
Birth and Death Rites among the Ba-Vengo of Cameroon: Norms and Variations

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Abstract

Rites and rituals are phenomena that cover a wide range of African spirituality and are religious expressions that have been in existence from time immemorial in Africa. Their efficacies are thus never in doubt as their cosmic significance is recognized. However, from the colonial era in Africa, religious understanding had been influenced by Western thought, and therefore any cultural phenomenon that could not be subjected to its rationality was simply regarded as superstition. That notwithstanding, even with such notions, rites and rituals have continuously remained part and parcel of many indigenous cultures and traditions. Among which, have been those pertaining to birth and death cultures. The perception of birth and death particularly in many African societies constituted an integral part of their cultures and traditions. It was received with several rites that either required cleansing or preparation for the afterlife and journey to the world of the ancestors. Have these ritual performances been carried out in the same proportion as they were before colonial influence or of have they experienced some degree of deviation? When we take into account that culture is dynamic rather than static, rites associated with birth and death culture in Ba-Vengo witnessed deviations with time and circumstance and for a greater part were continuously pollinated by varied influences modifying and at times transforming long established norms. In this study therefore, we evaluate the evolution of cultural and religious rites associated with welcoming newborns and honoring the dead in Ba-Vengo.

Key Words: birth, death, rites, culture, western influence, variations

Introduction

Within traditional African cultures, the notion of birth and particularly death, have always been accompanied by beliefs, cultural and religious rites varying from in nature and practice from one community to another. A rite is a fundamental act (or set of rituals) performed according to prescribed social rules and customs. Each of these rites are a key component that are a part of traditional African cultures. Every culture is premised on a certain worldview . Mkhize, defines a worldview as a set of basic assumptions that a group of people develops in order to explain reality and their places and purpose in the world.¹ These assumptions provide a frame of reference to address problems in life. Traditional Africans understand their being in the world as a qualitative tapestry of connected systems which deal with life issues collectively and collaboratively. This connectedness is reflected and manifests itself in people's relationships with others and their enviroing context. From this, they develop unique cultural features including rites and rituals that accompany such things as births and deaths. Rituals are therefore representation of cultural performances and rites of passage which mark a people's life experience. Properly construed, rituals are an expression of peoples thoughts, emotions, social organization and cultural identities. They are therefore regarded as viable scientific methods of connections and dialogue. Baloyi posits that rituals are forms of expressions and connections performed by individuals, group of people or communities in communication with the living dead and the supreme being.²

Overview of some Birth and Death rites in Africa

Birth, has been considered by cultures all over the world to be a sacred rite of passage in which the power of the transformation shapes both the child, mother, family, and community. For this reason, people all over the world have created ways of honoring and celebrating pregnancy, birth, and the newborn through physical, social, and spiritual rituals and ceremonies for healing. Some societies have more elaborate and extensive ceremonies and rites than others. For

example, among the Abamba (Kenya) and Gikugu (Kenya) all farm implements are removed from the house of an expectant mother before she gives birth. The community believes that metal objects attract lightening or other misfortunes. Similarly, among the Mao of Kenya, a pregnant woman does not speak directly with her husband.³ The couple communicates through an intermediary.⁴ This is because the pregnancy, it is believed, makes her ritually unclean and he must therefore be protected from that. This custom is also a means of protecting the expectant mother from any physical, psychological and ritual harm, she might otherwise suffer by being in direct contact with her husband. In some parts of South Africa, birth may take place on a grinding stone since it is noted to be a woman's work tool.⁵ In Udhuk (Ethiopia) when a woman is about to deliver, she walks alone into the bush and gives birth there and only returns home with the child after delivery.⁶ When a Gikuyu (Kenya) woman has given birth, she screams five times if the child is a boy and four times if it is a girl.⁷

