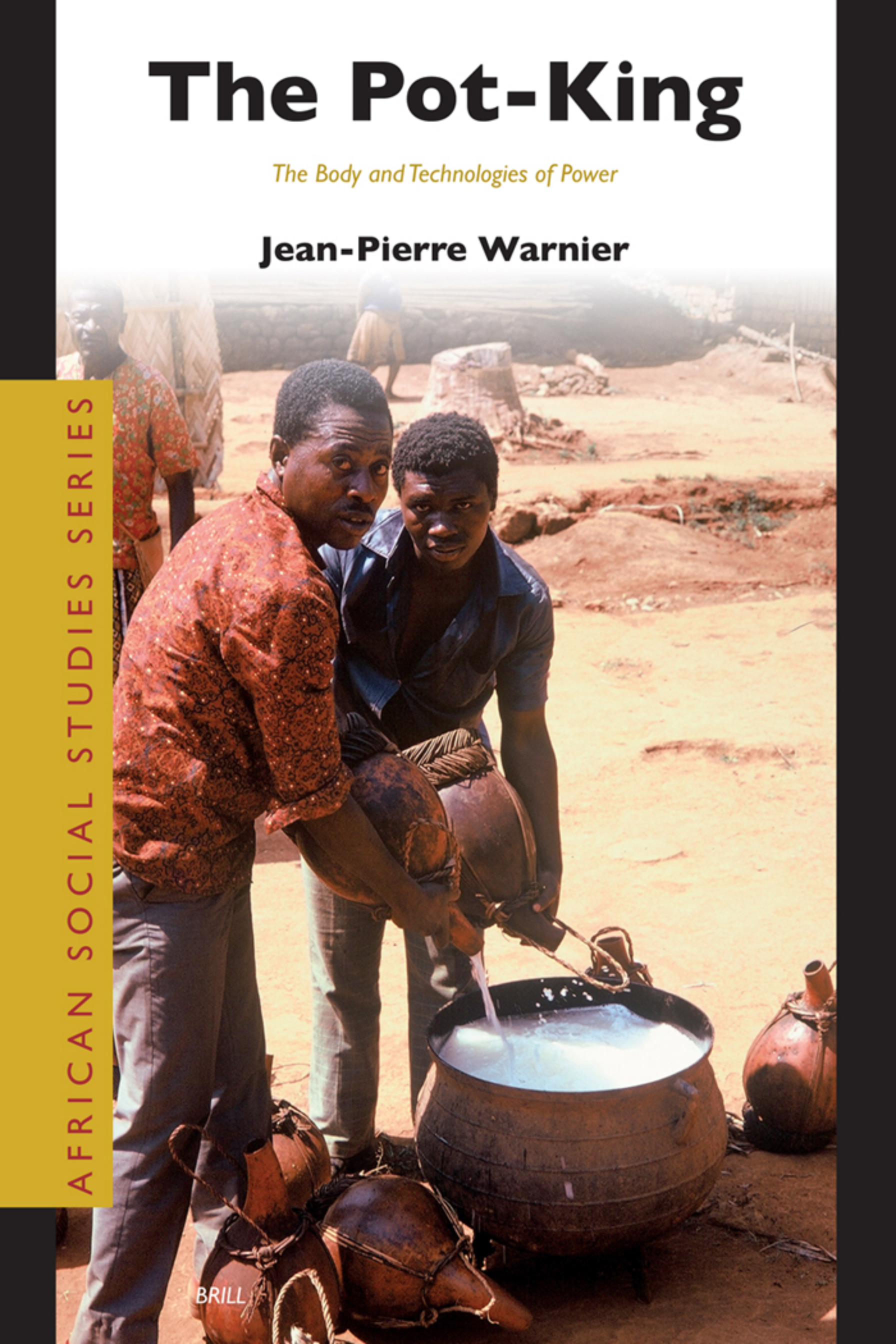
The Pot-King
The Body and Technologies of Power
Jean-Pierre Warnier
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BRILL

The Pot-King

African Social Studies Series

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The Pot-King

The Body and Technologies of Power

By

Jean-Pierre Warnier

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On the cover: Two stewarts fill a pot with raphia wine brought to the palace of Awing from various quarters during the annual festival. (Kingdom of Awing, 1973).

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When in Mankon, I stayed at *Azire* (1972–1974), *Nta' Aturu* (1977–1978) and *Ala'a Matu* (2002–2003) where I got acquainted with my neighbours and their way of life. On various occasions, I called regularly at the palace and all the Mankon lineages. During the first two periods of fieldwork, I was with Jacqueline Leroy, as a married couple. Her financial support, female networks and acquaintances, and competence as a linguist contributed to my research and my successful adoption in Mankon (since an unmarried man does not have the status of an adult).

I conducted genealogical and ethnographic enquiries in all 32 Mankon lineages. Several persons helped by accepting the roles of interpreter, language teacher, research assistant and counsel—Labah *Meungeum*, Paul *Fongo*, Peter *Amah*, Samuel *Tche Tangye*, Jo *Ngwa'fo*, Clement *Zua'*, *Adenumbi* Jude *Zua'*. I met and discussed with at least 150 persons, men and women. I will mention the names of those who were particularly helpful in revealing the arcane intricacies of Mankon life: *Ntso' Tse Za (Ala'a Akuma), Tse Ndi (Ala'a Akuma), Tawa (Ala'a Anye Fru), Nguti Anye (Bakworo), Akeunji (Bakworo), Awa' Aku* (*alias* Markus Njoya), Ambrose, *Nkwenti Tamandam, Ngwatom*, Agnes *Kyen* (all of them belonging to *Makwu Shwiri*), Felix *Akuma Ntumna (Matru fon)*, *Labinda (Ba Ntsu Alam), Moti (Mande Beusong), Awasom Mandzɛn (Mandzɛn), Avwontom, Anye Bakworo* and *Wa Nkyi Wara (Maso' beuAla'a Takingeu), Mu Meulu' (Maso' beuTue Fon), Atso'o Tingo* and his son Peter *Ade Atso'o (beuDzong beuTingo'), Ndifo Mbi (Nta Mbeung), Zama Shwe (Nto'fi),* Jonathan *Ndifomukong (Banong).*

The king *Ngwa'fo* and his entourage (*Maafo, Tabeufo*, Mr. Charles, Lukas *Tumasang*, Christopher *Zama,* Sylvester *Ndenge*) did not spare time and energy to ensure my safety and well being; directly or indirectly, they are at the heart of this book. Mankon hospitality was predicated on my status as an assimilated stranger (*ankyeni*, an edible locust), accepted to the kingdom on the understanding that I would bring whatever resources I could secure.

I am indebted to Elizabeth Chilver who registered the wish expressed by *Ngwa'fo* to have an anthropologist stay and do research in Mankon. Igor Kopytoff who was my supervisor at the University of Pennsylvania and has inspired all my endeavours to this day, conveyed this

to me. Elizabeth Chilver, Igor Kopytoff, Séverin Abega, Francis Beng Nyamnjoh, Christraud Geary, Claude Tardits, Richard and Joyce Dillon, Bertrand Masquelier, Ian Fowler, Charles-Henry Pradelles de Latour, Mike Rowlands, Nicolas Argenti and many others were, in various ways, competent and dedicated interlocutors who helped me develop my argument and documentation.

In 1977–1978, I visited all the kingdoms located on the Bamenda plateau, between the Ndop plain and the Ngi, on the western edge of the Grassfields. During the following years, I extended my research on the Grassfields iron industry towards the north, to Wum and We, in order to document the exchange networks and the geopolitics of the Grassfields. I took over from Mike Rowlands who had settled in Bamenda in 1976 to work on regional political hierarchies and exchange networks. Since then, we have traded notes, hypotheses and documentation.

I also worked at the archives of Bamenda, Buea, Kaduna and Yaoundé. Unfortunately, the archives in Basel (that I visited thanks to Paul Jenkins) and Potzdam remained out of my reach and competence; I gave the relevant information in a thesis presented at the University of Paris X (Warnier, 1983: 609–626).

Back to France, after more than 15 years in various countries, I was welcomed by Jean-François Bayart to his research seminars, especially Trajepo. He initiated me to the thought of Michel Foucault the impact of whom is quite obvious in this book. At the same time, I came to elaborate on a specific approach towards bodily conducts and material culture in collaboration with the members of the Matière à Penser research group, more specifically with Marie-Pierre Julien and Céline Rosselin. Rosselin was the first to draw the attention of the group to a "dynamic" approach inspired by the work of Georges Balandier. This led us to develop an interest in motricity and bodily motions.

My last stay in Mankon, in 2002, was devoted to checking data on bodily and material cultures and assessing the changes undergone by the kingdom since the late 1980s. I stayed there for four months, with the financial support of the laboratory UMR Langues, Musiques, Sociétés to which I belonged at the time.

I am grateful to Nicole Cambérou who translated chapters 3–5 from a typescript in French, and to Katya Leney who copy-edited the whole book. Sacha Goldstein and Ingrid Heijckers at Brill, devoted much time and attention to finalising the typescript and its publication.

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[1] All photographs taken in Mankon by J.-P. Warnier, and reproduced by courtesy of the king, unless otherwise specified in the caption.

CHAPTER ONE

THE HUMAN FLESH

> The good historian resembles the ogre of the fable. Where he scents the human flesh, he knows that there lies his game.
>
> Marc Bloch
> *An apology for history*

> 'Tis a little wonderful, and what I believe few people have thought much upon, *viz.* the strange multitude of little things necessary in the providing, producing, curing, dressing, making and finishing this one article of bread.
>
> Daniel Defoe
> *Robinson Crusoe*
> Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968: 96

I have often been at pains to explain to different audiences what I mean exactly by a 'sensori-motor culture propped against material culture'—an admittedly obscure expression, yet central to my endeavours.[1] I came to elaborate on an example which speaks to most people. It concerns the incompatibility of temper between hunters and conservationists.

I will not concern myself with the most violent and spectacular manifestations of their arguments in France: the slaughter of protected wildlife in the swamps of the *Grande Brière*, or the destruction of miradors used in pigeon shooting. There are similar cases in Great Britain, especially related to the ban on fox hunting. Like all such radical actions, they are performed by small if vocal minorities, and they are less significant than the dissatisfaction of reasonable people. There are indeed reasonable hunters, just as there are reasonable conservationists.

[1] The expression 'culture of motricity' (*culture motrice*) is borrowed from neuroscientist Alain Berthoz (1997: 9) who wrote: 'In anthropology, the object of study have often been the representations, beliefs, patterns of political, kinship, economic organisation... There is an obvious lack of concern for the "culture of motricity"'. For the sake of clarity, we will use 'sensori-motor culture'—an expression Berthoz would be unlikely to condemn.

Sometimes, although rarely, some people combine both inclinations. By and large, however, they do not coexist easily.

In the autumn, around the forest paths, hikers, mountain bikers and hunters come across each other and irritate one another. These provocations bring to the fore the view developed in the present study, namely that they do not proceed from diverse 'opinions' regarding moral 'values' or political 'philosophies'. They do not result from diverging ideas or beliefs. They get under the skin and reach deeply into the psyche. To put it bluntly: primarily, they do not address the mind, but the body. It does not mean that people do not think about it. It means that first and foremost, the confrontation occurs between two subjective regimes. They depend on practices based on somewhat different and incompatible material worlds, together with the sensori-motor conducts related to them.

The mountain biker mobilises his motor conducts, his body techniques and a sensori-motor culture as he rides his bike; the suspension and its 'attenuated pumping effects', the helmet, the flashy outfits. He stays on track, the muddy, sandy or stony surface. He breathes the fresh air of the mountain or the forest. His machine utilises aircraft technology rather than that of heavier land vehicles. It bounces over the steps and stones, flies over the tracks. It blends together the roughness of the land and the lightness of the ether. The mountain bike promises a dreamland to a restrained humanity.

The hunter, by contrast, identifies with quite a different material object. His hunting gun of which there is a vast variety of models depending on the bore, the position of the barrels, the shape of the butt and its dimensions. Each hunter will choose the one better adjusted to his morphology, his experience, his taste and the type of hunting he practices. He will learn how to handle it, open it, load it. He will embrace the art and the emotion of gun shooting. In addition, he will be equipped with cartridges, clothes, boots, a horn and a dagger when hunting large game. He may have a hunting dog, and adjust his hunting habits to the idiosyncrasies of his companion.

Without any doubt, these objects represent signs in a system of communication or connotation. This is a well established point since the publication of Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* in 1957. But, above all—and this is what I underscore in this book—they all possess a 'praxic' value that cannot be reduced to the 'use value' of the economist or the utilitarian philosopher, despite the fact that all these dimensions of the object (sign value, praxic value, use value) to a certain extent overlap. By 'praxic'

value I mean that the motor conduct, the gestures, the techniques of the body of the hiker, the mountain biker, the hunter, or any human being, are shaped by material culture. It relates to the *affordance* mentioned by Gibson. The sign value can be seen when the object is *static*. The praxic value can only be seen when the subject and his objects are in *motion*. The praxic value reaches everyone subjectively. It identifies the subjects in the diversity of their use. Temperamental incompatibilities, whether epidermic or visceral, are testimony to this.

The gun itself is the focus of a world in motion. On a December morning, in the damp woods, the lone hunter listens intently to the bell of the busy pointer. As soon as it stops ringing, it triggers an emotion within the preying human. Is the dog pointing to a bird? The bell starts ringing again. The hunter relaxes his grip on the gun. It was a false alarm. Then it stops for good. The hunter experiences a new burst of emotion. He spots the dog and makes a careful approach, all his senses alert. One step forward, two steps, three steps, a moment of doubt about what exactly is going on. The rest takes place in a second: the bird taking off as if from a catapult, the quick shot before the prey disappears, the erotic pleasure of the shot, the fall of the bird, the pursuit by the dog, the contemplation of the woodcock plumage in his hand; or else, the disappointment of failure. Not a word is said. Everything happens in the body, the motions, the feelings. They activate childhood memories, the fragrances of the seasons, the sadness of killing (and dying), a vague feeling of tragedy and an unsaid 'why?', without a proper answer, coming all the way from the darkness of the Pleistocene, when our hominid ancestors became human by becoming hunters.

Hunters do not share any ready-made discourse to express such subtle and ambivalent experiences. Like the discourse of most 'extreme conservationists', that of the most dedicated hunters is inadequate to their practice. All of them, when driven into a corner, resort to pathetic slogans, street demonstrations and sometimes to violence.

Try and observe the practice of the hunter, of the mountain biker, of all the bodily conducts juxtaposed against the material culture of work, leisure and domestic life, and all those of exotic societies. There are entirely different physical and material cultures. Marcel Mauss remarked that there are two different kinds of humanities: the sitting one and the squatting one. Observe religious practices. They are all based on physical and material cultures: fasting, kneeling, playing music, etc. All of them draw the outlines of hundreds of systems of identification, more or less shared, that constitute as many concrete

and sensory mythologies. All of them provide food for politics, because politics implies the production of subjects, and their subjection to a given sensori-motor and material culture of political practice. All this produces practical political relationships, beyond 'values', 'ideas', 'programs' and verbalisations.

A look at the French politics of hunting will illustrate this point with reference to the outstanding sociological study of the CPNT (Chasse, Pêche, Nature, Tradition; Hunting, Fishing, Nature, Tradition) vote by Christophe Traïni (2003), that drew 6.77 per cent of the French votes at the1999 European elections. The supporters of this movement belong to all the sectors of the political spectrum: from the Communist Party to the *Front National* at the extreme right. The difference between CPNT and the Greens does not fit with a right/left divide. One could say with Traïni that they diverge by having "quite distinct *political philosophies*" (author's italics), let us say ideologies. But Traïni underscores the fact that each of these is unsystematic and lacking in consistency, which is a serious obstacle to any kind of public debate. A law on hunting was passed in parliament in July 2000. In the preceding months, during the television talk shows on the topic, the two sides abused each other and failed to establish any kind of médiation.[2]

In order to account for their differences, one could look at current paradigms in sociology. Do the actors on both sides belong to different social categories? Not in any significant way. Can they be considered as social actors making choices in the framework of a rationality limited not only by the fact that each of them does not have adequate grasp of all the relevant parameters, but also by their respective passions? Not really, because, in their case, the rationalisations come as an afterthought. The practice and the passion come first. At the beginning of this chapter, I described the practice of one of several different ways of hunting. On the other side of the divide, one could study the practice of the militant members of the LPO (Ligue protectrice des oiseaux, a wildlife protection organisation with strong ideological orientations) making a survey of sea gulls taking to their roosts at dusk, or setting breeding-coops for owls in an orchard. Here again, we are faced with a pregnant sensori-motor culture propped against a given material culture providing emotional and aesthetic gratification to the experts.

[2] Something similar took place in Great Britain in 2005, when fox hunting was banned by Parliament, to no effect.

