merit inclusion into an ethnographic monograph. In this way Koloss succeeds where many an ethnographer has failed, namely in directing much deserved attention to the people who made his research possible. It is also a story tinged with tragedy – an unfortunate aspect of long-term fieldwork – that is rarely discussed but too often experienced. Over time, informants become friends, friends become family, and their deaths can weigh heavily on the ethnographer. In this context, Koloss and his "extended family" deserve mention, and in a way they too achieve personal immortality through this book thanks to Koloss' efforts to recognize their contributions.

As I read "Cameroon Thoughts and Memories," I was immediately reminded of the debt of gratitude I owe Hans-Joachim Koloss, as no doubt will others who do fieldwork in the Grassfields. For despite the methodological concerns, Koloss did succeed in gaining the trust of the Oku and Kembong people, and like Chilver and Kay-

berry before him, provided a solid foundation from which other ethnographers – myself included – can benefit. It is no coincidence that when I first stepped foot in the Oku Palace in 2003, Fon Ngum III loaned me his only copy of "Worldview and Society in Oku," with the instructions to "read this before continuing your fieldwork." It is perhaps the best reward an ethnographer can hope to attain when doing long-term fieldwork: the knowledge that one's life of labor remains relevant not only in ethnographic circles, but more importantly, amongst the populace that initially embraced him. With detailed descriptions accompanied by vivid photographs from his initial visit to Cameroon, "Cameroon Thoughts and Memories" reminds us of the debt that we owe the people on whose good will we were dependent on while doing fieldwork; or, as they say in Cameroon, "one hand can never tie a bundle."

Brian Bartelt

**Kozinski, Thaddeus J.:** *The Political Problem of Religious Pluralism. And Why Philosophers Can't Solve It.* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010. 263 pp. ISBN 978-0-7391-4168-7. Price: £ 44.95

Thaddeus J. Kozinski (Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Humanities at Wyoming Catholic College) examines in "The Political Problem of Religious Pluralism. And Why Philosophers Can't Solve It" the political (philosophical?) problem of religious (ideological) pluralism in the political thought of three 20th-century writers: John Rawls, Jacques Maritain, and Alasdair MacIntyre. They have the same concern: how to create in the democratic, Western societies (nations) conditions for the "*communal discovery of the true traditions*" (239). They present theories of the modern pluralistic state and the way how to resolve the conflicting conceptions of the good with the notion of the rationality of persons. Kozinski declares modestly that his aim is "only to describe and analyze their failed attempts in the hope that an accurate account of their failures might inspire someone to undertake this most difficult and vitally important task with the sufficient intellectual equipment" (xiv). He confesses that the ideas and arguments contained in his book (it began as a dissertation) have their inspiration in Plato, Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, and the doctrinal teachings and the political theology of the Catholic Church. At the heart of this book is also Charles Taylor's work, "A Secular Age," which helped the author "to see modernity in a more positive light" (xv).

The book begins with a foreword by James V. Schall (ix–xi) who observes that the principal concern of Kozinski is the foundation of politics in reason and "its relation to political order that would not only 'tolerate' the presences of diverse traditions, religions, philosophies, and cultures, but that would recognize that their relative status of truth is itself a vital element of any common good" (xi). There follows an "Introduction" (xxi–xxv) by the author and three main parts: 1. "John Rawls's Overlapping Consensus" (1–45), 2. "Jacques Maritain's Democratic Charter" (47–125), and 3. "Alasdair MacIntyre's Confessional Consensus" (127–246).