The rituals and rites surrounding death in many African communities are complex and varies from place to place. In traditional Africa the thought of death, the grieving process was characterized by rites and rituals such as the bereaved family members shaving their hair and the slaughtering of a domestic animal. Different rituals are performed depending on who is the deceased and how they have died. In South Africa, some of the Bapedi tribe that originated from Limpopo province believe that when a married man dies, his widow is forbidden from arriving home after sunset, visiting neighbors, attending family and community functions and wears black clothes. The black clothes symbolize the dark cloud, death which is associated with loss and pain (*bohloko*) in Sepedi. In case of the wife dying, the widower is also forbidden from having an intimate affair before a stipulated period, usually six months to one year depending on the cultural group concerned. He is also barred from arriving home after sunset. There are different practices which vary from different ethnic groups and they all have symbolic significance. The performance of these rituals is seen as

important in maintaining balance and harmony between the living and the living dead. This is the bases on which the connection between the physical and the spiritual ontologies is maintained and enhanced. All these rites and rituals were said to ensure a peaceful welcome of newborns as well as the solemn transit of the dead into the world and journey to the world beyond respectively. However, the complete upholding of such rites has not been the case with many African communities nowadays.

Background

In understanding the cultures and traditions of a people, a look into their foundation histories and location in a particular region becomes important as such knowledge aids in understanding how and why they turned out the way they turned out particularly with the kind of life style, cultural practices and traditions they adopted. It could have come about as a result of basic elements of the cultures of other people which they picked up in their migration or the rules and rites their founding ancestors bestowed on them in directing and guiding their settlement paths. Ba-Vengo is one of the Tikar kingdoms that migrated from Ndobu in the present day Adamawa Region and settled in the North West Region of Cameroon. As earlier noted, the *fondom* is rich in fertile soil, water, hills, ideal grazing lands, and swampy areas that enable for rice cultivation. The original name of the people is *Vengo*, which literally means “of the same family”. They were called *Bavengo* (*Ba-* people; *Vengo-* of the same family) until the Germans particularly with the visit of Dr. Zintgraff in 1889, came and transformed this name to ‘Ba-Vengo’.⁸ And, instead of “Babungo” as called and spelled by the colonialists, “Ba-Vengo” has been greatly used in this study to give this piece its originality. The history of the origin, migration and settlement of Ba-Vengo is as controversial and mythical as those of other villages in the Bamenda Grassfields. The foundation legends of Ba-Vengo remain mythical and it is commonly held that, the first *fon* and his attendants emerged from a cave behind a water fall called *forghai*.⁹ Another tradition holds that it was because of wars

that the Ba-Vengo left their home territory in Ndobu in the Tikar country in the Mbam valley to settle in their present location. The group of emigrants included *Tiefu-Tifuan* considered to be the chief, *Nswi*, The *Ndiwah*, *Songho* and a mother called *Mangewith* her children, (*Fuanje*, *Bah*, *Saingi* and *Nfanyui*.) Their names have been remembered and they are still being used today in the hierarchic organization of the authorities in the chiefdom.

The Ba-Vengo in the Bamenda Grasslands of Cameroon like most African societies, themselves paid special attributes to parturition and mortuary rites. These were for the most part informed by cultural and traditional importance. However, due to loose opening, and exposure to alien cultural practices, the Ba-Vengo have had most of the intractable aspects associated with baby reception and funeral customs adulterated.

3. Birth Rites in Ba-Vengo

Immediate rites/Practices

Because it was shameful for a young girl to bear a child out of wedlock, childbearing among the Ba-Vengo was authorized only for recognized couples and meant for pro-creation. It was expected that immediately after marriage, the couple ought to waste no time in starting a family of their own. Infertility was very uncommon among men and women in traditional Ba-Vengo.¹⁰ For it was held that the gods of the land had bestowed on the founding fathers, fruitfulness in all ramifications. The few women who had fertility problems were treated off their abnormality using traditional medicines and rites. In traditional Ba-Vengo, parents with the knowledge that their daughters had 'become women' wasted no time further in marrying them off to prevent the girls from getting pregnant while at home. As earlier noted that getting pregnant was the first assignment of a newly wedded wife, many of these women who got married immediately after their first menstrual flow testified of having to witness the second monthly flow again, only after having birthed.¹¹