The sociology of action as well as mainstream anthropological theories—if there is such thing—are at pains to analyse such behaviours: the latter are too close to the passions and the physical conduct of the subject. Yet, the world is governed, or rather dominated, by the clash of antagonistic passions. Max Weber, N. Elias and P. Bourdieu (1979, 1992) did not think that one could do without the study of the *habitus* of the capitalist or dominant classes—this kind of embodied 'reminder' that transmits repertoires of actions and social dispositions outside any clear awareness on the side of the actors. The body, the flesh, this is the game of the historian and the anthropologist.

Once more, the body: it is fashionable. It is the object of more and more publications. P. Duret and P. Roussel (2003) have classified them according to the main trends in contemporary sociological theory. One can guess why the body has attracted so much attention in the social sciences lately. During the 20th century, sexual practices changed, especially in Western countries. They are no longer subjected to procreation or to its avoidance. One can talk more freely about them. The development of mass consumption makes room for hedonistic practices regarding food, dress, health, bodily care, sport and games, home decoration, etc., all of which was out of the reach of most Westerners as recently as the 1950s. Religion assumes the appearance of a number of practices concerning the biological life of the subject: access to medical care, desired procreation, a permanent concern for one's well being, fitness practices. Fewer people expect salvation from God and more from the laboratory, from jogging, or from the new—often of oriental origin—spiritualities, less mortifying than the old ones.

The flesh, then—but which flesh? The research I have conducted since 1971 in the Mankon kingdom, an obscure kingdom of the western highlands (or Grassfields) of Cameroon nurtured my doubts, especially when I found the words for them. In my view, they come from what I call the 'Magritte effect'. Magritte painted a series of pictures representing a smoking pipe (reproduced by M. Foucault, 1973). In the lower part of each picture, he wrote 'this is not a pipe'. He was right, of course. One can test this by attempting to stuff the painting with tobacco and then light it in order to smoke. The *praxic* value of the graphic representation of a smoking pipe has nothing to do with the praxic value of the smoking pipe itself. By contrast, the *sign values* of the pipe and the painting in a system of communication or connotation may be compared, to some extent, and they definitely relate to one another.

The 'Magritte effect' derives from an illusion most characteristic of intellectuals. It seems to me the latter tend to take verbal expressions, ideas and representations at face value. They mistake the picture of the smoking pipe for the pipe itself. They mistake representations of the body for the body itself, the verbalisations for the sensori-motor conducts. Consider for example what D. Le Breton (1999: 12, transl. JPW) wrote: "The formulation of the *cogito* by Descartes extends historically the implicit dissociation of man from his body, stripped of any value in itself". Is it really possible to agree that a philosophical theory could have changed the physical *practices* of peasants, sailors, artisans and merchants in France, the Netherlands and a couple of other Western countries, and even of the few educated people capable of reading the *Discours de la méthode*? Under the influence of the great philosopher, did people cease to eat, digest, defecate as they used to do before 1637, when the *Discourse* was published? Were ploughing, livestock rearing, fishing at sea less physical and demanding undertakings? Did people cease to die at war, spilling their blood and losing their guts? Did love-making lose its potential for ecstasy? Did pregnancy and delivery cease to be a labour involving body and soul? All this by the single virtue of the *cogito*? It may be, but this would require a thorough discussion of the relationships between *practice* and *representations* in the course of history.

To be accurate, the sentence written by D. Le Breton should read more or less as follows: "the formulation of the *cogito* by Descartes extends historically the implicit dissociation of the *representations* of man from those of his body, stripped of value in themselves (and this exclusively within the minority of people enjoying a high level of formal education)".

Contemporary sociology in the light of the 'Magritte effect'

The 'Magritte effect' provides a touchstone that allows us to distinguish between field research on sensori-motor cultures, body techniques, perception and daily practices, from the analysis of their popular or educated representations; the pipe and the picture of the pipe. This is a useful exercise.

Nearly all structuralist approaches to such topics focus on representations, the structures of thought, 'symbolism' (that is, what goes on in the mind). To mention one example, M. Douglas (1966) wrote on the 'notions' of pollution and taboo and was essentially concerned with

material and physical purity and defilement. This work was based on a study of cultural categories, most prominently those featuring in the *written* prescriptions of Leviticus. This remarkable book deals with the structure of the verbalised norm. It does not concern itself with a field ethnography of the physical practices involving dirt, rubbish and ritual impurity. Its analyses are most relevant as regards the way that notions are structured. By contrast, an ethnography of actual practices (for example, think of the polemics around dogs' defecation in towns, cigarette smoke or nuclear waste) shows to what extent the notions and categories are blurred and contested, caught in power struggles, whenever one deals with human bodies in motion, and material substances involved in given practices in a given historical context. This remark raises a question that concerns the object of social sciences: Is it the practices, the representations, or both, and especially the way they may or may not fit together.[3]

Despite the fact that phenomenological anthropology developed in the 1990s aimed at achieving the 'reduction to the body', in my view, it suffered from the same shortcomings. The works of D. Le Breton (1990, 1999), Th. Csordas (ed., 1994) or M. Featherstone (ed., 1991) are less concerned with the body than with its representations. The philosophical heritage of phenomenology focuses on the question of 'meaning' and the way it comes to the world through the acquired experience of the body, ultimately leading to its verbalisation. It is not conducive to an ethnography of bodily motions, perception, and emotions. It is at pains to establish a dialogue with neuro-cognitive sciences.

Since R. Barthes (1957) stressed the fact that objects are signs in a system of connotation or communication, there is no possible doubt about that. J. Baudrillard (1968, 1972) and many others have developed

[3] The relationship between practices and representations, procedural and verbalised knowledge, cognitive unconscious and awareness, embodied *habitus* and ideology is too difficult to analyse and thus often ignored. Of course, there are prominent exceptions, such as the analysis of 'cognitive dissonance' in cognitive psychology. Another example can be found in G. Bateson's work and that of the Palo Alto school, in the notion of schismogenesis based on the double bind often due to a contradiction between the bodily practices and the verbalisations produced in the same context. One has to admit a certain amount of autonomy of the representations on the one hand, and the practices on the other. One also has to admit that, in particular cases, there is specific impact of the representations on the practices and *vice versa*. For instance, there is little doubt that the Cartesian thought concerning the body has opened up ways in which modern medicine as a practice, together with its specific technologies, has had the opportunity to develop. We shall return to this question later.

and illustrated this point successfully in different ways. Similarly, in the framework of structuralist thought, Cl. Lévi-Strauss (1975) and M. Douglas (1966) concerned themselves with some aspects of material culture (the masks, matters in or out of place) as items that found their meanings from an underlying cultural code. However, if physical and material cultures are reduced to their sign value with no consideration for other possible dimensions, the object is reduced to a pseudo-word, the body to its representations, the movement to its meaning and the smoking pipe to its picture. Working on the 'sign value' of the material and bodily cultures answers the question 'what does it mean?' Working on the 'praxic value' of physical motions in a material world answers quite a different question: 'what does it do to the subject?'; or else, 'to what kind of aspect of the subject does it belong in any particular instance?' The various kinds of semiology and structuralism answer the first question, but not the second.

In order to answer the second question by studying sensori-motor cultures in a material world, one has to appropriate the praxeology developed by P. Parlebas (1999), the variety of neurosciences represented by A. Berthoz (1997) and A. Damasio (1994), and the cognitive sciences of S.M. Kosslyn and O. Koenig (1995) or P. Buser (2005). What can we learn from them that would provide a useful contribution to this project? To make a comparison, if I already have a personal computer (PC) and I also want a printer, I will have to connect them together. However, this will not be enough. In addition, I will have to load on the PC's hard disk a printer pilot, that is a software that will allow the PC to recognise the particular model of printer, and to pass on the command to print.

This is more or less what takes place with our sensori-motor conducts propped on material culture. If I want to make use of a bicycle, I will have to adjust my body to it, by sitting on the saddle, putting my feet on the pedals and holding the handle-bars. However, this is not enough; if I have not learned how to ride a bicycle, I will not be able to use it. In other words, I have to load on my neuro-motor hard disk the software that will allow me to make use of the bicycle without losing my balance and falling. This software is analogous to the printer pilot. The way I can load it is by apprenticeship, that is, by the repetition of the appropriate gestures until they are effectively absorbed. By doing so, I construct sensori-motor algorithms to hold the handle-bars and push the pedals while keeping my balance. Combined with each other, they allow me to coordinate the movements of my body, my legs, arms,

hands, etc. and to ride efficiently. In doing this, I appropriate a body of human knowledge, although not discursive. It is a procedural knowledge which is quite difficult to verbalise in its details. I can say: "I know how to ride a bicycle", but I cannot explain in detail the way my different muscles and my perception operate to obtain such a result.

The model of the human brain as a computer was more or less accepted by neuro-cognitive sciences around 1980. Later on, it was challenged on the grounds that there are vast differences between the brain and a computer. A brain does not operate by combining billions of binary choices. It involves and operates together with the drives of the subject and his neuro-endocrinian system. Emotions play an important role in its function, as a system of making quick decisions. Without them, just by pondering the pros and cons of any physical movement or thought, we would not be able to reach a decision. Yet, as a metaphor, the comparison between, on the one hand, our neuro-muscular and perceptive apparatus and, on the other hand, a computer, is useful because it shows the role of the acquisition of procedural knowledge and of sensori-motor algorithms in order to make use of our material culture. It is also useful because it shows that the subject is incomplete. In motion and agency, it has to be complemented by a material culture the use of which is imprinted on the subject.

Besides, the comparison also allows us to understand an essential dimension of the procedural, poorly verbalised knowledge: it is buried deep into our cognitive unconscious. As already mentioned, we cannot explain in detail how our different muscles and our perception operate when we ride a bicycle. Riding is achieved by a kind of automatic piloting. While this is at work, my attention is focused on the uncertainties of the road, not on cycling: We are on the lookout for pedestrians about to cross our way, traffic lights, potholes. All the while, our sensori-motor algorithms take care of the riding proper and of stirring the hundreds of muscles that contribute to our movement and balance. Thus, the two kinds of knowledge are quite different. Procedural knowledge escapes verbalisation. It belongs mostly to the cognitive unconscious, it is embodied. By contrast, discursive knowledge is by definition verbalised and easier for the mind to focus on directly. Neither of the two kinds of knowledge is more or less 'human' than the other. They both depend on our subjectivity, a subjectivity that is not restricted to *logos*, the verbally expressed thought. Nearly any human activity rests simultaneously on both types of knowledge. For example, when delivering a lecture, a professor uses unconscious procedural knowledge of sound

production in a given language, as well as the discursive knowledge with respect to the verbalised content of the lecture. Proper sound production in any given language involves the mastery of about 250 muscles used in breathing and moving the larynx, the vocal chords, the tongue, the jaws, the lips, etc. We load the procedural knowledge of our maternal language in childhood. Once we have reached adulthood, it becomes more difficult to re-train all our motor algorithms to produce the sounds of a foreign language. This is why, whatever our efforts, most of us speak it with an accent.

Let us return to the main theme of this argument: If we consider the smoking pipe, the tobacco, the action of smoking (and not their representations), we also consider the perception and the motor conducts of the subject. (Since there is no perception without motivity, and *vice-versa*, I will write 'sensori-motivity'.) But in addition to considering sensori-motivity, we have to include the match box, the flame, the smoke and their perceptive dimensions as essential components of the action of smoking. In brief, we will have to consider material culture[4] as the essential counterpart of sensori-motor culture. It is fairly easy, common practice in fact, to isolate the representations of the human body from the material culture which is, so to speak, the womb or the matrix of the human flesh. However, an ethnography of actual practices does not permit it. What will make the difference between a structuralist, phenomenological, or semiological approach on the one hand, and a praxeological one on the other, is the way material culture is taken into account in *motion* or motivity; or else, the way the *materiality* of a body in motion in a material world is taken as an object of investigation.

[4] I call 'material culture' all the artefacts on which our sensori-motor culture is propped. Gérard Lenclud brought my attention to the fact that the definition I gave in a previous publication (see Warnier, 1999) was inadequate insofar as it did not specify what it included and what it excluded. What belongs to human 'culture' in any given 'material culture' is made of all the artefacts that are co-invented and co-produced with the appropriate gestures of their use. It is not only the thread and the needle (or the wheel, or the bow). As A. Leroi-Gourhan indicated, the innovation concerns both and, at the same time, the artefact and the gestures. The gestures of needlework are invented or learned together with the thread, the needle, the materials (hides, leather, textiles) that can be assembled by such a craft. What we can exclude from the definition of material culture are all the material things that have not been shaped with the appropriate gestures in order for them to fit together. In that sense, any given material culture is associated with a corresponding sensori-motor culture in an essential way. The stone I pick up from the ground and throw to the top of an apple tree may not be considered as part of the material culture of the society I belong to. The limit between the two domains is admittedly blurred and subject to negotiation.

Materiality is the touchstone on which bodies and things will leave a mark, whereas the representations do not leave any. All our techniques of the body, all our sensori-motor conducts are propped against material culture and form a single system in a way akin to what psychoanalysts call 'anaclisis.'[5] As regards the importance of motion or motivity, I refer to the 'dynamic' approach of the 1950s, and especially to G. Balandier (1955) who took change and motion as essential to social reality.

In the preceding pages, we shifted three times. Firstly, from a sociology of the actors' choices to an analysis of the body, the practices and passions; this is a standard shift in contemporary social sciences. Secondly, from the study of representations of the body to the analysis of the sensori-motor conducts; this is more unusual. Finally, we complemented the study of sensori-motor conducts by shifting to a consideration of material culture against which these are propped. Bourdieu did much to make the first shift; he also had, at times, the intuition of the other two. But he stayed on the threshold. When he described the *habitus* and the bodily *hexis*, he sketched the sensori-motor conducts essential to them. However, his notion of a 'body' remains very dependent upon the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (1945): a speaking body, a body more intent on signifying (for example, in *La Distinction*) than on moving, sweating and engaging in sensori-motor conducts. A similar remark could be made as regards the third shift. Following Elias, Bourdieu considered material culture in *La Distinction*. However, his analysis focused on its sign value in a system of communication or connotation, rather than on its praxic value in a system of agency. The objects indicate social class and are marked by it; they mean social class. This is already a considerable move. However, it has not reached the point of no return, that is, the materiality of the objects in a given sensori-motor culture.

[5] The word 'anaclisis' is used in psychoanalysis to designate the way our drives are propped against our wants, and are constructed on that basis throughout the ontogenesis of the subject. It is also used to refer to the way the psyche as a container is a fantasy that is built on the basis of the coetaneous experience of the skin as a bodily envelope (see Anzieu, 1985). Similarly, it refers to the fact that most, if not all, our gestures are propped against, and shaped by, the objects and the substances we are in contact with in motion and agency. The art of mimicry, by artificially removing the artefacts which normally prop the gestures reproduced by the artist, reveals the inscription of our real gestures in the materiality of things. For example, if the artist mimics the gestures of sewing, he shows that these are shaped by the needle, the thread that one passes through the eye of the needle, the course of the needle and thread through the fabric, the folds in the fabric, etc.

These considerations ought to allow us to cast new light on the comparison between the hunters and the conservationists in contemporary France. A major difference between them is not so much different verbalised 'political philosophies' which, according to Traïni, are unsystematic and rather inconsistent, but different non-verbalised and to some extent unconscious sensori-motor cultures and their associated material cultures. These are quite consistent and systematic. Both drive their car and park it along the road. Then, they part. The hunter, together with a friend—both heavily loaded—walk through the marshes towards the hunting hut. They carry a picnic basket, warm clothes for the night, waders, a couple of guns and a few decoys, often live ones. The hunter keeps his dog on the leash. The bird-watcher, by contrast, puts on his boots and carries a small rucksack containing his book of birds, a couple of maps, a note-book and a pencil. He also carries a tripod and powerful binoculars. He walks silently towards a good spot. What follows subsequently is the long hours while waiting motionless and silent for something to happen, the frustrations, the emotions when expectations are realised, the pleasure of an exceptional shot, the contemplation of the ever-changing light on the water and the marshy landscape. This is what makes the difference between the hunter and the bird-watcher who stands for the protection of the environment and the endangered species. This is what shapes in different ways their subjectivities in their relationship to others, to wildlife and to death.

Above, we focused on hunters and conservationists. However, this materialistic approach to bodily cultures and identifications can be taken with any kind of human subject; for instance to factory workers and general managers. (Mr. Michelin is inebriated by the smell of the car tyres manufactured in his factories, whereas the workers are of the opinion that they 'stink'.) It can be transposed to the farmer, sitting bored on his tractor; to the secondary school teacher subjected to the routines of the classroom, the blackboard, the marking the examination papers; the business executive waiting for a flight at Heathrow while typing on his laptop and eating a dreadful panini. Not one of them is made of the same stuff as the others. Their subjectivities are shaped and subjected in different ways depending on their sensori-motor and material culture.

In this book, I propose to validate empirically the anthropological surplus value produced by taking into consideration sensori-motor and material cultures, not only for their sign value, but also for their praxic

value in a system of agency. The case-study is an African kingdom, the microphysics of power of which will be analysed.