In Ba-Vengo, pregnancy was the first indication that a child was on the way. Therefore the rituals of birth begun with the pregnancy of the mother. The birth of a child was often greeted with joy in Ba-Vengo and throughout many other African communities. Even the desire to have many children especially sons was regarded as a sign of pride, wealth and prestige. So when a woman was pregnant, she rejoiced with her husband and the immediate family. Necessary precautions were then taken to ensure normal gestation and delivery. These precautions included both medical and spiritual attention. Sacrifices of thanks were made to the family gods or ancestors. Incantations were made for the health of the baby and the mother.¹²

From then on, the pregnant woman must observe certain taboos and regulations. Some of included wearing protective amulets which had the virtue of preventing evil spirits such as witches and also helping in delivery. She avoided doubtful foodstuffs which would interfere with the health and safety of the mother and child or cause misfortune for either of them after birth. For example she was not permitted to eat sugar cane because it was believed that if she did, she was going to accumulate a lot of water in her system which would eventually complicate and slow down her delivery process. Similarly, she was not permitted to drink water while standing because the people held that by doing so, the water would move directly on the baby and cause him breathing problems after birth. She was therefore supposed to drink while sitting at any point in time. There was equally a general taboo on intercourse between wife and husband for a considerable period, if not during the whole pregnancy period. The common belief was that intercourse would harm the child and cause the mother's milk to dry up. This explains why many men sought alternative means of sexual satisfaction when their wives were pregnant. Consequently explaining the polygamous nature of many Ba-Vengo families among other factors. Another taboo instituted on a pregnant woman in Ba-Vengo was the fact of keeping late nights. She was not supposed to be outside her home after dawn because evil spirits which often hid behind the cover of

darkness to perform witchcraft, could see through her womb and “eat-up” her unborn baby. She was therefore called upon to be home before the fall of darkness.

After the period of nine months when the pregnancy was due for delivery, mid-wives around the village were called upon to safely deliver the baby at home. The birth of a child in traditional Ba-Vengo was accompanied by various rites, which involved presenting the baby to the ancestors and cleansing of the mother from the “pollution” of childbirth. In an interview with Yayuh Christina, she stated;

The father of the new born mixed mud fish commonly called in the Vengo language as (*soseh-nhow*) in red oil and a jug of palm wine. He goes to the various alters where the gods of his compound dwells be it on a tree or stone, putting on a leaf the fish and pouring the palm wine while saying some incantations. He informs the gods of an addition into the family and seeks their blessings and guidance in ensuring the proper growth and upbringing of the child. The mother of the baby is far off from this ritual and is well taken care of by her mother and mother-in-law as tradition stipulated that they come to “wash” the baby. Unlike the Bororos, child naming ceremony in the Ba-Vengo was not much of an ideal culture worth celebrating but children were accorded names of revered ancestors who they always believed to have reincarnated at the birth of the child.¹³

Twin Rites

The cultures and traditional rites that usually accompanied the birth of twin children greatly varied from that of “ordinary” children. Unlike with single child births, at the birth of twin children, the father of the children immediately went to the palace and informed the *fon* of this great blessings because unlike in other communities the birth of twin children was not an abomination but a thing of joy. After visiting the palace, the father came back home and the rites continued. First he harvested so many bunches of plantains and banana with several pots of oil. Anyone who visited the compound was allowed to serve himself that is to say; nothing could be personally served to someone, for the culture forbade it. Instead people were to take for themselves as many plantains and bananas with any quantity of oil they could carry. However, note should be taken that if a person

was to take two plantains, he was expected to take the exact quantity of banana.

Several fire places were lit in the compound so people could roast the plantains. Anyone who desired to take his to his house, was expected to peel it off before taking it along (no one was to go home with a plantain or banana that was unpeeled.) This was not a compulsory rite because it required a lot of expenditure buying bunches of plantain and banana and the several jugs of oil. As such the twin children even after they had grown up and were capable, could perform this rite by themselves.¹⁴

If the children were same sex (girl-girl) the senior twin was called *Yatah* and the junior one was called *Yabuah* and for a boy-boy twin, the senior was called *Titatah* and the junior twin was called *Titabuah*. They were called in the same way if they turned out to be of mixed sexes (boy-girl = *Titatah- Yabuah*, or girl-boy = *Yatah-Titabuah*.) Note should be taken that the senior female twin was given out to marriage by only the *fon* and it was he who collected her bride price while her biological father had right only over the junior twin. As we have gotten to see, after marriage, came birth, growth and eventually death. Thus, we are now going to get into the death and burial rites of Ba-Vengo, that is, how these people perceived death to be and how they treated their dead to ensure solemn transition into the world beyond.

Death and Burial Rites n Ba-Vengo

Deaths of Commoners

In recognizing and addressing cultural issues precisely that on the end-of-life, it becomes imperative particularly when one understands the fact that culture as we know it, is the worldview of values, norms, and behavior patterns shared by a group of people in a community setting which profoundly impacts behavior and the family; and shapes how persons make meaning out of illnesses, suffering, and dying. Socio-cultural concepts, beliefs, and practices concerning death are of great relevance to many African societies in general. Dancy and Davis assert that “death is a universal natural, persistent, inescapable, unavoidable, and undeniable fact of life.”¹⁵ When death occurs, there is usually a void and an impact on

the family and friends or even an entire community as is often the case may be with the death of a notable or 'disappearance'¹⁶ of a *fon*, depending on whether it was expected or unexpected. Once the thought of death becomes inevitable, the dying person goes through periods of fear, anger, and grief. In Ba-Vengo like in many other villages in the grassfields, death was often announced through public wailing particularly by women and children whether it was expected or not. The process of unexpected (sudden) death and expected death (dying) are quite different given that the loved ones are left behind to go through the grieving process albeit differently.

Deaths in Ba-Vengo were, besides crying and lamentations, announced by gun firing and later on a member of the family or the quarter head (*tii-ntih*) went to the palace to inform the *fon* so as to have the deceased's name taken into the records of the dead. The wailing was done in such a dramatic and disorganized manner, then much later on when close neighbors and passers-by began to move into the compound to verify things for themselves, the wailing style changed and became a more organized occasion with special songs and dances and immediate preparation for burial rites given that the deceased was not taken to the mortuary primarily because of the absence of one in the village.¹⁷

Deaths of Notables

In Ba-Vengo like in villages elsewhere, rituals and rites surrounding death were of absolute importance particularly of a great notable. It was believed that the absence of some particular rituals and practices will lead to a failed transition of the deceased from life to the afterlife, in which he/she became an ancestor and an intermediary between his children/family and god. Thus, by understanding the importance attached to burial rites and rituals that called for respect and preservation of culture, it was deemed a necessity to ensure fulfillment to the very least of rites. In this case we chose to take a look at the burial rites that usually accompanied the death of a quarter-head in Ba-Vengo otherwise called a *ntih-nteh*.

With the dead of a *ntih-nteh* or *tih-feh* in traditional Ba-Vengo, he was buried in a place called *Tah-yifung*. These people had a unique style of burial, done while the deceased was placed in a sitting position believed to still be commanding authority even in death. When a *ntih-nteh* died, a fellow *Tita* had some rites to perform on him before his burial proper. And in the absence of such a *Tita* to do the necessary rites on the corpse, the *ntiih-nteh* is supposed to have taught his wife/wives what to do to his corpse in the event of death, given there were no mortuaries in traditional Ba-Vengo to preserve their corpses for the rites to be performed whenever the *Tita* showed up. Even if there were mortuaries, notables in Ba-Vengo were forbidden from being put in mortuaries.¹⁸ As such the wife/wives had to perform these rites quickly enough. An item (though the name was withheld from the researcher because of her gender), was immediately sent from the palace to be administered on the deceased notable and later on when all else had been done, the deceased notables's traditional cup, his pipe also called *yikeng* and his sacred bag were asked to be brought forth.