But what difference will this analysis make to contemporary issues debated in Western societies? Are there lessons to be learnt from an ancient African monarchy when there are so many urgent and difficult issues around us? In my opinion, what is at stake is a sociology of the body. It is important because it is a fighting arena in many different domains (gender, politics, religion), since any power and any religion address the body. The approach that will be developed here will take us away from the 'Magritte effect' and will give us a comparative perspective on the technologies of power based on sensori-motor and material cultures.

The untraceable sociology of the body

The body is an object of debate. Different types of explanations have been put forward as to the reason for this. A first one was formulated by D. Le Breton (1990, 1999) and has proved popular because it is in tune with New Age and post-modern feelings. According to it, contemporary, 'modern' civilisation has inherited its contempt for the body from Judaeo-Christian tradition, from Gnostic spirituality, and from dualistic Cartesian philosophy. This heritage separates the subject from his body, from others and from the cosmos. When this triple gap is filled, one witnesses a liberation of the body. Exotic civilisations, 'traditional' societies, have kept clear of such problematic heritage. Their subjects are not cut off from their own bodies and from others and they are not separated from the cosmos.

However popular this theory is, I disagree with it for several reasons: Firstly, a field ethnography of bodily techniques, both in Western societies and in 'traditional' ones, such as the Mankon kingdom, demonstrates the same kind of gap or separation between the conscious self and the body. This has more to do with the way motivity operates in the human species than with differences in civilisations. As indicated above, sensori-motivity operates within the confines of a 'cognitive unconscious' (see P. Buser, 2005) or else, a 'motor unconscious' as defined by Parlebas (1999: 170–176). The expression is admittedly ambiguous, but it refers to well established facts, such as the way we move under the guidance of an 'automatic pilot'. Our sensori-motor conducts are shaped by the

software of the motor algorithms we have learned and incorporated in work and in leisure, walking, driving, speaking, etc. The following extract is from Parlebas (1999: 171, transl. JPW):

> If the goal-keeper who comes out to catch a 'cross' from the opposing team's winger or the skipper who clears the ball had to 'become aware' or conscious of all the elements of the situation of motivity that are at the origin of their conducts, they would be condemned to be frozen on the spot by the extent of such requirements. There are billions of stimulations on the acting individual. Storms of waves pass along the organs of motivity. Thousands of connections are established. Activating and inhibiting circuits are called upon. An infinite number of muscular micro-contractions is unleashed. Actually, the subject is only conscious of a number of fragmented sensations and of certain results.

Our motor conducts in a regime of motor unconscious allow us to be efficient with a minimum of energy expenditure, by pushing 'the body' away or aside, or even into oblivion. If it were not the case, the mental burden would be unbearable and the result extremely inadequate. In that respect, there is no difference between the proficient driver slipping through heavy traffic on a suburban dual carriage-way and the Maori canoe pilot surfing on the Pacific waves, or the African virtuoso musician playing the xylophone in a 'traditional' orchestra.

Secondly, another reason why the thesis developed by Le Breton does not seem acceptable is that it extends within the range of the 'Magritte effect'. It does not distinguish between the smoking pipe and the picture of the pipe, the body and its representations, especially those that are produced by professionals: philosophers, journalists, movie-makers, literary authors, designers of the advertisement business. Briefly, it does not make the difference between the procedural knowledge and the verbalised knowledge, and takes the latter at face value.

Yet I agree with Le Breton on at least one point: the body is an object of considerable concern in Western societies. Sport, aesthetics, health care and magazines devoted to the body demonstrate the extent of this concern. And this concern raises a question in the epistemology of the social sciences: is the body a sociological object? J.-M. Berthelot (1985) examined some 600 sociological publications focused on the body. He deconstructed the way they turned the body into a sociological (and anthropological) object or failed to do so. He concluded that the body is an object of endless and inconclusive debate in the social sciences because, although it provides a common meeting ground for many scientific approaches (biological, anatomical, genetic, psychological,

etc.), it cannot be constructed into a sociological or anthropological object. It is socialised and there is a social dimension to it. Yet it is not a social fact. It is an object of social practices, but it cannot be dealt with by the sociologist as just 'the body'. Berthelot proposed to focus a sociological approach on the situations in which bodily practices are a relevant parameter of the situation, and on these practices. For the same reason, Parlebas (1999) was of the opinion that the only way to develop a sociology of games and sports and, generally speaking, of sensori-motor conducts was to exclude 'the body' as a possible object of sociological enquiry. Consequently, Parlebas assumed a somewhat radical position and systematically avoided using the vocabulary derived from the word 'body' (bodily, embodiment, etc.) which is implicitly static and dualistic. Instead, Parlebas focused on the notion of motivity which gives at the same time the movement and the unity of the living subject. A similar position was developed by P. Duret and P. Roussel (2003) in their review of the different sociologies of bodily practice, also assuming Berthelot's position as developed in the 1980s. I will not follow suit, because I still need to talk about the 'body' of the King, as will become clear later.

Lastly, it seems to me there is a third reason why the sociological debate on 'the body' does not make much headway. If, following J.-M. Berthelot and P. Parlebas, one engages in a sociology of sensori-motor conducts, it is impossible not to take into account the material culture which supports them and by which they are shaped and construed in essential ways. It could be expressed in a graphic way using the metaphor invented by P. Schilder (1923, 1935) who said that the body is not the sum total of all its organs. It is the product of billions of connections that are not given right from birth, but acquired and constantly improved by apprenticeship. This is what Schilder calls the 'bodily schema', or, insofar as the subject has a representation of it, the 'image of the body'. According to Schilder, the image of the body is extremely versatile, supple, adjustable to various circumstances, and it can expand so as to include material objects *in an essential way*. "The body-image expands beyond the confines of the body. A stick, a hat, any kind of clothes, become part of the body-image. The more rigid the connection of the body with the object is, the more easily it becomes part of the body-image" (Schilder, 1935/1964: 213). And: "When we take a stick in our hand and touch an object with the end of it, we feel a sensation at the end of the stick. The stick has, in fact, become a part of the body-image." (*ibid.*, p. 202). If one tried to analyse 'the

body' (difficult, if not impossible as a sociological object), or the 'bodily conducts' (feasible) without including the articulation between the bodily conducts and material culture, an essential component of the *human* conduct would be missing. From an anthropological and comparative point of view, the human species presents two specific functions: language and a praxic relationship to material culture in agency. Biological life and the reproduction of the human species have become impossible without manufactured things. Human phylogenesis is coterminous with language and material culture. The relationship to the object is part of the subject, as Hegel and Marx pointed out. In spite of that, nearly all studies on the 'body' hardly ever mention material culture. It would seem that things are the unproblematic logistics of life for human subjects whose subjectivity is invested in language, thought and relationships to others and untouched by their praxic relationship to things in agency that mediate language, representations and relationships to others.

Consequently, I agree with B. Blandin (2002) who regretted that sociology (and anthropology as well) is a 'sociology without things'. However, Blandin met a dead-end when, instead of starting with empirical research and fieldwork, his point of departure was a definition of the 'object', borrowed from psychoanalytical theory, reduced to an entity that is absolutely distinct from the subject. This definition is relevant to the psychic ontogenesis of the subject. However, it loses any relevance where sensori-motor conducts are concerned. We have seen, following Schilder, that the image of the body extends beyond its limits to include the material object into a common *interiority* produced in agency.

Here is an example: when the hunter shoots a pheasant, the bird is in a relationship of absolute exteriority to the hunter. This is epitomised by the fact that the hunter kills the bird. However, the hunter embodies an *object*—his gun—of which he has a grip, and which is part of his 'image of the body'. The gun is indeed a material object, but in agency it is not defined any longer by being something exterior to the hunter by the fact that it is embodied, that is, it is within the bodily limits of the subject. From an empirical and analytical point of view, an *a priori* definition of the object as something exterior to the subject is unproductive and irrelevant. What could be called the Shilderian revolution disqualifies this position. (It could also be called the Hegelian of Marxian revolution since Hegel and Marx explored the process of objectification of the subject.)

To conclude, studying the case of the African kingdom will hopefully contribute to this socio-anthropological debate, enlightened by

the neuro/cognitive sciences. It concerns the sensori-motor cultures articulated to material culture. The praxic relationship to material culture is one of anthropological theory's blind spots, especially in industrial societies. It concerns directly the subject insofar as he acts and is subjected to social and political processes mediated by material culture. The hunters, the conservationists and an African monarchy bring us back to the question of power and politics.

Matter for politics

There is no doubt that the functional approach to politics in terms of individual strategies, actor's choices and intended *versus* unintended effects is, within limits, relevant. However, it seems that these limits have now been reached. The functionalist approach fails to grasp the moral economy of conflicts and alliances that develop from lifestyles, bodily and material culture, aesthetic worlds. These phenomena are not specific to the 'modern' world. As will become clear in this book, they constitute a dimension that is essential to political organisations. The tchador, the beard or the technologies of control in public—or less public—spaces, shopping malls and airports were dealt with in two recent publications: *Matière à politique. Le pouvoir, les corps et les choses* (Bayart and Warnier, eds, 2004), and the fifth chapter (The global techniques of the body) in J.-F. Bayart's book published in 2005.

In order to bring forth the political dimension of bodily and material cultures, I will return to the analysis of the hunters' vote by Traïni (2003). At each national election in France, the conservationist/hunter divide affects some two million votes, not a small stake in contemporary politics. What turns it into a tricky issue for politicians is the fact that the hunters' lobby, represented by the CPNT list recruits its followers from throughout the political spectrum, from the extreme left to the extreme right. At parliament, there is a recognisable group of supporters of hunting. "There is no doubt that this group of MPs crosses party boundaries since, a few years ago, it numbered 125 members, including 59 members of the Socialist Party and three Communists", Traïni wrote (2003: 38). In 2006, the membership of that group was about the same. Although it cut across political boundaries, this movement was clearly a political one, with the result that it upset the political strategies of the parties and complicated the exercise of elective democracy. It was not easy to negotiate a compromise, especially on the basis of

a political ideology since the main characteristic of the divide did not depend on a political philosophy, but on a practice, on a number of infra-conscious sensori-motor repertoires and on a given material culture that developed into a passion.

The hunting practices that are most vehemently stigmatised. Deer, fox and badger hunting with hounds and horses, the use of snares and traps, the shooting of migrating doves trigger feelings of horror and disgust within their opponents, and sacrosanct feelings with their practitioners. The moral judgments, the abuses and, sometimes, the physical fights between the two clans speak for the depth and strength of their respective feelings. The war of subjectivity concerns life and death; those of the animals, of course, but also of the subjects who inflict death after attending the mass of St. Hubert, patron of the hunters. All this has a strong religious flavour and suggests that one should question the relationship between sensori-motor and material cultures on the one hand, and religion on the other.

Matter for religion

Is religion 'physical'? Regis Debray and Marcel Gauchet (2003) addressed this question. Their point of departure concerned the debate about the possible end of religion: is it possible to 'get out of' (or to do away with) religion? Is there a possible 'end' to religion? In a world subjected to acute religions tensions, it is worth raising this question. The answer, of course, depends on the definitions that are elaborated on the basis of religious experience. According to Marcel Gauchet:

> In its depth, [religion] designates the relationship between humanity and itself placed under the sign of denial and dispossession. A relationship in which humanity relates the source of the order to which it obeys to something else than itself, to an exterior and superior principle (p. 12).

To this view, Regis Debray responded:

> In my opinion, the *ultima ratio* in this domain is biological in nature. It is a search for a surplus, not of spirit or soul, but of life, for the individual who knows he is mortal, as well as for the group who knows he may perish. In that sense, the religious drive, as I say at the end of my *Feu sacré* ['sacred fire'] is biologically grounded [...] and therefore irrefutable, since it rests outside any logical alternative of what may be true or untrue, consistent or inconsistent.

The respective implications of these two positions are quite different from one another: in the first case, by returning to immanence in a disenchanted world, one could perhaps 'get out' of religion. In the second case, this would be impossible. The two definitions did not emphasise the same elements of the religious experience. Gauchet focused on the mental components and on representations; while Debray focused on human flesh. I am inclined to adopt the point of view of the latter, while trying to combine religious procedural knowledge in connection with bodily practices together with the corresponding verbalised knowledge. There is indeed something *physical* about religion. Naturally, there is also a psychic element. From a formal point of view, a religion, whichever it may be, is made of a number of practices concerning the life of the subject. These apply to the body and involve the use of objects and substances, accompanied by performative speech and bodily practices that transform the bodies and substances into something both real and imaginary, that belongs to some kind of transmission, is inalienable and connected with the origins of the subject. Also from a formal point of view, there is something of a religious nature when such practices and verbalisations are combined with the general offer of life and salvation goods and services that compete against one another. The adept can do their shopping here or there, depending on what sources of life seem most 'real' to them. "It is always in the name of something 'real' that one can order people about and produce them as believers," M. de Certeau wrote (1987: 57, transl. JPW). And is there anything easier to transform into something 'real' than a 'material' substance or object?

The priest takes bread and wine. He says "this is my body, this is my blood" while performing the appropriate gestures. In that very instant, for the believer, the bread and wine have 'really' become the body and blood of the Saviour. The followers who confess that the transformation has taken place, eat the bread and drink the wine. The Mankon king places red camwood powder (a crimson pigment) on the forehead or the shoulders of a woman while saying "this is good, the country is good", and the camwood powder becomes a substance of life which will act efficiently on the woman for her to conceive and become pregnant. These examples allow me to stress that nothing becomes 'real' except by the actions of an 'imaginary'. An atheist and a Catholic who would sit together in a church would perceive the same material objects, bodies and substances, but not the same 'reality'. Before the consecration, both will agree on the fact that what they see is 'really' a piece of bread

and a cup of wine. After the consecration, the Catholic will consider the bread and wine as the 'real' body and blood of Christ his saviour, whilst the atheist will still see 'real' bread and wine. The 'real' difference lies in their respective perceptions, not in the materiality of the facts. Yet this materiality is essential to the production of the 'real', as is the imaginary.

All the sacraments of the Christian churches address the body and are accompanied by performative words. This phenomenon is less conspicuous in the reformed churches than in the Orthodox and Catholic ones. Yet the Reformation failed to entirely dismiss the body and the substances from the core of religious practice. In the Orthodox and Catholic churches, baptism, the ordination of popes, priests and bishops, and the last sacraments proceed with ablutions and anointment; the Eucharist by eating and drinking. Marriage is validated by sexual intercourse, otherwise it is void. Penance implies the physical presence of priest and penitent (for example, it cannot be done by telephone). The clergy can be very talkative. However, when things become serious, they use few words and proceed with substances and bodily conducts.

The clergy has been accused of mortifying and despising the body of the faithful. There is a lot of truth in this indictment and it can be documented to some extent. Yet, it reveals the central importance of the body in the Christian tradition since it is thought that flesh will be resurrected. If the faithful commits a sin, this is necessarily embodied. As a result, the sin, which is accidental to the body of the subject, has to be eradicated from the body and by bodily practices. Sin and salvation inhabit the incarnated subject. These practices are based on a monist approach to the human subject. On that point again, Le Breton is mislead: in the so-called 'Judaeo-Christian' tradition, the body is not an object of dislike (as it was in Mani's dualistic traditions), since it is normally intended to experience resurrection, salvation and glory; the objects of dislike are the evils that inhabit the body. It is true, however, that Manichaeism, at times, may have contaminated some of the innumerable versions of Christianity.

If the vocabulary and the representations attached to the three main religions of the Book seem to be dualistic at face value ('body', 'soul', 'breath', 'ethereal body', 'mind', etc.) their anthropology and their practices are definitely monist in nature. However, this is not only true of the main religions. It is true of most, if not all religions: one fasts or banquets, undertakes pilgrimages, recites mantras and repetitive formulas, throws stones at the stele of Satan, intoxicates oneself with

drugs, dance or music, etc. Even the religion of Mani and his followers is quite ambiguous in that respect. From a *theoretical* point of view and if one takes its verbalisations at face value, it is clearly dualistic. From a practical point of view, by putting bodily practices and material substances at the centre of religious concerns, it cannot escape from a practical monism and from the general rule of any religion. In that respect, we can see that there may be a gap or even a contradiction between the verbalisations and the unconscious procedural knowledge. This point will be further developed later.

In that sense, the *practice* of any religion takes place within the confines of immanence, since it addresses the body, the life and the objects of the practitioner *in this world*. One cannot escape from this world, no more than one can escape from one's body or one's ancestors. Religion is subject to change. It may assume many unexpected expressions. However, insofar as it is an experience that cannot be falsified or verified, it is an enduring phenomenon. It all depends on how a shared perception may turn into a shared 'reality', using biological life and material things as the basic stuff from which to generate believers. Given the enormous development of industrial production of consumer goods, the modern religions of the Western world seem to involve more and more consumption in its various forms, including health care, scientific endeavour, the 'vital interests' of the country (in its very material form, like oil), or else, 'self-development', psychotherapy and even psychoanalysis mislead as a form of knowledge or a technology of comfort. If this is true, it is impossible to 'get out' of religion. J. Lacan (1974/2004: 29, transl. JPW) wrote:

> I am sure that when we will have had enough of rockets, television and all those damned empty [scientific] researches, we shall yet find something else to keep ourselves busy. It is a revival of religion, is it not? And what would make a better ravenous monster than religion? It is an enduring feast, enough to entertain us for centuries, as it has already been demonstrated.