Picture 1: Sacred bag with the Porcupine quills and some red feathers



Source: Tita Tieh-feh Lo'ong, collected: March 12 2022

Picture 2: Traditional cloth (nkeuh) for the Burial of Notables.



Source: Tita Tiehfeh Lo'ong collection: March 12 2022.

With the deceased now wrapped in the *nkeuh*, a special cap called *Ndongbai* (an entirely red and colorful feathered cap) which was an honor to beget one from the *Ngumba* on instructions of the *fon*, was placed on the head of the notable depending on the kind of cordial relationship that existed between him and the *fon*. Afterwards his fellow notables each with a porcupine quill, a red feather and another pair sent from the palace, came and placed it on the deceased's *Ndongbai*, with some reverencing and humility bidding him a final farewell to the ancestral realm. When these notables had performed their own part, the deceased notable's children and wife/wives were then called upon to come and bid a final goodbye to their father/husband. Each was required to dip his/her hand in a bowl of camwood and apply it on the deceased body while telling him to go well and rest in peace. With all these items on, the dead notable tended to be very frightening to look at and preparations to have him laid to eternal rest continued as Tieh-feh Lo'ong explained:

When all these rites were done, the grave was dug in a special and technical manner different from that of an ordinary villager, so as to receive the dead notable in the sitting position in which he was buried. Now in the grave, and still on his chair, a small bamboo stick was fitted into the mouth of the deceased and the other end was left hanging outside after the ground must have covered up

the dead notable. This bamboo stick that was left hanging outside, enabled for his successor and children to pour in palm wine and make libations annually (this process was commonly called *Feh-te-fung*), which was believed to go in directly into the mouth of the dead notable who in return became pleased and continued to bless and watch over his children from the spirit world.¹⁹

Deaths of Princes and Princesses in Ba-Vengo

At the death of a prince or princess in the Ba-Vengo village who were generally referred to as *Vang-Nto* (children of the palace), their burial rites slightly differed from that performed on ordinary villagers as it required the services of a special person in the village, Mangoh popularly known as the father of the princes and princesses were called in to prepare the corpses. He then went to the palace to collect their dressing items comprising of a red feather, the *Nkeuh* (Ba-Vengo traditional dress) and some camwood. With these materials in place, he returned and washed the corpse preparing it for its final journey to the *Itui*. The deceased properties (dresses and shoes) were given to the Mangoh by the royal family.²⁰ From the settlement in the second palace, at the death of a prince or princess in Ba-Vengo, the corpse was carried and exposed on a shelf in a particular cave in the village called the *Itui*. This cave was an isolated structure situated in *Ibia* quarter bounded by the River Meyeh. Internally it was arranged in shelves where corpses could be kept conveniently. This aspect of isolating the corpses of princes and princesses of the Ba-Vengo *fondom* in the *Itui* was done to show honor to royalty by not allowing their corpses to mix with the soil.

New Trends in Birth and Death Rites in Ba-Vengo

In contemporary times, changes were observed in cultural rites regarding birth and death cultures of Ba-Vengo. In the pre-colonial Ba-Vengo society, birthing culture was a practice which the indigenous people sought traditional ways of handling and receiving new born babies. There were no modern medical facilities, yet, these people could get pregnant, survive the period of gestation and successfully give birth to children. There was the availability of herbal medicines to help barren women become fertile.²¹ The people

made use of indigenous traditional medicines and practitioners of such were highly revered.