The following are some performative sentences that come along with the proposed consumption of material goods: 'X [supermarket]: the real life', 'E.L., the beauty by definition', 'Everyday I preserve my health capital with Y', 'With the F. Method you will recover your freedom of movement and thought'; and there are believers that take all this as something 'real' and go shopping.

Material culture and political subjectivity

The three different debates described above all concern the 'human flesh'. All three lie at the heart of contemporary debates regarding social issues. In the end, all rest on a praxeological and cognitive approach to subjectivity by sensori-motor and material cultures in agency.

Pierre Bourdieu (1972), Paul Veyne (1991), Daniel Roche (1997), Michel Foucault (1994, 2001), Michel de Certeau (1987) have all contributed to this type of debate—each of them in his own way. The research group Matière à Penser (MàP or Matter for Thought) to which I belong, follows their school of thought. Political analysis received a powerful impetus from Jean-François Bayart and his research seminars at the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales (CERI).

From the point of view of the MàP group, the touchstone, or the discriminating parameter of any relevant approach of the 'human flesh' and of any process of political subjectivity appears to reside in 'motor and material culture'. In the framework of accepted paradigms in the social and human sciences, material culture in its relationship to motivity and bodily conducts escapes analysis. It is not the object of study, except for its sign value in a system of communication or connotation including the body, but not for its praxic value in a system of agency. The various publications of the MàP group have attempted to address this basic issue. J.-P. Warnier (1999, 2001, 2006), M.-P. Julien and J.-P. Warnier (eds, 1999), M.-P. Julien and C. Rosselin (2002, 2005), M.-P. Julien *et al.* (2002), J.-F. Bayart and J.-P. Warnier (eds, 2004) aimed at putting together a theoretical toolbox allowing one to construct and analyze this type of anthropological object. Following Foucault (1994, 2001), we consider that any power is addressed to the 'body' insofar as it aims at promoting its life (or inflicting its death), controlling it, disciplining it and winning the subject's consent. Power, in that perspective, is not limited to state power. Vast and intricate networks of action apply where the subjects perceive themselves as the objects of their actions, govern themselves and practice what Foucault called 'techniques of the self'. These networks, historically and socially shaped in specific ways, Foucault called 'governmentalities'.

These governmentalities subject people to a sovereignty. They shape and identify the subjects in certain ways that are consistent with the basic tenets of the historical context to which they belong. Every society, Foucault said, proposes and even prescribes to the subject a number of 'techniques of the self' by which people will work on their identity and

according to which they will govern themselves. These techniques of the self include the 'techniques of the body' to which Marcel Mauss (1936) devoted a famous essay, without being limited to them. Foucault did not make any reference to Mauss and it is not clear whether he had access to Mauss's text.

The term 'subjectivation', used by Foucault to designate both the subjection and the identification of the subject by the implementation of the 'techniques of the self', is ambiguous. It departs from its standard meaning in psychology, in which it just designates the ontogenesis of the subject. Foucault collapsed together the subjectivity and the identifications processes, the subject and the self.[6] One should not obsess about words, yet, conversely, one should avoid misunderstandings. In historical and anthropological analysis, there is a definite advantage in collapsing the subject and the self, the ontogenesis and the identifications of the subject. Power is directed towards gaining control of the subjects, their identifications, the way they govern themselves, and the way other subjects act at the point where they take themselves as the objects of their own agency.

As regards the notion of subject, Foucault did not have in mind the subject as seen by the humanism of the 1930s to 1960s—whether Christian or atheist—that is, a subject conscious of itself or its deeds, structured by the *cogito*, full of its identifications, and with a calling for freedom. This concept, as it has been shaped by contemporary philosophy all the way to the phenomenology of J.-P. Sartre and M. Merleau-Ponty, has dissolved under the scrutiny of human and social sciences. Its standard profile, so to speak, is not any longer consistent with what we knew at the end of the 20th century, Foucault said (1994, *D&E IV*: 52). The subject Foucault dealt with is the subject that is divided between 'I' and 'id' (the drives and the unconscious as repressed) which belongs with 'I' but is not 'I'. The subject is a subject not because he has achieved so much and is conscious of his thoughts, freedom and performances, but because he is divided, which makes him capable of identifications and of being subjected within the confines of symbolic relationships. We now know that the ego is not the master in his or her own house.

From the subject, let us return to the 'body'. 'Subjectivising governmentalities' address the body. Foucault did not elaborate on the

[6] My thanks to Zaki Strougo who drew my attention on this point.

notion of a 'body'—no more than did Mauss. It is the anatomical body which, following Berthelot, cannot be constructed into a sociological object. In the research group MàP, we have attempted to get out of this epistemological dead-end by shifting our interest from the 'body' to sensori-motor conducts. The body is essentially characterised by the fact that it is in motion. Motivity, in its turn, cannot operate without the permanent contribution of the seven senses, which, according to A. Berthoz (1997) are but one: the sense of movement. They operate in connection with each other to allow the central nervous system and the brain to perform the tasks it has been designed to perform throughout human phylogenesis in relationship to other subjects within a common environment. Furthermore, if there is no motivity without perception, and *vice versa*, neither goes without feelings and emotions that are both psychic and hormonal phenomena. Thus, the anthropological object that seems more relevant to my study than simply the 'body' is constituted by 'sensori-affective-motor conducts', although one cannot entirely disqualify the vocabulary of the 'body'. And, as already mentioned, the sensori-affective-motor conducts are systematically articulated with the material world.

This book assumes a specific place in the various publications of the MàP group. The majority of these consists of articles or edited volumes, with a strong theoretical emphasis illustrated by short ethnographic contributions. Until now, the members of the group have not attempted to test the praxeological approach to political subjectivity with a full-scale monograph. Therefore, there is not an equivalent to the many monographs that have tested and illustrated the strength of functionalist social anthropology, especially in Africa, or a structuralist approach to symbolic and thought systems. Not a single work has attempted to show that it was possible to construct a model of the political physiology of a given society thanks to a praxeological study of its sensori-motor and material culture and of its micro-technologies of power. Within the tradition of social anthropology, one knows how to analyse a society, its descent groups, social categories, power structure, conflicts, conflict-resolution procedures and political dynamics. By contrast, the physiology of subjection, the way the subjects are disciplined in their sensori-motor conducts and their identifications has hardly been scrutinised from an anthropological point of view, and on the basis of long-term fieldwork. Such an approach has only been suggested in short essays or unpublished monographs—by C. Rosselin (1998) on 'how to inhabit a single room', by M.-P. Julien (2002) on the manufacture of 'Chinese' furniture in Paris, by A. Jeanjean (1998) on sewage workers

in the town of Montpellier. With this book, my intention is to test this approach with a full-scale published monograph. It concerns the kingdom of Mankon, in the Northwest Province of Cameroon.

The 'pot-king'

Against the 'Magritte effect' which is an impediment to research, I will bring the debate down to the flesh, to the material substances, to perception, to gestures, to the techniques of the body. All such things are base materials. I will bring the debate down to materialities, as does R. Debray (1994) and his 'mediology' which I try to emulate; although, in my opinion, it is insufficiently liberated from its semiological matrix. I will not focus primarily on verbalised knowledge, representations and the structure of thought. I will concern myself with symbolism, by means of an analysis of sensori-motor conducts.

More specifically, I intend to show that a contemporary African kingdom operates on the basis of a number of embodied technologies of power. The king contains in his own body a number of substances, like those that are contained in any human body: breath, saliva, semen. These are transformed into life-substances by the dead monarchs and stored by the reigning king to be given out to his subjects. However, these bodily substances are multiplied and extended by other substances like raffia wine, palm oil and camwood powder used by the king to spray and smear on people and things. These substances are stored in a variety of royal containers illustrated by P. Harter (1986). They are perceived as extensions of the king's body, incorporated into his bodily conducts and, so to speak, his image of the body. When the king makes offerings to the dead monarchs and utters appropriate performative words while addressing them, his bodily and other royal substances are transformed into ancestral life substances, although it is never explicitly articulated. However, the sequence of bodily conducts show that, from a cognitive point of view, this is what the Mankon expect to take place. For example, the king intensifies the dispensation of substances after having addressed the dead elders of the kingdom. Thus, the monarch is what could be called a 'pot-king'. Corpulence befits him. His sexual life is that of a man of great potential and potency. He makes it a point to impregnate as many of his numerous wives as he can.

The monarch distributes his royal substances to all his people. He exhales, speaks out, sprays raffia wine with his mouth, anoints the skins, smears them with camwood, ejaculates. This is the 'burden of kingship',

as Frazer said. All the subjects of the kingdom receive the royal substances, either directly or by proxy. The technologies of power and the technologies of the subject focus on the treatment of skin, containers, openings, surfaces, actions of receiving, storing, closing down, opening up, pouring out, expelling, etc. The corresponding bodily conducts are propped against an abundant material culture by which the king, the notables and the ordinary subjects are surrounded. It diversifies and multiplies the opportunities of bodily storage and containment: drinking horns, calabashes, wooden or clay bowls for mixing oil and camwood, oil drums, bags, houses, the enclosure of the palace and the city, hedges, fences and gates of all kinds. This is how material culture in motion together with the sensori-motor conducts participates in a micro-technology of power which identifies the persons and the subjects to the city.

Contrary to the kind of research I conducted from 1971 to the mid-1980s, this detour via the bodily and material cultures keeps me clear of a functionalist approach to politics. I then analysed the Mankon kingdom within the confines of the paradigm of social anthropology. I charted the descent groups, the organisation of kinship, the institutions of the kingdom, the who-is-who of this micro-state. I studied conflicts and conflict resolution procedures and the rituals of the lineages, clans and kingdom. This scientific practice, together with half a century of field research, brought results; however, its scope was too short to catch the imagination of the political scientist or historian, that is, according to Marc Bloch, the human flesh or the *subjectivities* that are primarily at stake in relationships of power. The historian Paul Veyne (1991: 307–308, transl. JPW) made the point:

> Throughout the centuries, this subjectivity has been disputed, as have economic stakes or having a share in power (in the 16th century, the revolt of the educated Christians who read the Bible, against the pastoral authority of the Church, shed more blood than the labour uprisings three centuries later).

However, this statement can be qualified by asking whether the labour movements were not immersed in 'subjectivation' processes.

Taking into account the skin, perception, gestures, things and so on amounts to taking into account the subjectivities of the king, the notables, the women, the bachelors, etc. that are not made of the same stuff. The way they act, govern and produce themselves differs. It is not only a question of roles and statuses. It is a question of subjectivity,

of aesthetics and lifestyles that provide substance for politics and for religion.

I have had much opportunity to introduce to different audiences the 'pot-king' and the issues of sensori-motor *cum* material culture. Such audiences are easily convinced by this approach and by its relevance in the case of a contemporary African society, at the time of the spectacular 'return of the kings' in the forefront of African politics since around 1980. This return is correlated with the crisis of most post-independence African States. It has been discussed by C.-H. Perrot and F.-X. Fauvelle-Aymard (eds, 2003). The fact that Africans, in the past as well as today embody and materialise their technologies of power does not surprise anyone. Most people are willing to admit it, precisely because they are Africans, and because the Orientalist divide between them (Africans) and us (Westerners) is still so strong, despite its constant critique by modern anthropology.

The fact that I am an anthropologist encourages my peers, especially sociologists, to think that the object of my study does not have any relevance to their own research. Most of them are reluctant to consider that our Western societies may make use of practical repertoires of a kind exemplified by an African society. They find it hard to think that sensori-motor conducts may belong in essential ways to the microphysics of power in contemporary European democracies.

Yet, they may be wrong. If, as Foucault believed, any power addresses the body, and thus achieves the subjectivity of the members of the polity, is it not beneficial to wander through the exotic detour I propose in order to change our way of looking at issues in 21st century Western societies?

Royal anointing and spraying

December 1972, third day of the annual festival, at the end of the agricultural cycle. *Ngwa'fo III*, Mankon king, dances amongst his subjects. There are 200 or 300 of them. The king stands at six feet and can be seen well above the crowd. He is dressed in a colourful embroidered gown which goes down almost to his ankles. He wears a head-dress made of the tips of several elephant tails attached together. His face is enlightened with a permanent smile. He obviously enjoys being surrounded by and united with his people. He marks the rhythm with the fly-whisk that he holds in his left hand. In his right hand, he has a

splendid drinking cup, carved in a dwarf cow horn and adorned with coloured beads (see photo n° 1).

A palace steward, his head closely shaved, stands to his side and slightly behind him. He carries a calabash of raffia wine at shoulder height. He keeps a keen eye on the movements of the monarch. *Ngwa'fo* reduces his dancing to an almost static swing. He turns slightly towards the palace steward, holding his drinking horn. The servant pours raffia wine from the calabash and fills up the horn. The king takes a sip and drinks it. He fills his mouth once more and dances more actively. He takes his time. Men and women congregate around him and bow gently.

The king takes a deep breath, throws out his chest, and blows vigorously the content of his mouth straight onto the crowd. A cloud of milky mist falls on the heads, chests and arms of the people. The wine falls on a dozen people. *Ngwa'fo* smiles again and resumes his dancing. He looks keenly at the crowd. He takes more wine in his mouth and expels successively two clouds of droplets on the dancers who had not benefited from the first spraying, including the anthropologist who was taking photographs (photo n° 2).

In 1999, *Anyɛ'* (pseudonym) left the hamlet of his parents to study at the University of Dschang. His maternal grandmother stood up facing him. She took his hands in hers, crossed and uncrossed their forearms a couple of times and said: "May your eyes remain wide open. May your mind be clear. If someone wishes evil to you, may he bite the dust." As she was saying this, she sprayed her saliva on each of her grandson's hands.

The gesture of spraying belongs to the sensori-motor culture of the Mankon and is called '*fama*' (to spray). Human beings are not the only ones who can spray. Every Mankon knows that if he meets a chameleon on his way, he should be first to 'spray' the animal. If the chameleon, a very slow and clumsy animal, whose tongue projects itself as fast as a lightning, is faster than the Mankon, the latter, it is said, may contract leprosy—a terrible disease of the coetaneous envelope. Royal game (the python, the otter, the elephant, the buffalo, and, above all, the leopard) are well known for their spraying. The monitor lizard is also said to spray.

In those instances, we have a number of gestures, performed by the king, but also by commoners, and even by animals (especially those who are considered as 'persons'—*ngwon*). These gestures establish a relationship between subjects (the king and the dancers, elders and

Photo n° 1. King *Ngwa'fo* dances, while holding his drinking horn (December 1972).

Photo n° 2. The same, spraying raphia wine with his mouth.

young people, human beings and animal 'persons'). They involve a number of liquids or meteoric substances: breath, saliva, raffia wine, or a mixture of them. Other substances may be added to them, like chewed pepper, whisky, etc. In different contexts, these substances are put into contact with each other due to the fact that raffia wine is mostly contained in the drinking horn of the king or one of his subjects, who takes it to his lips. In his mouth it mixes with saliva and is blown out with his breath; or else, can be given to another person to drink.

These substances are projected upon certain surfaces (the skin of humans or animals, or the surface of certain objects, like the shrine of the dead elders). One should notice that such gestures are seldom accompanied by verbal comments. True, *Anyɛ*'s grandmother spoke before spraying her saliva on his hands. However, what she said did not constitute a comment of her gesture, even though gesture and speech related to each other. Most of the time, the gestures are performed without any verbal comment. Yet, they belong to the sensori-motor repertoire of all the subjects, and everyone *knows* them as part of a non verbalised procedural knowledge.

In1988, I discovered that, at least in my view, all social and political relationships of the Mankon were materialised in substances and containers, and embodied in their sensori-motor conducts.

My first enquiries in Mankon date back to 1971. More than 15 years lapsed before I found out that the Grassfields technologies of power were best analysed in terms of container-bodies, of sensori-motor culture, of substances and material culture. At the time, I was not prepared to consider politics and power from the point of view of sensori-motor and material cultures. My social origins (the wealthy Catholic bourgeoisie of the 16th district of Paris, with provincial roots in Normandy and Champaign) pulled me in two opposite directions. On the one hand, it put much value in things considered 'spiritual' while neutralising and naturalising an overwhelming material culture. The discourse diverted the attention from the material and bodily mediations and from the class differences and identifications. I thank Roland Barthes and Pierre Bourdieu who analysed this kind of social phenomenon with such efficiency.

On the other hand, although today I consider myself as an atheist, I have been brought up in a devoutly Catholic family. I therefore cannot subscribe to what is said by a number of social scientists who deal with religion but have not had a thoroughly analysed personal experience of it, or conducted extensive fieldwork. Religious practice involves the

body and is addressed to it (like all the sacraments). I have never recognised the Catholicism of my childhood in the analyses stigmatising its 'dualism' as evidence beyond discussion. If, in the 1970s, someone had told me 'religion is (also) physical', I would have most probably agreed. From that point of view, the bourgeois culture in which I was brought up was to some extent inconsistent and, as with every culture, made of contradictions that operated as an ideology. It had a potential which, by deconstruction, could develop in different directions. Or, in other words, it was made of a vast procedural, mostly unconscious, knowledge, that was not entirely in tune, to say the least, with the verbalised knowledge that came along with it; more on that question in chapter 11.