Deviations from Indigenous Birth Rites

The Ba-Vengo in earlier times received the birth of a child particularly a male child (*wei-wodong*) with so many rites being performed as seen earlier on. The aspect of “born-houses” in Ba-Vengo particularly after the year 1999 with the enthronement of Fon Ndofoa Zofoa III, deviated and took on other forms of celebration including for example, baby-showers that are celebrated even before the birth of a child. This was in sharp contrast to the traditional norms and customs of the village as a “born house” was only instituted after the baby’s birth.²² However worthy of note is the fact that even though the Ba-Vengo tended to adopt other forms of ceremonials (like gender reveal parties and the baby shower), the traditional form of the “born house” has remained standard though both ceremonies are still given equal importance. As well, the rites and customs performed at the birth of twin children have throughout time, remained standard.

The number of children which a Ba-Vengo woman was to have in marriage especially those who had no complications in bringing forth children like stillbirths and other birth complications, often exceeded the number thirteen mostly common for a monogamous marriage and way over that number for a polygamous family. But today, many young girls in the Ba-Vengo community interviewed regarded the thought of having children above the number four, as exaggerating. For in the traditional Ba-Vengo society many children meant greater sources of joy in the family and more farm laborers which enabled for economic prosperity. Even with regards to breast-feeding, women in the traditional Ba-Vengo society found joy and happiness in connecting themselves more to their children through the process of breast-feeding. This practice could take two to three years before a child could be barred from it. As a matter of fact, women were only permitted to stop breast-feeding if the child had started walking and could eat almost all the types of food

that adults ate.²³ But we get to realize that after the colonial era in Ba-Vengo this practice started to dwindle as the 21st Century Ba-Vengo woman as a result of western influence and modernity tendencies sought other means of child feeding. This was noted particularly with the giving of artificial milk to babies immediately after delivery promulgated by the fact that they were now career women or the desperate need for the prevention of saggy breasts which to a very great extent was believed to have been brought about through child breast-feeding.

Deviations from Indigenous Death Rites

We realized that in the traditional Ba-Vengo community, death was regarded as a mysterious, inevitable, grief-laden and calamitous event. Rarely, in case of very old or very sick people was death perceived as a welcome event or one to be celebrated. When death occurred especially an unexpected or sudden one, the immediate relatives of the deceased showed visible signs of anguish and inner pain while most often the consolers indicated distaste for elaborate feasting in the household.²⁴ However, in contemporary times particularly from 1999, changes were observed in village attitudes to death and burial and although death in Ba-Vengo is still not regarded as a pleasant event it seems nonetheless now to present a rationale for showing off family wealth, influence, social status, and prestige which are manifested among other ways in the form of lavishing and expensive burial programs.

When an ordinary villager died in Ba-Vengo, he was buried soon after all the wailing had died down. There were no mortuaries as the case is today, so he was embalmed locally from the time he died till when all the burial arrangements like (digging of the grave) was made. Today when a villager dies, especially those whose family members can afford to have him put in mortuaries, various funeral programs are being made like organizing wake keeps, printing badges, sewing *asoe-ebi* dresses, hiring funeral singers, and other activities needed to showcase wealth while giving the dead a befitting burial. Most funeral celebrations in Ba-Vengo with the advent of westernization and Christianity, do not

welcome ritual performances on either the corpse or on the deceased family members like what obtained in the traditional setting. Even in some Christian families in Ba-Vengo, they do not permit juju dancing in the funeral celebrations of their deceased. Others have their dead buried in constructed cemeteries which are very common with Catholic Christians like the cemetery beside the Catholic Church in the *Mboukang* quarter. This is mostly done by children on their dead parents, with the intention of keeping them closer in the vine yard of God. However one key burial culture of the Ba-Vengo that has proven resilience is that which rejects the mounting of ridges on graves. Till date in the Ba-Vengo village today, people do not bury and leave ridges on graves but graze the area making it almost unrecognizable as a burial spot. Also, with regards to the hair shaving ritual which in the traditional Ba-Vengo setting was a compulsory phenomenon at the death of any family member, today this culture has undergone deviation. The *fon* of Ba-Vengo, Ndofoa Zofoa III in a meeting with the *Ngumba* house, had this culture changed and specifically ordered that only at the death of three key persons that is a father, mother and wife/husband, were people obliged to shave their hair. And if not shaving the entire hair off, a few strands of hair could be removed to symbolize this culture.