My education at an upper-class Jesuit public school in Paris, the Sorbonne and the University of Pennsylvania did not offer much in terms of changing this state of affairs. Except that at the University of Pennsylvania, something was going on which led, in the 1980s to a 'return to the things' under the impulse of Igor Kopytoff (whom I was fortunate enough to have as my supervisor), Arjun Apadurai and Brian Spooner. It led to the publication of an edited volume on *The Social Life of Things* (A. Appadurai, ed., 1986). Although I had already left the University, I was informed of these developments.

I did not choose my object of research, and I cannot be accused of any elective affinity with it. When I arrived at the University of Pennsylvania, I had never contemplated doing fieldwork. I was interested in the theoretical and critical potential of anthropology. Igor Kopytoff confronted me with the necessity of doing fieldwork and directed me to Mankon whose king had asked Elizabeth Chilver to send him an ethnographer (we shall see why in chapter 7). Until then, nothing could have induced me to become interested in material things. The dominant paradigm within which I was to write my dissertation on the Mankon kingdom was that of social anthropology, as applied to Africa, in the tradition of M. Fortes, E.E. Evans-Pritchard and others, updated by contributions as diverse as those of E. Leach, of American cultural anthropology, and of the dynamic approach of Georges Balandier and M. Gluckman.

None of the current paradigms (certainly not structuralism in its different versions, nor French Marxism) could open my eyes on sensorimotor cultures. The exception could have been the cultural technology of A. Leroi-Gourhan (1943, 1945) and its more recent—mostly Marxist—versions. However, it dealt with objects only in the context of technological work, as means and ends of an efficacious action on

material substances. However, from a retrospective point of view, I think that my blindness did not come first and foremost from my personal trajectory or from the theoretical paradigms in the 1960s to 1080s. It came from two widely shared phenomena. Firstly, the 'Magritte effect' which is overwhelming in anthropology, and results in putting a premium on verbalisations as the medium of enquiry and operates an uncritical confusion between facts and their representations. Secondly, the fact that procedural knowledge concerning the use of material culture belongs to the motor or cognitive unconscious and, as such, is not easily brought to explicit, verbalised and conscious knowledge. Maurice Bloch (1995) is one of few anthropologists who have pointed out the implications of such a state of affairs for the practice of ethnology in the light of the cognitive sciences. To sum up, I do not think I received the impulse from any personal disposition, nor from any current anthropological paradigm, except perhaps the contribution of G. Balandier on everything dynamic, that is, on movement. The impulse, in fact, came from elsewhere.

In the mid-1980s, I was invited by J.-F. Bayart and P. Geschiere to develop the research I had conducted on the economic history of the Cameroon Grassfields to the present, and to work on the trajectories of accumulation of businessmen and women originating in the Grassfields. In order to respond to this assignment, I teamed up with Dieudonné Miaffo (see Miaffo and Warnier, 1993), himself an anthropologist, who was born in the Grassfields. Miaffo had become my friend. He died prematurely in 1992. I owe him a debt for having drawn my attention to a pamphlet entitled *The truth of the Ancestors' cult in Africa among the Bamileke* (*La vérité du culte des Ancêtres en Afrique chez les Bamiléké*, 1975) and written by two Bamileke Catholic priests, Fathers Tchouanga-Tiegoum and Ngangoum. The Bamileke occupy the eastern part of the Grassfields, formerly under French mandate. They belong to the same linguistic group as the Mankon, the Mbam-Nkam, and their kingdoms are similar to those of the western part of the highlands. The two priests proposed to convince the Catholic hierarchy and the faithful that the 'skull cult' or the 'cult of the ancestors' is in no way adverse to the Catholic faith and practice. The gist of their argument rests in the fact that any subject, even if he is baptised within the Catholic Church, cannot distance himself from the very origin of his own life. Consequently, he must address his dead elders time and again in order to receive from them their life essence. He must address them through the 'family head' (p. 33) "who is a vital piggy bank of sorts for the whole

family: in him resides the fullness of the blood that has been received since the creation and through a chain of ancestors".[7]

The priests did not say that the father could be *compared* with a vital piggy bank. He *is* a piggy bank. His body is a container of physical substances. This is not a metaphor, it is a fact. Not a single Mankon source had ever expressed verbally this experience. To me, this text was like an Epiphany of the 'pot-king', under the auspices of religion. The 'piggy-bank' allowed me to perceive the accumulation practices of businessmen under a new light. It is now time to give more background information on the Grassfields kingdoms.

Mankon and the Grassfields kingdoms

Mankon is a small kingdom located in the western highlands of Cameron.[8] In 2003, it numbered about 60,000 persons and in 1900, at the onset of colonisation, probably around 6,000 to 8,000. Over the centuries, some 150 micro-kingdoms (mostly referred to as 'chiefdoms'—see map 1) settled in the Grassfields and engaged in a permanent process of re-arrangement. Each of these political entities federates a number of descent groups or kindred of prominent men under the leadership of a monarch who assumes the status of *primus inter pares*, with a special relationship to the mythical founding fathers of his kingdom which gives him the aura of a sacred King.[9] The components of the kingdom

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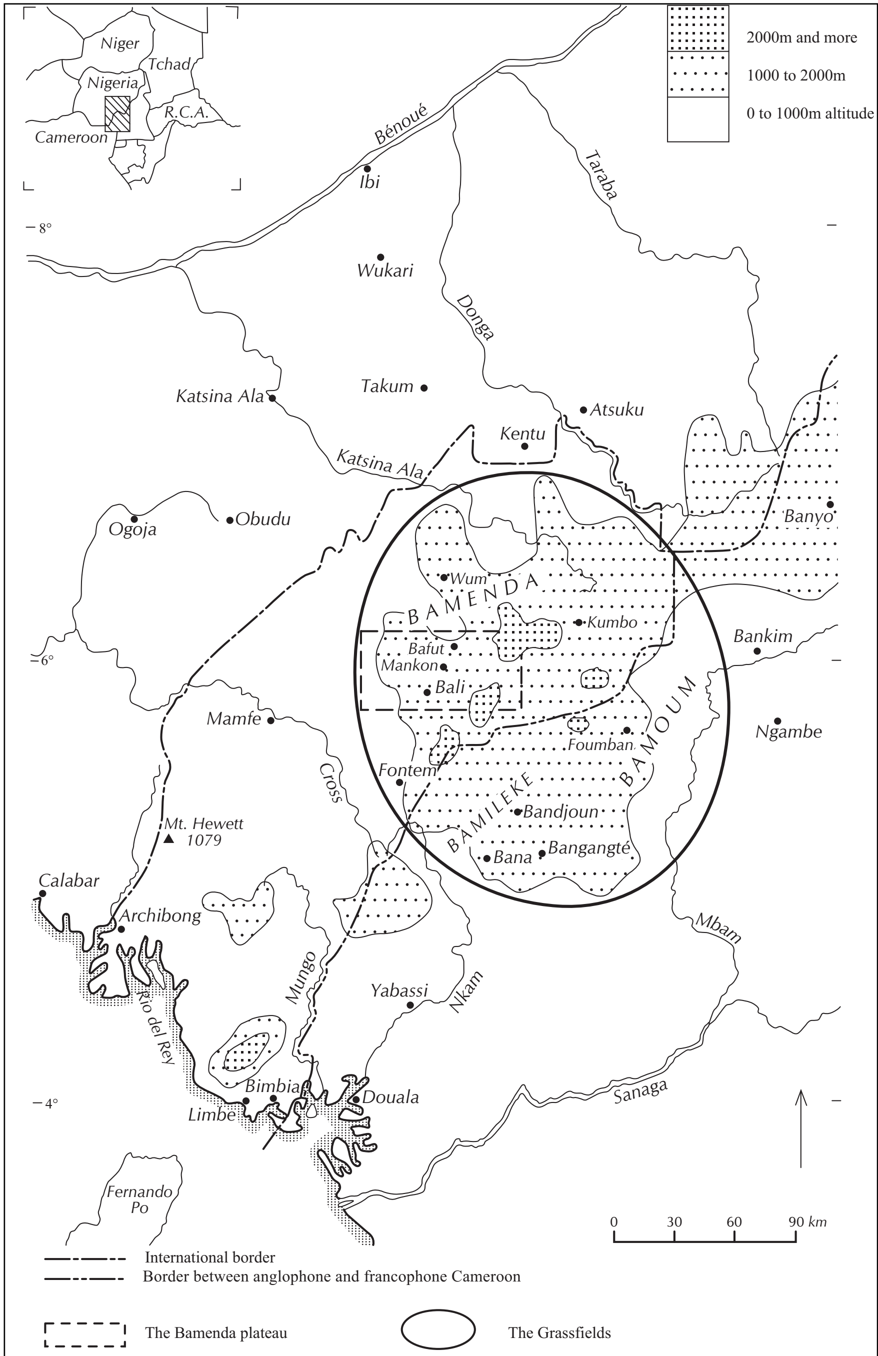
[7] In the original French: "Le chef de famille est une espèce de tirelire vitale de toute la famille: en lui se trouve la plénitude de sang reçu depuis la création en passant par une chaîne d'ancêtres."

[8] The data on which this book is based were collected in a dozen trips over a period of about 50 months spent in Mankon between 1971 and 2003. During two of those trips (in 1972–1974, and in 1977–1978) I spent a total of 36 months there. Consequently, most of the events I refer to in this book date back to the 1970s. A four-month stay, in 2002–2003 (with the financial support of UMR 8099 CNRS-Paris V "Langues, Musiques, Sociétés") allowed me to update or check a number of observations, and to assess changes. Please refer to the acknowledgments and sources section.

[9] Whereas the Grassfields languages designate the king almost everywhere (with a few dialectical variations) by the word *fo* (anglicised as *fon*), its translation in the European languages of the colonisers raises a few problems. The word 'chief' has the legitimacy of its colonial use since the beginning of the British mandate, when it translated the German word *Hauptling*. However, it does not prompt the comparison with African kingship on which there exists a vast, more or less scientific, literature—especially about 'sacred' kinship. This literature has been thoroughly reviewed by Feeley-Harnick (1985). Amongst its most prominent contributors, one finds Frazer (1911–1915), but also L. de Heusch (1972, 1982, 1987, 1997), A. Adler (2000), and many others. Moreover, the



Map 1. The Grassfields of Cameroon.

are federated or woven together by the threads of the many lodges, associations and councils the members of which are recruited from all components of the kingdom: the council of the notables (often numbering seven or nine—a conventional figure not necessarily in accordance with their actual number), associations of diviners and medicine men, warriors, hunters or traders. Groups of musicians and masked dancers, each with a name, a musical and choreographic repertoire and specific paraphernalia. They are part of the corporate estate of the descent groups, but may be found, under the same names, and with the same repertoires in several genealogically unrelated descent groups, thus creating transversal links between the components of the kingdom.

The king's palace provides a scenery to the federal constitution of the polity. It shelters the household of the monarch. The latter maintains matrimonial alliances with all the groups that constitute the kingdom and also with the neighbouring kingdoms in the region. (The Mankon king had around 150 wives at the end of the 19th century. His successor had about 50 when I met him for the first time in 1971.) In the past, the number of male stewards or retainers equalled that of the wives. To this enormous household were attached various institutions of the kingdom: the king in council and various lodges of medicine men, the poison ordeal, the hunters, etc. Two important areas are attached to the palace: the marketplace where people meet every week and the dancing field where they assemble around the monarch for the annual festival at the end of the agricultural cycle, and once in a while, during the rest of the year. The festival is the occasion during which the king regenerates the body politic by giving out the ancestral life substances in a number of different ways—the gesture of 'spraying' being one of them. The functioning of the kingdom is akin to that of the other African sacred kingships. We owe their last studies to Luc de Heusch (1972, 1982, 1987, 1997) and Alfred Adler (1982, 2000): the monarch mediates between the cosmic order of the ancestors and the prosperity of his people. His body and his health warrant the reproduction of the city; the theories of 'sacred kingship' will be discussed later on.

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word 'chief' does not prompt the comparison with other—mostly European—kings, which may be highly relevant especially with reference to the moot question of the king's bodies. One could add that, before colonisation, each king was a 'sovereign'. To date, he is a 'monarch' in the strict sense of the term, that is, the single origin or principle of ancestral substances in his kingdom. Consequently, depending on the context, I will use one or the other of the following terms: *fo*, 'chief', 'king', 'sovereign', 'monarch'.

In the 19th century, most, if not all, the kingdoms of the Grassfields formed clearly localised and defined residential groups. The largest of them, such as *Nso'* and the Bamoum kingdom studied by Cl. Tardits (1980), were the exception, since they ruled over several archipelagos of smaller residential groups and chieftaincies connected together through a complex network of alliances under the rule of a clearly defined capital.

These societies were, and still are, non-egalitarian. The social hierarchy is conspicuously exemplified by the practice of polygamy. At the beginning of the 20th century, the kings were not the only prominent men to practice it. Descent group heads and palace notables commonly had one or two dozens of wives. The sex ratio at birth being normal and the practice of infanticide unknown, polygamy entailed that half of the men never married or had sex. However, until the 1920s, the slave trade reduced the number of adult men in such a way that a calculation of the number of men of marrying age could produce the illusion that every single man could expect to marry some day—an expectation which is clearly proven to be wrong by the genealogies I collected. All in all, about one in three men did not marry or reproduce. In most kingdoms, there was no male initiation that could automatically promote successive cohorts of boys to the status of marriageable adults. As a result, they were permanently locked into a status of sub-adult boys from which they were extracted only if their descent group decided to give them a wife and allow them to inherit a title that would become vacant when its holder died. Those who did not benefit from such a promotion remained *ad vitam* in the subordinate status of unmarried cadet (called *takwe* in Mankon). The bachelors, and to a much lesser extent, the women, crowded the lower ranks of the hierarchy.

This short presentation provides a rough sketch that irons out local variations and summarises the numerous studies of about 50 anthropologists and historians of the Grassfields since the 1940s. If we add to their achievements those of the geographers, archaeologists, linguists and environmentalists who worked in the Grassfields, we speak of a vast amount of documentation on the social and political organisation of those kingdoms, kinship systems, agricultural practices in relationship with the ecosystem, the regional economic specialisation, the exchange networks, the trade in luxury goods between kings and notables, art, languages, historical change over the last couple of centuries, against the background of a much deeper chronology dating back to the Neolithic and the iron age. The wealth of documentation at hand, and

even more so, the multiplicity of disciplinary approaches, underscores a remarkable consensus concerning the hierarchy and social inequality that characterise the Grassfields kingdoms.

I propose to analyse those hierarchies on the basis of a whole range of data so far unexploited: those that concern the gestures and sensorimotor repertoires of the subjects illustrated above with the example of the spraying (*fama*), and that also concerns the material objects and substances on which such conducts are propped. The facts that the king stores raffia wine and camwood powder in specific containers, that he projects his breath, saliva and wine on his subjects, that he had some 150 wives a century ago, and that he had intercourse with all his wives of child-bearing age, is consonant with the fact that his own body operates as a container of large capacity in which those substances are stored. Each descent group head operates the same way in his own lineage or clan as regards his own ancestral substances, while acting as an intermediary for the royal substances flowing out of the palace.

The hierarchy and inequality of Grassfields societies match the circulation of substances from one body to the next. The king alone contains them all. The unmarried cadets contain nothing and receive what is given to them. They are symbolically (that is effectively) sterile and empty. By necessity, and from an ontological point of view, they lie at the bottom of the hierarchy of communicating vessels the summit of which is occupied by the dead elders. My materialistic approach to the hierarchy does not invalidate a 'structural-functionalist' analysis of the kingdom. What it does is bring forth the technologies of power that are implemented. What seems important to me is to show that the cadets provided the notables and the king with goats and palm oil, and that they were in return paid back with a spray of raffia wine on their skin. I wish to show that, in this exchange of gifts, the cadets thought they were the winners, since royal saliva is priceless, whereas goats and palm oil fetch a certain limited price on the marketplace. Thus, I wish to take into account the containers, houses, thresholds, enclosures, openings, doors and all the gestures that are made to open, close, pour in and out, cross over, retain, store, spray, anoint, etc.

This book is only marginally concerned with the 'structure of thought', verbalised knowledge and representations. Or else, to pick up on what Mauss said, quoting M. Halbwachs (who seem to have borrowed the expression from R. Descartes), it deals with the ideas 'that are thought with one's fingers'. That is, precisely, what procedural knowledge is all about. It is a very practical book on a background

provided by the cognitive sciences. It is a treatise of things, gestures and images, but also of the cognitive elements which articulate the sensori-motor and the material cultures. Yet, this book is not devoid of concepts. Indeed, concepts are greatly needed to analyse concrete things and cognitive processes. They are needed all the more since procedural knowledge and bodily practices usually escape verbalisation and since, for commonsensical wisdom, they belong with the logistics of daily life and there is not much to be learned from them. They seem to be commonplace. As anthropological objects, they do not enjoy the prestige and legitimacy of a kinship system, a myth or a symbolic construction, which, obviously, belong with conscious thought, the *logos*, and speech.

The two faces of the 'pot-king'

Technologies of power—whatever the specific shape they assume in any given society—are effective only if they are institutionalised and shared by a vast majority of subjects. This includes conflicts, change, or even subjectivity wars, provided they do not tip over the limit leading to a deep societal crisis. In Foucauldian terms, let us say that the Grassfields kingdoms are characterised by a governmentality of containers which implies that the subjects identify with their body and their skin on which they will focus their concern to govern themselves, to take care of themselves, and onto which the actions of their entourage, of the notables and the king will be directed. More specifically, the subjects will rub their skin with oil, camwood and medicines. They will ingest specific foods and substances and will receive the spraying of the king. Facing the 'pot-king' we find 'skin-subjects'.[10]

The kingdom provides each subject with specific 'techniques of the body' or what Foucault called 'techniques of the self', which help the subjects to identify, by constantly working on and with containers, surfaces, openings and contents to which they are assimilated and which they embody in their sensori-motor conducts.

The king himself, like a *Janus bifrons*, is at the same time a subject and a monarch. Insofar as he is a subject, he is subjected to the gov-

[10] In French, '*pot*' (for pot), and '*peau*' (for skin) are pronounced exactly the same way. King and subjects are '*roi-pot*' and '*sujets-peaux*', pot and skin at the same time.

ernmentality of containers just as any Mankon subject. Insofar as he is a king, he is the source or the origin of a system of material provisioning of ancestral substances. His body is the focus of a number of compelling techniques aimed at managing the reception, storage, or provisioning mediated by him.

The following chapters will reflect the two faces of the pot-king: the subjective, more self-centred face, and the public one. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 will illustrate various practices that operate as 'techniques of the self' which identify the subjects with their skins as containers. Starting with chapter 5, I will examine the technologies directly associated with the exercise of kingship. They are essentially focused on closure, reception or provisioning of ancestral substances, the articulation between the different bodies of the king, the excretion of bodily and, so to speak, political wastes, and the techniques of succession from one generation to the next.

Mankon is an historical kingdom. It took part in all the regional dynamics in the 18th and 19th centuries, in connectin with the world market (see Warnier, 1985a). For the more recent period, the personal trajectory of the king illustrates the historical setting. *Ngwa'fo III* was born *circa* 1920. He graduated from the University of Ibadan, in Nigeria, as an agricultural engineer. He was recruited as a civil servant by the Ministry of Agriculture where he served until he succeeded his father in 1959. He then started a brilliant political career by refusing to sit on the House of Chiefs where he had a seat by constitutional right, ran for elections and was elected a member of the House of Representatives of Western Cameroon. A staunch supporter of President Ahidjo, he became president of the regional section of the Cameroon National Union (CNU), accepted reunification with Eastern Cameroon in 1972, was elected a member at the newly formed National Assembly, and then supported President Biya's Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Camerounais (RDPC). Besides, he is a prominent businessman, with interests in various local business firms, plantations, livestock breeding, etc. He practices the 'straddling' strategy so typical of contemporary African elites. He presents himself as a fully modernising king from the economic, technological and cultural points of view. One of his last moves was to provide his palace with a museum and a documentation centre, with their website (www.museumcam.org/mankon). He fully participates in the spectacular 'return of the kings' in the forefront of African politics, following the more or less permanent crisis in the 'construction' of most post-independence African states, if not

to their 'formation', to which *Ngwa'fo* fully participates. This 'return of the kings' was analysed in a book edited by C.-H. Perrot and F.-X. Fauvelle-Aymard (2003). The present study does not deal with the businessman and the politician, however interesting they may be. The focus will be on the king alone, because the repertoires of wealth and power accumulation are predicated on kingship, the most central of *Ngwa'fo*'s three roles. It is also, paradoxically, the one that is at the core of his invention of an African modernity.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SUBJECTS AS CONTAINERS

J. Laplanche and J.-P. Pontalis (1967: 187) give the following definition of the identification process: "It is a psychological process through which a subject[1] assimilates an aspect, a property, an attribute of another subject, and transforms itself totally or partially on the basis of the model provided by the former. Personality constitutes and differentiates itself by a series of identifications." As we shall see, people can also identify with objects.

A pot-king is a monarch that identifies with a container and behaves as such. If this is the case, it puts a premium on similar identifications by his subjects. They must embody the corresponding sensori-motor conducts. Otherwise, there would be a mismatch between them and the king, and possibly conflicts of identifications. The bodily conducts of the pot-king would not be in gear with the body politic. His saliva, so to speak, would go wasted. Similarly, if the subjects did not share the repertoires allowing them to tune into each other through what Foucault called a "device" (*dispositif*) made of material contraptions, sensori-motor conducts and systems of actions and reactions, including relations of production, then, this kind of mismatch would generate a cacophony of identifications and subjectivities.

Consequently, if a monarch is a pot-king, one can hypothesise that, insofar as his subjects act together with him, they are preferably constructed as envelopes or containers, and that the Mankon kingdom presents them with an array of practices to identify with and maintain their identifications. Foucault (1989: 134) called these "techniques of the self", that is, "procedures that are probably common in every civilisation and are proposed or prescribed to individuals, in order to fix their identity, maintain or transform it, according to a number of goals, and this, by means of control of oneself by oneself or of knowledge of oneself by oneself". One cannot hypothesise that such "techniques of the self" are fully consistent for a given subject or a given society. We

[1] The term "subject" is used with the *caveat* mentioned in chapter 1.

shall see that there are conflicts of subjectivity. However, we will start with the areas of consistency that are defined thanks to the descent groups, insofar as they give birth to the subjects, nurture them and provide them with "techniques of the self" according to which they can act upon themselves.

Mankon consists of 32 patrilineages belonging to 9 exogamous clans. Each clan or lineage is a corporate group headed by a "father of the descent group" who manages the corporate estate of the group and his rights on persons and things. Descent rules are patrilineal within the clan and the lineage. However, the Mankon have matrigroups placing each subject at the meeting point between matrilines and patrilines that transmit elements of inheritance from various sides. Each subject, for example, has a privileged relationship with his MoFa (*tama*, i.e. "father [of the] mother"), that is, on the mother's side, because the *tama* is the man who provided his daughter as a wife to the patrilineage in which the subject was born, and as a mother to the subject. More details on Mankon kinship were mentioned in three past publications (Warnier, 1975, 1983, 1985a). The few details mentioned here suffice to analyse as a case study the identification of people as surfaces and containers in their kindred.

A case of bridewealth settlement at Foba'*s*[2]

At the end of September 1973, a young man named *Tsi* Samuel died. The burial and the funeral ceremony took place in the compound of his father, Solomon. The latter was about 50 years old. He had eight wives. *Tsi* was young. His death caused deep emotion and bereavement.

His father consulted with the diviners (*ngwon nikwab* = "person [of] divination") within a few days of *Tsi*'s death. The conclusions Solomon and his agnates drew from what the diviner said were twofold: Solomon had indeed paid bride-wealth for *Maangye Bi*, the mother of the deceased, but that he began living with her before having completed the payments. He was instructed by the diviner to repeat the last payments and to have the MoFa and the MoMoFa of the dead young man (that is, his *tama*, and the *tama* of his mother), anoint *Maangye*

[2] In this case-study, all the names have been replaced by pseudonyms, as some of the persons referred to are alive.

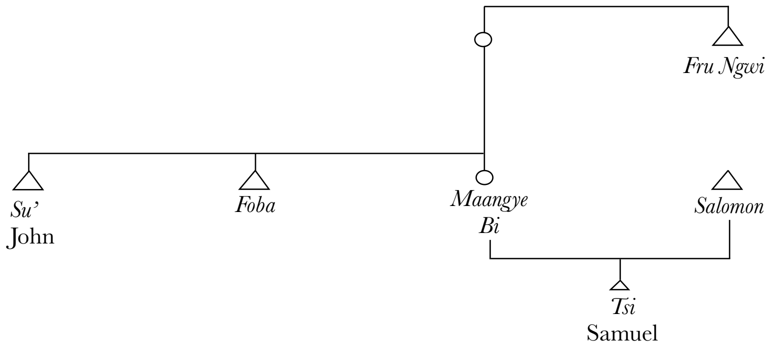

Fig. 1. The genealogy of *Tsi*.

Bi, as is usually done before the bride and the groom begin to live together. Solomon had to give the last bride-wealth gifts to the two men (actually to their successors) and to their female full siblings. For each of the two men, he had to give a fowl, a calabash of raffia wine, five lumps of salt and 500 Francs CFA. To the women, he had to give bundles containing a plantain stew, cooked with meat and palm oil—a standard marriage gift.

Then, the father of *Maangye Bi* (actually his successor, half-sibling of *Maangye*) and her MoFa had to anoint her with a mixture of palm oil and camwood. On the basis of the bodily conducts observed, I would say (the informants would not) that this is a means to produce a wife by working on her skin in order to shape a healthy container. In other words, the divination performed by the diviner and the interpretation given by Solomon and his agnates suggested to accomplish the last steps of any normal marriage procedure.

During the process of divination following the death of *Tsi*, a second issue came to the fore. It was a conflict within the descent group of *Foba*, the maternal grandfather of *Tsi*, between *Foba* and one of his classificatory half-siblings called *Tamafo*. *Tamafo* had paid a visit to *Foba* a few months before *Tsi* died. In the evening, the two men shared a meal before parting for the night. But instead of going to the house that had been assigned to him, *Tamafo* tried to join one of *Foba*'s wives and to spend the night with her. She was annoyed, raised hell and *Tamafo* was expelled from *Foba*'s compound. It was such a scandal that *Tamafo* never dared to meet *Foba* again until the death of the young man. The diviner suggested that this conflict might have contributed to the death of *Tsi*, although, from a structural point of view, it is difficult to establish any connection between the two events.

The diviner seems to have followed two different lines of interpretation. Firstly, he thought that the death of *Tsi* might have resulted from something wrong in alliance relationships causing a negative disposition with the maternal grand-father of the young man—we would say a structural one—not necessarily associated with conscious ill-feelings on the side of the latter. This is standard interpretation in such cases, extensively analysed by Pradelles de Latour (1991) in the case of the neighbouring Bamileke. Secondly, he must have thought that the death of *Tsi* could also be explained by the conflict between *Foba* and *Tamafo*, that had caused conscious ill-feelings echoing the subjectivity of *Foba* to the extent that they affected his relationship with his grandson. If this were the case, a libation to the ancestors should suffice to settle the matter. In brief, the diviner seems to have followed a more structuralist line of interpretation, as well as a more interactionist one.[3] This double interpretation is nothing exceptional in Mankon. In various proportions it characterises all the diagnoses given by diviners.

Perhaps the reader will think that my story is unnecessarily complicated and that a simpler case would have done better; I would agree. However, in 30 years of field research, I have never come across a case that was simple and straightforward. One can see that the diviner amalgamated two unrelated components of the situation (the conflict *Foba/Tamafo* and the structural relationship between a maternal grandfather and his grandchild). By doing so, the diviner distributed the wrongs equally between the two parties: wife givers and wife takers. If he had insisted on a structuralist explanation, he would have put all the blame on Solomon alone, since he took *Maangye Bi* with him before having completed the bride-wealth payments. By putting the blame of such a

[3] This plurality of local interpretative inclinations is seldom mentioned in anthropological literature, as this tends to homogenise a given culture. However, there are exceptions. An example is provided by Richard Fardon's (1990) monograph of the Chamba. Two of his (illiterate) informants clearly presented diverging interpretative inclinations: "*Tilesime*'s analytic turn of mind was roughly 1960s Manchester processualism: he was good on transactionalism, well versed in network theory and had a keen eye for latent function" (p. 18). Another informant, *Dura*, "exploited many of, what we call, the symbolic codes which *Tilesime* and his friends were predisposed to downplay: associations between colour and gender, between ritual and thermal change." "*Dura* explained as if he had spent a lifetime absorbing structuralism at the feet of Luc de Heusch" (p. 19). As a matter of fact, L. De Heusch (1982: 14) notes that the Kuba have diverging views concerning kingship. Some of them share a more structuralist view in the same vein as Radcliffe-Brown, whereas others are more in line with the views of Frazer.

serious mishap on both the wife takers and the wife givers, the diviner made sure that no one would incur a loss of face and that everyone had to make an effort to patch things up. The methodological conclusion that can be drawn is clearly in favour of concrete case studies. When working on the verbalised norm and not on concrete cases, the ethnographer misses such intricate practices and the social dynamics behind the application of the norm. This is one of the limitations of structuralism which is better equipped to study the systems behind the verbalised norm than social processes and transactions.

All this suggests that we miss part of the story. Normally, *Tsi* should have stayed clear of the conflict between *Foba* and *Tamafo*. He had nothing to do with it. He probably took sides, or either one of the two men tried to involve him. We do not know how *Foba* and *Tamafo* settled the case in such a way that they could address the dead elders "with one mouth" when performing a libation according to the diviner's instructions.

Working on envelopes

On October 17th 1973, less than three weeks after the death of *Tsi*, his father Solomon, together with seven people of his entourage, paid a formal visit to *Foba*, the maternal grandfather of the dead young man. There were five people with *Foba*. *Fru Ngwi*, the maternal grandfather of *Maangye Bi* (actually his successor) was present because he had to be, but he was alone. Altogether, 16 persons crowded the single room of *Foba*'s house, including the ethnographer who accompanied Solomon and one of his sons.

The 16 persons sat all around the room. I was seated by the door next to Solomon and his son—a good place from where to observe and take photographs. I greeted *Foba* and *Fru Ngwi*, expressed my sympathy, told them my interest in the customs of Mankon (*mbom ala'a*, in Pidgin: "country fashion") and requested permission to take photographs and to tape-record the performance. Permission granted. Solomon took the gifts out of his bag and spread them on the ground in front of him.

Listening to the tape and watching the photographs 30 years later, I can see how tense was the atmosphere at the beginning of the encounter. All the protagonists avoided each other's gaze. Solomon looked tired. He was leaning back on the wall and kept silent. At the time, he was

suffering from a stomach ulcer. He refused the raffia wine, preferring to sip once in a while from a bottle of Fanta he held in his hand.

I was ill at ease. Was my presence unwelcome? There was no sign of that, except when the women asked me not to take photographs when they removed their shirts to receive the mixture of oil and camwood. If I had not been there, I thought, the two parties would have been facing each other in the absence of a third party. This is the privileged place of the diviner. Was this the reason why Solomon had invited me to join in?

The master of ceremony was *Su'* John, a classificatory half-sibling of *Foba*—a middle aged jocular man. He took it upon himself to break the ice, and to face the embarrassment of the other people. He made himself busy. For the time being, there was nothing to say, just a number of things to do that at face value seemed somewhat unimportant. The first gestures he did were to remove from the hearth (at the centre of the room) a large aluminium pot in which a stew of plantains, meat and palm oil had been cooking for quite a while. He put it aside and replaced it by another pot of similar dimensions, about 30 litres, that he filled with the content of several calabashes of raffia wine that the men, including Solomon, had brought, so that the produce of several households were blended together in a single container. Raffia wine is the standard drink in Mankon and it is associated with all kinds of sensori-motor practices and symbolisations. *Su'* then decanted raffia wine in smaller calabashes of 2 to 3 litres each. He gave one to each of the titled men in the assembly, except Solomon who did not drink wine. Once this was done, he bleached a dozen banana leaves on the hearth in order to make them supple. He put two of them on the ground, turned the stew with a ladle and emptied a full ladle of stew on the banana leaves. With the help of Solomon who had offered the stew, he folded the leaves and tied them up carefully in a bundle. He did it all over again half a dozen times and then lined up on the ground as many neatly tied and leak-proof parcels to be given to the women who had claim on the husband's stew.

We had not been in the house for more than half an hour and the subjects had already engaged in a number of sensori-motor conducts focused on containers. The 16 persons had crossed the high threshold of the single room and had congregated together within the envelope provided by the four walls. Solomon had opened his bag and had removed the gifts. *Su'* had blended the content of several calabashes of raffia wine in a single pot, had divided it into several smaller decanters,

and had distributed the content of the stew pot in half a dozen bundles ready to be taken away. However, this was only an 'appetiser' in a performance during which the work on containers, envelopes, the openings, the skin of the subjects, the contents and various substances was to play a prominent and crucial role.