With regards to the death and burial rites of notables, princes and princesses in the Ba-Vengo *fondom*, some aspects as regard the rites put in place in its traditional setting, have undergone deviations. In the 14th Century Ba-Vengo as we earlier on noted, the death of princes and princesses required a special burial site at *Ibai* known as *Itui* which ensured for them a royal honor even in death.²⁵ But the tradition of burying princes and princesses at some designated site was terminated during the reign of H.R.H Zofoa II and a new burial ground was sort out for the remains of these princes and princesses. This age old tradition was abolished because of the presence of human bone traffickers in and around the community, who used to go there for the extraction of human bones.²⁶ Thus today, the princes and princesses are buried like any other villager with the same burial rites even though the services of *Mangoh* are

still very much indispensable. The allocation of plots to nearly all the queens and their children during the reign of Zofoa II particularly, further facilitated the disposal of the corpses of death princes and princesses which are buried in their respective mother's plots.

Major Cause for Variations and Diviations in Indigenous Rites in Ba-Vengo

The Contact Factor

The contact factor as a cause of deviations in the performance of rites associated with birth and death cultures in Ba-Vengo is explained by the fact that, Ba-Vengo had her first contact with the Europeans who brought in cultures, ideas and belief systems that were completely different from those which the indigenous people held and practiced. It was in 1889 following Dr. Eugene Zintgraff's explorations in the Western grassfields that these people were to be groomed into practices and policies which accounted for eventual digressions in their ritual appropriations. The role of colonialism which eventually enabled for the Christianization and westernization of these people into the European cultures fitted well in this context. Loose openings and contact with other cultures of the world particularly those of the West, interiorized esteemed ritual practices carried out by the indigenous people which served as prerequisite to uphold and maintain their cultures and traditions. In addressing this, Ojoniyi writes:

From my personal experiences of the relics of colonization as a young boy growing up in Western Nigeria, I can give firsthand information of the subtle and unconscious damages of colonization on the way the Africans have come to perceive and understand themselves in relation to the crucial issue of cultural identity...²⁷

European colonizers and their Western education policies led to a spate of strong mental erasure of revered ritual practices in Ba-Vengo and preferably adopted those brought in by the foreigners, thought to be more noble. By implication, inferior and ignoble were how indigenous rites and cultural practices

were thought to have been. Many of rites and rituals which particularly accompanied twin births have become obsolete. Wearing protective amulets by pregnant women and other important ritual practices have been thought of, to be fetish and harmful. The penetration and spread of Christianity in Ba-Vengo by the year 1902, constituted one of the major determinants of ritual and cultural transformation. This process was catalyzed by the multifaceted nature of the approach of the Christian missions at proselytization-evangelism, education and health. As such, knowledge on Christianity in Ba-Vengo was common even to those who did not profess the religion.

Equally, as communications proliferated in recent decades bringing the external world to millions of people previously living in isolated communities, so have they generated two major concerns: the development of mediated communication as a technical and social need, but also as a threat to the quality and values of culture and the indiscriminate opening of doors to new experiences and impressions by the media which sometimes alienates people from their own cultures. Many villagers have had their conception of reality obscured and distorted by messages conveyed by the media.

The rapid increase in the volume of information and entertainment programs has brought about a certain degree of homogenization of different societies, while paradoxically, people can be more cut off from the society in which they live as a result of media penetration into their lives. The introduction of new media, particularly television in Ba-Vengo helped to shaken centuries old rites and customs particularly those which concerned the birthing culture of the people. Too often, the benefits of modern communications – which disseminate unfamiliar, vivid, absorbing information and entertainment originating in urban centers and, more often than not, from foreign sources have been accompanied by negative influences which dramatically disturbs established cultural orders of the indigenous people. Loose openings and Ba-Vengo receptiveness to other cultural rites

from other communities of the world accounted for the deviations recorded in the rites and cultural practices on her birth and death cultures.