Once the parcels had been put aside, *Su'* was engaged in the performance. He was now ready to face the general discomfort and to begin talking. He addressed the late *Foba*, the father of the patrigroup whose successor was present in the house. He began by a number of standard statements, addressing the dead elders. He recalled the will of the elder who had recommended to act always according to what he had taught. "Is it not", *Su'* added, "what we are doing today, after the 'nightmare' [the death of the young man]?" He recalled how the diviner had informed them of the problems they had not noticed. Now, they knew about them. They had discussed them and had come to an agreement. Consequently, they all "spoke with one mouth".[4]

At that point in his speech, *Su'* performed a series of gestures that are quite common in such a meeting. He held a calabash of about 3 litres, filled with a mixture of water and raffia wine. He stood in front of *Foba* with the calabash resting on his cupped hands. He presented *Foba* with the calabash in such a way that the latter could easily put his hands on the belly of the container, on both sides, which he did. Then *Su'* moved around the room and everybody took turns to place their hands on the flanks of the calabash. In case someone disagreed with what had been said by a member of the kin group—whether present in the room or not—he would not touch the calabash and the debate would start all over again. On that day, although people felt tense and avoided each other's gaze and although *Foba* averted his eyes when he touched the calabash (see photo n° 3), everybody placed their hands on the container. It implies that *Foba* and *Tamafo* (absent from the meeting) had settled their quarrel, at least to the extent that they considered they were "speaking with one mouth".

Su', still holding the calabash, resumed his speech and drew on Mankon wisdom to exorcise the threats coming from the outside: "If someone comes to us and wants to destroy our family, will this water not

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[4] For an explanation of this expression, see chapter 4 where information concerning the household, the architecture and the dissents or agreements within the household are discussed.

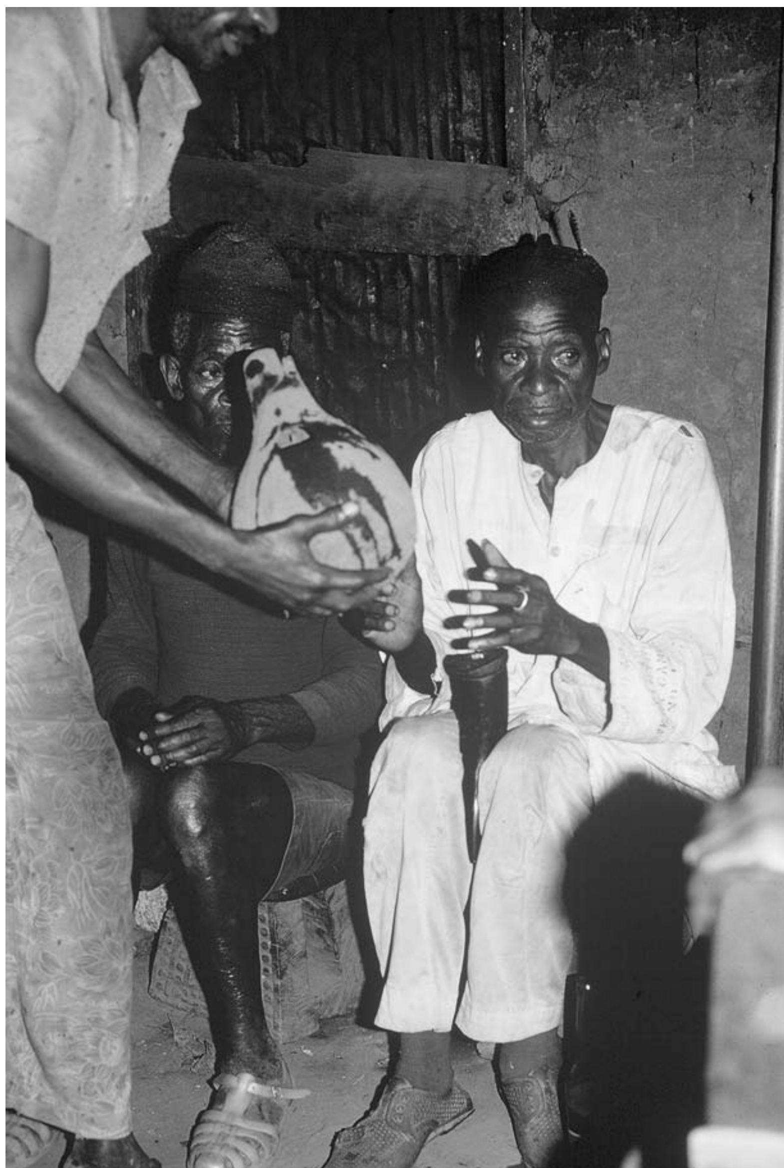

Photo n° 3. *Su'* John presents a calabash to *Foba* for him to apply his hands on the vessel (1973).

Photo n° 4. Two men rub the legs of *Taneshwim* with oil and camwood powder (1973).

cause his death?" The people replied: "It will". ("*Amen!*", so to speak). "We shut the door (*ntsu*, i.e. "mouth") of our house, do we not?", he added as he shut the door. The assembly was beginning to warm up to his actions and speech. *Foba* asked *Su'* to spill the content of the calabash in a line going from the door to the hearth at the centre of the room. He also requested *Maangye Bi*, the mother of the dead young man, to remove her shirt so that he could anoint her shoulders with a mixture of palm oil and camwood.

Maangye Bi was standing by the hearth. *Foba*, the successor of her father and mother's father of the dead boy, stood up in front of her, while *Fru Ngwi*, the maternal grandfather of *Maangye Bi*, stood behind her, acting as the "father at the back" (see Pradelles de Latour, 2001, regarding the role of the mother's father as a "father"). The two men anointed her shoulders and chest, back and front, until the skin of *Maangye Bi* was glowing with a deep red hue. Several people in the assembly asked that a second person be anointed. Usually, when a marriage celebration is performed, a child will be anointed and will then follow the bride and act as a babysitter (*ndimon, i.e.* 'elder [of the] child') of the first baby to be born. In the present circumstances, anointing a child would have been irrelevant since *Maangye* had already given birth to eight children and was no longer of child-bearing age. In honour of her status and the number of her children, someone suggested not to anoint a *ndimon*, but a *ndifo* ('elder [of the] king') which is a title of nobility at the palace. Agnes, a half-sibling of *Foba* and *Su'* was appointed by *vox populi*. The assembly was now reacting to the situation. Agnes presented herself willingly. While the two "fathers" (in the front and at the back) were rubbing her chest, *Fru Ngwi* asked *Maangye Bi* why she was suffering from poor health (in the 'Ngemba' language spoken in Mankon : "why is your skin dry?"). "Now that we have heard from the diviner that we all speak with one mouth, he said, your health ("skin") should improve". Then he quoted Mankon wisdom: "If you hit your toe with a stone, may the stone be shattered into pieces." Most people in the assembly had lived and walked bear-foot, and such a wish meant a lot to them. *Foba* added other wishes of good health.

At that stage of the performance, the assembly had worked with gestures and substances on five more containers/envelopes: the calabash that everyone had touched, the line of water spread across the room (we will return later to the question of the limits drawn by such libations or with medicines put on the ground), the house door that was shut, the skin of *Maangye* and that of Agnes. Regarding the two

women, one should remember that in Mankon as in most central African societies, health resides in the skin, and that *Fru Ngwi* had asked why the skin of *Maange* was "dry" and "brown". (In Pidgin, one asks "ao fo you shikin?", that is "how for your skin?", in other words "how is your health?") Anointing the two women was expected to transform their skin into a shiny and deep red envelope, thus achieving a state of good health that should endure after the settlement of the conflicts revealed by the death of *Tsi*.

At that point, the atmosphere was far more relaxed than it was at the beginning of the meeting. A man called *Taneshwim* made a joke and everyone laughed. The two maternal grandfathers had not used all the mixture of oil and camwood contained in the bowl used to mix them (*azo*). Someone suggested to use what was left to anoint 'the hen's cock', that is, *Maangye Bi's* husband, Solomon. But *Foba* objected, saying he wanted to use it to rub the calves and ankles of *Taneshwim*, who had walked some 15 kilometres to attend the meeting and would do the same on his way back. He asked *Su'* to help him to do this. The two men squatted around *Taneshwim* and massaged him thoroughly while joking and wishing him to have "cool" legs and feet (see photo n° 4). Some mixture remained, and *Su'* used it to anoint a calabash and the tallest of the hearth stones which stood as a concrete metonymy of the whole house, as I indicated in a previous publication (Warnier, 1985b). Such raised stones (*netshwere*) are found in all important places: the courtyards of the palace, the royal dancing field, the marketplace, the hamlets of descent group heads, etc. People perform a great variety of actions around those stones: they rub palm oil, perform libations, place medicines, deposit lost and found or scrap iron. Having used up all the mixture, *Su'* wiped his oily hands on his own calves, according to the saying: "whoever anoints a king will not wipe his hands on the grass". Solomon did not have a share in the rubbing.

The list of containers on, or with which people worked can now be completed with the palm oil and camwood bowl (*azo*), the skin of *Maangye Bi*, Agnes, *Taneshwim* and *Su'*, the surface of the calabash and the hearth stone considered as the material metonymy of the house of *Foba*. It all adds up to about 20 different motor conducts applied to two dozens containers. This is what I mean when talking of a "sensori-motor culture" propped against a given material culture.

Subsequently, a woman stood up and started singing a song. In the Mankon musical repertoire, the song belonged to the category called 'They rock the babies'. The Anglophone Mankon call them 'songs for

twins' in English. They must always be sung in pairs: two, four or six. The praise of twins, twin's parents and the king, features prominently in these songs. As soon as the women started singing, all the people stood up and formed a circle dancing slowly around the room. For want of space, they had to exercise a lot or restraint. The female soloist sang the verses and the people replied with the chorus. On that day, four women took turns as soloists, spontaneously and without previous arrangement.

Given the number of people and the small size of the room, such a performance, from a praxeological point of view, is not easy. Even if the steps are compacted, they require a good level of non-verbal communication between the dancers who synchronise them to the song's tempo. This communication achieves the aggregation of the 16 persons who form a circle round the hearth that is contained within the house. These songs achieve a kind of acoustic envelope or bathing in which they 'rock the children'. On that particular occasion, there was not a single child in the house. The adults, by contrast, regressed to infancy.

Songs and acoustic envelopes

The relevance of acoustic envelopes in the ontogenesis of the subject and in group dynamics has been underscored by the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu (1985), following J. Bowlby and others. At birth and in the following weeks, the acoustic perceptions of the newborn are reorganised. From a cognitive point of view, the newborn learns how to differentiate three different kinds of acoustic transmitters producing as many different experiences of acoustic envelopes: firstly, its own body with its cries, belches, etc.; secondly, the nurturing subject, most of the time the mother, but also including a number of known adults (father, elder siblings, grand-parents), rather undifferentiated but clearly distinct from its own body. Such people can transmit acoustic signals at a distance whenever the baby calls for them. The third kind of acoustic envelope is produced when the first two transmitters are fused together, at least according to the newborn's perception. From a cognitive point of view, a 5 week-old baby can differentiate between the three acoustic envelopes and their respective contents. They constitute the first experiences behind "I", "thou" and "we". In the Cameroon Grassfields, where breast-feeding has been common practice until

recently, and still is to a considerable extent, the experience of the third acoustic envelope is closely associated with the warm contact of the breast and the perception of the mother's voice that comes along together.

What should be underlined, concerning the performance of the 'songs for twins', is the arrival of the women in the forefront, whereas so far only the men played an active role in the performance. Their voices, so strikingly feminine, come suddenly. They celebrate the newborns and a rebirth of sorts by singing songs that are quite different from lullabies. By contrast, they are meant to awaken and stimulate the infants, and to help them share in the dancing when they are carried by their mothers on their backs. As already mentioned, there was not a single child to be found in *Foba*'s house at that time. All the people were implicitly invited to repeat the archaic experiences of the three acoustic envelopes. Each of them heard his or her own voice and all of them joined in the chorus. When hearing the soloist woman, each of them was immersed into the acoustic envelope of the motherly "thou".

The songs were performed in an atmosphere of pleasure and even euphoria that shows in the photographs I took, in sharp contrast with the tension at the beginning of the meeting. The lyrics of the songs evoke twins, fertility (women's fertility in particular) and the king. The peaceful dancing's sensori-motor conducts as well as the lyrics call for a regression to the innocence of childhood. The group, and each person in it, are invited to rejuvenate with a supple and shiny skin now that the kin group has been reunited after it had been torn apart by the death of one of its members. It speaks 'with one mouth'. Having a single opening, it has a single envelope that is identified with the house and with all the material culture of containment: the calabash of water, the *azo* bowl of palm oil, the large pot of stew, and the other one for the raffia wine.

Like all motor conducts, the ones I have just described exhibit three inter-related dimensions: motivity, the senses and emotional experiences. In his book *Le sens du mouvement* (*the sense of motion*), the neuroscientist A. Berthoz (1997) underscored the intricate relationships between perception and motivity. There is no motivity without perception and no perception without motivity. Besides, the seven channels of perception (the five known since antiquity, to which *proprioception* and the *vestibular sense* of balance and spatial orientation must be added) cannot be fully analysed independently from each other. They form a complex network in which each channel of perception feeds back to the others in the

exercise of motivity. Dancing and singing involve seeing, hearing, touching, self-perception and the vestibular sense of balance, associated with the perception of the specific smells of the domestic space. As I said, the emotions of pleasure, even euphoria, and a feeling of security can be seen on people's faces, in their gestures and in songs. As a result, it is more accurate to speak of 'sensori-affective-motor' conducts than simply of 'motor' conducts, except as a kind of shorthand. The psychic and emotional components of the sensori-affective-motor conducts have been synthesised by S. Tisseron (1999, 2000), in their relationship to material objects.

The meal

When the fourth song was over, everybody sat down to eat and drink. The little crowd was in a loud and fine disposition. The two fowls brought by Solomon had been slaughtered and cooked in a pot. *Su'* cut them to pieces. He gave the gizzard to each of the two maternal grandfathers (*tama*). This is the most valued part of the fowl, as it is the muscle of eating and digestion of a toothless animal that swallows the food without chewing it (this is my own interpretation—more on that theme later). There was still some stew left for a few people who could claim a share in it.

The women had brought *atshu'* and sauce in their baskets. *Atshu'* is the Mankon staple. It deserves a few comments insofar as its consumption is an exercise in containment. It is a thick paste of mashed *colocasia* and unripe sweet bananas, cooked and pounded in a mortar. When ready, the mash is shaped in lumps of a couple of pounds each, wrapped in banana leaves bleached above the fire to make them supple. The cook also prepares a sauce with palm oil softened with potash or ash water, with a few pieces of animal protein: beef skin, smoked fish, more rarely goat meat or game meat, in small quantities.

When it is time to eat, the women take the lumps of *atshu'* out of their baskets, and distribute them. The recipient of a lump unwraps it and spreads the banana leaf on his left hand. Then he softens the stiff paste by working it with two fingers of the right hand. When it is soft enough, the person shapes the paste into the form of a container with a thick wall around, a kind of bowl, like a mason's mortar. It is then put directly on the ground, on the banana leaves. One of the cooks goes around with a pot of sauce. She stirs it and pours it into

the central hollow of each lump of *atshu'*. She picks up bits and pieces of meat in her pot between thumb and index, and adds them to the sauce she has just poured.

Eating *atshu'* consists of taking a small lump of paste with the index of the right hand, dipping it into the sauce and bringing it to the mouth without spilling the oily red sauce on the way. Usually, two or three persons share the same *atshu'* dish. The consumption of *atshu'* begins very early in infancy. Three week-old babies are fed small lumps of it. Two to three year old children are already adept at eating it.

When the lump of *atshu'* has reached the mouth, it must be swallowed (*dzie*) without chewing it (*kfure*). Chewing with one's teeth is what people do to eat meat, and what witches do when they consume their victims in the occult world. Chewing means cutting and tearing apart with one's teeth, whereas swallowing (*dzie*) is the gesture of absorbing soft and nourishing substances. By extension, it is used to consume good things given by dead elders, acquired as gift or purchased. It is also used as a metaphor for succession. The successor of a dead notable is called the 'house eater' (*dzie nda*) insofar as he absorbs the corporate estate of the group (in Pidgin he is called the 'chop chair'). It is therefore understandable that Mankon people hardly put any meat in the *atshu'* sauce—less than a small mouthful per person. The nutrition specialists working in the area have noticed that Grassfielders consume far less animal protein than their resources and the local availability of meat products would warrant (personal communication with Luc Mebenga and Patrick Pasquet, November 2000). Consequently, deficits in iron are frequent, especially among children. They result in cases of megalospleenia and growth problems.

As the amount of *atshu'* paste diminishes, the walls containing the sauce get thinner and thinner to the extent that they may crack and let the sauce leak out. There are several techniques to mend the leaks and to absorb the sauce lest it gets lost on the ground. In brief, *atshu'* consumption involves a particular technology of containment and absorption.

These events combined two performances that have no essential connection with one another: marriage and the settlement of a conflict that resulted in a death. They allowed me to show how, in both cases, the subjects act on each other's actions and gestures, objects and substances that transform and identify them with so many containers and with healthy envelopes absorbing soft and nourishing substances. They represent as many technologies of the subject. *Maangye Bi* and Agnes

were transformed. Likewise, the men—in particular Solomon, *Foba*, *Fru Ngwi*, *Su'* and *Tamafo*—were deeply touched by this procedure. A couple of weeks later, Solomon's son mentioned how much his father's mood and health had improved since the meeting at *Foba*'s.