Conclusion

The Ba-Vengo of the Western Grassfields as a people and a culture established for themselves rites and ritual practices that accompanied such social phenomena as births and deaths. These were instituted and regularized by the founding fathers of the fonom. For family success and prosperity, each of the rites as stipulated on either birth or death culture, had to be fulfilled to the very least and the people made sure of that. However, due to loose openings, advancements in communication and contact with other societies and cultures of the world as well as Ba-Vengo receptiveness to other cultural values, most of her intractable aspects of culture associated with birth and death rites became adulterated. Variations thus occurred and these people vacillated between a desire to preserve these standards and the need to attune to changes. The struggle to maintain along cultural lines these standardized values while fitting into the cultural evolutions of societies of the world thus became real. Rites and customs pertaining to baby reception and funeral obligations began experiencing particular deviations from what was instituted and practiced in the yesteryears. Though this deviation was necessary, it was only partial as even till date, conservatives in Ba-Vengo consciously proof to be resilient to these changing dynamics on rites and ritual practices. Thus while deviations were recorded on some fronts, resilience was implemented on others.

Endnotes

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- ⁸ Mama Fogam, Babungo History, Culture and Development Incarnated by H.R.H Fon Ndofoa Zofoa III, (Bamenda: Peaceberg Printers, November 2015).
- ⁹ V.G. Fanson, *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges: From Pre Historic Times to the Twenty-First Century*, (Bamkika'ay kumbo: Team Work Press, 2017).
- ¹⁰ Interview with Binyui Cecilia, Aged 60, Housewife/Farmer, interview with author, Babungo, April 15, 2022.
- ¹¹ Idem
- ¹² Interview with Binyui Cecilia, Aged 60, Housewife/Farmer, interview with author, Babungo, April 15, 2022.
- ¹³ Interview with Yayuh Christina, Aged 47, Teacher, interview with author, Bamenda, April 15, 2022
- ¹⁴ Idem.
- ¹⁵ Rabi Ilemona Ekore and Bolatito Lanre-Abass, African Cultural Concept of Death and the Idea of Advance Care Directives, *Indian Journal of Palliative Care*. Vol. 22 No. 4, October-December 2016.
- ¹⁶ For it was believed in the Bamenda Grassfields villages that a *fon* never truly died but simply disappeared into the world beyond. It was an abomination to say a fon had died because it was believed that they were too mighty and powerful to succumb to the call of death.
- ¹⁷ Interview with Colday Ndofekeh Olivier, Aged 47, Notable/Journalist/Media Strategist, interview with author, Mile 4 Nkwen Bamenda, March 12, 2022.
- ¹⁸ Idem
- ¹⁹ Interview with Tita Tiefeh Lo'ong, Aged 47, Quarter Head Lo'ong, interview with author, Bamenda, April 06, 2022.
- ²⁰ Ngwengi John Nebende, *Picturesque History of the Vengo People*, (Bamenda: Shiloh Printers) 48.
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- ²³ Interview with Lambi Felicia epe Ndofekeh Ywekoh, Aged 40, Teacher, Mile 4 Nkwen interview with author, Bamenda, March 12, 2022.
- ²⁴ Interview with Tumenta Peter Nyogbuh, Aged 74, Compound head, interview with author, Babungo April 16, 2022.
- ²⁵ Interview with Tiefeh Lo'ong.
- ²⁶ Interview with Fon Ndofoa Zofoa III, Aged 45, *Fon* of Babungo, interview by author, Yaounde, March 5. 2022.
- ²⁷ Ojoniyi B., Education and the Intentionality of a performing Arts Educator in Nigeria, *American Journal of Educational Research*, 3., 630.

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iii) List of Informants

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Lambi Felicia epse Ndofekhe Ywekoh. Aged 40. Teacher. Mile 4 Bamenda. March 12, 2022.

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