Psychic and bodily envelopes

The following pages will pick up on the contributions by a few authors who can help us to analyse more precisely the links between psychic and bodily envelopes in human experience. Didier Anzieu (1985) developed the notion of "skin-self". He relied on various categories of data. Observations in animal and human ethnology underscore the relevance of the grasping reflex amongst non-human newborn primates, and of the corresponding skin surfaces with the mother or its substitutes, even artificial ones. The observation of group behaviour reveals the importance of contacts, distance between individuals of different categories (male, female, young, adult, etc.), the occupation of space, and in group interactions. These observations validate the hypothesis of invisible contact, surfaces between individuals belonging to the same group. Another set of relevant data comes from the interpretative processing of projective tests, particularly the Rorschach test in which two independent variables—envelope and penetration—have been identified. They are the objects of specific quotations. Lastly, clinical data in dermatology and psychosomatic medicine show the extent to which a subject can conceive his skin and its openings (nose, mouth, ears, anus, etc.), as objects onto which he can project his emotional sufferings or well-being and the possible healing of his psychic disorders.

These different sets of data validate the notion of "skin-self". It is implied that the individual self is constructed as a fantasy of a psychic skin, an envelope containing affects, drives, representations and fantasies. It divides the space between an inside and an outside, and provides the structures for the processes of projection, introjection, and identification. Anzieu carries on by noticing that, in the ontogenesis of the subject, whatever the society he belongs to, the skin-self builds up on the neuro-physiological functions of the skin, whenever they are stimulated by the environment of the subject.

The point that deserves emphasis is not the complete list of the functions fulfilled by the coetaneous envelope, but the fact that those functions provide the neuro-physiological and anatomical foundations of

a vast array of sensori-affective-motor experiences localised on the skin. When exercising those functions on a daily basis, the subject builds itself by bridging the coetaneous experience and the psychic experiences of pleasure and frustration in their relationships to the other subjects and to objects. Many practices like holding, bathing, dressing a newborn, brushing his hair, rocking or feeding him, contribute to shaping the bodily and psychic experiences of the skin as an envelope, to such an extent that the two levels of experience—psychic and coetaneous—become intertwined. It also shapes the bodily and psychic experiences of being held by the body of the nurturing subject as a protective envelope. To sum up, the Mankon fully agree with Anzieu when considering that health is localised on the skin and that any subjectivity is built as an envelope. The subjects of the 'pot-king' are 'skin-subjects'.[5]

Transformations and symbolisations

When Anzieu published his path-breaking book, he had not yet fully analysed its implications. Thus, he had not underlined the importance of processes of transformation in the dynamics of envelopes. Psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Serge Tisseron (1999 and 2000: 89) insists on this last point. In his view, the psychic envelopes separate the inside and the outside whilst connecting them together. This experience of a connection between inside and outside is propped against the functions assumed by *bodily openings*. These most essential organs operate as so many devices of transit, and they process the experiences, perceptions and emotions along the path from inside to outside and vice versa. Many of these processes are perceived by the subject, although he is seldom capable of verbalising such feelings, and even less, of giving a scientific account of his perception. In that respect, the contribution of the cognitive sciences is invaluable. This "orifice" experience of bodily ports or apertures could be summarised by saying that the skin is an organ capable of processing and transforming everything that touches its surface and openings. Those organs are also transformed by the same token.

[5] In French, the pun mentioned in chapter 1 (about the '*roi-pot*' and the '*sujet-peau*') extends to the '*moi-peau*' (or '*moi-pot*') of Didier Anzieu.

This is precisely what takes place with the skin as a fantasy of the self. As a rule, the lived experiences cannot be assimilated by the psyche because they are lacking in phenomenal consistency. More often than not, they look chaotic and, in extreme cases, difficult or traumatic. They have to be processed, elaborated and domesticated in order to be internalised. In brief, Tisseron wrote (2000: 36–46), they must be "symbolised", that is, "put together", "assembled" (from the Greek *syn bôlon* = to put together). He illustrated this point with the case of an adult woman walking in the street, followed by three girls in a single line—presumably her daughters. In any case, it is clear that there is a personal bond between the woman and the girls. She is in a hurry and walks fast. She stumbles on an obstacle, loses her balance, and is about to fall on the sidewalk when she manages to recover her balance. She turns around, gives a glance at the obstacle she met on her way, utters a few offensive words, and starts walking again. One can easily imagine the reactions of the three girls: acceleration of the heart beat, blushing, tingling sensations in the fingers, etc., that is, all the symptoms of a strong emotion of shame, chaos and confusion. Besides, they must cope with their emotions while catching up with the woman. What do they do? The first one reaches the obstacle, pretends to stumble on it, turns round, utters a few offensive words, and runs after the woman. The second, smaller, girl does the same. The third one, still smaller, jerks, mumbles something and catches up with the other two.

That is, through a mime of the whole sequence of events, the three girls have transformed an event that was unexpected, absurd, chaotic, and that could have been catastrophic, into a coherent scenario with a happy ending. They turned it into a small play, that could be stored in their memory and played all over again laughingly. By doing so, they transformed it and internalised it at once. In their psychic envelope, they conjoined it with other similar memories and fantasies. In the etymological sense of the term, this event was 'symbolised', that is, its elements were put together in a consistent scenario. The girls appropriated the scenario by playing it, and the whole sequence was put together with other similar psychic contents.

By so doing, they worked both on the envelope of their psychic self, that came out unscathed and even comforted from this trial, on the events happening in the outside world, and on the psychic contents symbolised by them. It would have been quite different if the woman had been severely injured. In that case it would have been very difficult for them to symbolise the event. But on that particular occasion,

they were most probably successful. This is how children, according to D. Winnicott (1975), and, later on, grown ups, produce their own world by mimicry, playing hide and seek, playing with a spool, as Freud's grandson did, or pretending to kill and be killed, to being a nurse, a medical doctor or a mother. They repeat these games time and again, thus building the limits between self and others, reality and fantasy, inside and outside, and symbolising and transforming in the process the scattered bits and pieces of their experience.

Tisseron (2000: 42–46) elaborated on the work of Bowlby, D. Anzieu and others, and distinguished three ways with which the subject symbolises his experience: the sensori-affective-motor medium, images, and words or verbalisations. Let us return to the observation of the three girls: they symbolise the event of the near collapse of their mother by gestures, that is, through the sensori-affective-motor medium—an almost ever present element of children's play, and which is the first to make its appearance in the ontogenesis of the subject. But at their age, they could have symbolised the event by drawing—a medium that D. Winnicott (1975) and Françoise Dolto (1984) favoured in the psychoanalytical therapy of children. Last but not least, they could have talked about it, among themselves or to other people, and one can guess that they did that.

Those three media of symbolisation belong together and do not operate separately. However, they are not strictly equivalent to one another. They do not duplicate but they complement each other. Motivity is essentially linked with perception. Perception and motivity are then connected with emotions of pleasure, displeasure, pain, annoyance, euphoria, however tenuous they may be, in such a way that the sensori-affective-motor medium reaches the subject in the depth of his emotions and psychic contents. However, gestures are fleeting. It took only a couple of seconds for the woman to stumble, recover her balance and continue her journey.

By contrast with the gesture, an image is an enduring mark impressed on some kind of material, and internalised in the psyche. Images borrow the durability of the material on which they are printed. Psychic images can substitute, but they alter faster and more easily than objects or photographs. The third medium is provided by words, verbalisations. Words, Tisseron said, allow one to recall at will, for oneself and for others, notions, gestures, actions, images without having to materialise them. The enormous advantage of language is its abstraction, the fact that it is a system of signs. However, lest one disqualifies language and

speech as a mere *flatus vocis*, it cannot be cut off from the other two media of symbolisation. It is not enough to speak. One has to perform. In the Word, there is speech and action. Provided this is the case, words play the essential role of a weft for the other two media. It is the royal way, or path, to symbolisation.

Language assumes another essential function. It allows us to distance ourselves and construct a critical position. For example, totalitarian regimes propose or impose on their subjects a number of techniques of the body and a number of sensori-affective-motor conducts accompanied by the provision of material equipments, signs and images. As a result, the whole thing becomes something of a reality, and a majority of people join in without criticism. The Nazi party was quite adept at displaying grandiose liturgies, with uniforms, marching, initiations beginning in childhood but extending also to adulthood. Images like the motion and still pictures produced by Leni Riefenstahl succeeded in mobilising a nation humiliated by the defeat of 1918, by the terms of the Versailles Treaty, and by economic crisis. Images, bodily practices and political incantations contributed to symbolising this bitter experience. They extended to many different aspects of the daily lives of the subjects. They became a lifestyle. Only a critical discourse, well informed and enjoying enough freedom of expression, could have deconstructed and exposed the subterfuge, and proposed alternative interpretations and political programs. Only a tiny minority of people were in a position to voice such an alternative discourse. They were silenced, discredited and eliminated by all available means. This left considerable freedom to the Nazi party to propose its own images and sensori-motor symbolisations and to obtain the consent of a vast majority of people.

Speech makes it possible to have a debate and to clarify things in case of disagreement. This is not allowed to the same extent by the other means of symbolisation, although the sensori-affective-motor medium opens up the possibility of antagonistic games, motor counter-communication, and competition.

Material culture and verbalisations at Foba*'s*

Amongst all the motor conducts performed by *Foba*, Solomon and their parents, the only ones that concerned the subject's skins were the rubbing and anointing of Agnes's and *Maangye Bi*'s chests and *Taneshwim*'s

and *Su'* John's legs. All the other actions concerned material objects (pots, bundles of food, calabashes of raffia wine, water calabash, house, lumps of *atshu', azo'* bowl, etc.). One could therefore argue that one cannot extend to those material objects the lines of analysis provided by Anzieu and Tisseron concerning the identifications, skin and the human psyche. This subject/object dichotomy is precisely what I want to challenge in the case at hand. From a cognitive point of view, and from the point of view of psychic investments and motor conducts, there is no clear-cut separation between those two domains. In the first chapter, I took stock of the research of H. Head and G. Holmes (1911) and A. Berthoz (1997) that points to a crucial point: that is, all the objects on which the subjects have a direct or indirect grip are an integral part of what P. Schilder called the 'image of the body' (*alias* sensori-affective-motor conducts, or, from a static and postural point of view, the 'bodily schema'). This is how, Tisseron said (1999) "life-spirit comes to objects". Manufacturing bundles of food and anointing the calabash with oil are indeed actions performed on material objects. However, the subject who performs them works on surfaces. He includes them in his image of the body. Therefore, he identifies with them. Most of those objects are embodied through motivity, and working on them amounts to working on the subjects who have embodied them. Those actions belong with the techniques of the body (Mauss) and the techniques of the self (Foucault). The following chapters focus on a praxeological approach to the treatment of the skin in its relationship with the house. They aim to document how the subject identifies with his objects in the art of daily life.

In the case of the death of *Tsi* Samuel and of the events that followed, speech played an essential role in symbolising the situation. Without its intervention, at the various stages of the process, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to find an issue. There are four such occasions. Firstly, the conversations that took place in the kin group of *Foba* and Solomon following the clash with *Tamafo* and the death of *Tsi* lead to the decision to consult a diviner, at least concerning the "nightmare" of *Tsi*'s death. Secondly, the discussions with the diviner allowed the men to construct a narrative of the different events, and to establish some links between them. The presence of a third party—the diviner—not involved in kinship relationships, is probably a key factor at that stage. He was allowed to raise all the questions he thought relevant, without restraint, and he pushed the subjects into giving a narrative as elaborate as possible. (*Awa' Aku*, one of my informants, compared

our working sessions with *nikwab*—divination). Thirdly, *Foba, Fru Ngwi*, Solomon, and presumably *Tamafo*, had to come together following the consultation with the diviner, and to decide what to do in order to 'speak with one mouth' to the dead elders and get ready to place both hands on the water calabash. I did not have access to the first three stages, except indirectly, through the partial account given to me by Solomon's son, and through the fourth stage, that is, the speech given by *Su'* John during the meeting, that condensed the first three stages in a kind of official, strictly coded, statement. But at least, being public, it provided a verbal expression to the feelings of each member of the group. Besides, I had taped it, and was in a position to listen to it all over again and to study its content.

It is the co-occurrence of sensori-motor conducts, of images provided by the people, their gestures and the objects, and of speech, that bestowed on this performance its potential for symbolisation, and its impact on the subjects.

As a provisional conclusion, the actors in the event that provided the material of this chapter, acted, moved, spoke, perceived in a material setting made of things and images, of redundant and repetitive motions and emotions revolving around the theme of envelopes, containers and contents. All this amounts to a technology, an efficacious action on the subjects, producing or renewing given identifications. The effectiveness of the technology is proven by the fact that the case was settled, and by the changing mood of the subjects between the beginning and the end of the performance, and their well-being during the following weeks.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SKIN-CITIZENS

When I first exposed to different audiences the views described in previous chapters, some stressed that 'containers' are used by most, if not all, social groups or societies on a regular basis, and that 'skin' is inherently necessary to the psyche. Therefore the Mankon data should not lead to the conclusion that containers and skin refer to one social group in particular or the Grassfields as a whole. Nonetheless, it was argued, should I want to make my analysis more convincing, I ought to identify the psychogenetic determination which would elicit the forms of 'over-investment' of the envelopes and of 'self-skin', as conceived by the people living in the Grassfields. Exploring the educational systems among these social groups might give persuasive evidence of the way the mountain people in western Cameroon value so highly this moment in the making process of a human psyche.[1]

However, in my view, such controversy results from a form of misunderstanding of the main issue. It is significant that in the Grassfields any form of over-investment of envelopes, containers, contents and conducts of transformations in the orifices is first and foremost *political* in character. Such fluid mechanics, as well their channelling, result from the microphysics of power pertaining to the hierarchy. Yet, it is true that this microphysical configuration of power has a hold on its subjects only inasmuch as they themselves identify with subjects-skin, envelopes, containers and contents. So, one feels that they tend to become over-invested in the face of other societies (and, more specifically, of current Western societies). Consequently, it is well worth proceeding to a comprehensive exploration of the elements of this psychological over-investment, particularly by analysing the specifics referring to the concern with skin (chapter 3) or with the habitat (chapter 4).

[1] I am grateful to Zaki Strougo who helped me clarify this point, and to Berthe Elise Lolo, MD, who attracted my attention on the anal component of the construction of limits and of the control exercised on contents.

Bathing an infant

As far as the subject's ontogenesis is concerned, the processes of holding and handling a baby (the ways the baby is maintained or manipulated) contributes to creating links between the infant and the mother, to transforming the experience though the skin and to elaborating (or forging) the self-skin identity. A baby's bath is one of the key events which help conceive exactly the specificities of these events in Mankon society. On several occasions in November 2002, I visited Perpetua (a pseudonym) with the aim of observing the process of bathing her baby.

On one such occasion, together with my research assistant, *Ade*, we reached Perpetua's house at about 11 am. The sun had dispelled the cool night air. The baby could now be given a bath in the midst of the hamlet's courtyard. *Ntso'* is a well-built eight months-old boy. He is wearing a T-shirt and leggings. He is playing joyfully in the courtyard. His clothes and skin are dusty. *Ade* holds him up and settles him, leaning on his back across his own thighs while sitting on a chair. *Ade* applies both hands on the legs of the boy who lays his own hand on *Ade*'s forearms. The child and the adult are touching each other. The baby is calm and keeps babbling while looking around.

Meanwhile, Perpetua comes out of her home holding a plastic basket filled with toiletries. She also brings a plastic baby's bath, a towel and a bath cloth. She spreads them all under a mango tree, between the shadow and sun. She pours lukewarm water into the bath, then adds a small quantity of Dettol, a disinfectant. She then reaches for her baby, undresses him and sits him down in the bath. She sprinkles water over the baby, soaps the cloth, then rubs it all over the boy's head downwards. Both vigorous and precise, she lathers the skin with the greatest care and delicacy, she rubs the cloth and her own hand around the boy's earlobes and behind the fold of his ears. Then she lingers on his eyelids, around his nose, nostrils and lips. *Ntso'* does not seem to mind.

Perpetua then goes on to wash the baby's chest and upper limbs. She reaches for one of his arms and goes on washing with the other hand. She sits him down in the bath again, lifts his legs one after the other and rubs them, and reaches between each toe with the cloth and brushes the soles of his feet. Once the child has been washed, she rinses him with water from head to feet. She helps *Ntso'* out of the bath, lays him down on the towel and dries him.

Ntso' is now lying on his belly across the lap of his mother who proceeds with the second stage, massaging him with a lotion. She pours into a small, plastic pot Pears baby lotion and some Pears baby oil, then pours a small quantity of the mix into her palm. She rubs her hands one against the other, props the child up holding one of his arms, sits him and starts rubbing his shaven scalp. She spreads the lotion lavishly and rubs systematically applying both palms, the thick part of her thumbs and her fingertips over his eyelids, around his nose, nostrils, folds around his ears, his cheeks, so as to cover all of the baby's head and face. She lays him down on his belly, massages his back, reaches in the folds of his arms with the sides of her hands, along his armpits and buttocks. She turns him on his back and spreads lotion over his bust, along his sides, his belly and his sex. She seizes the joints to move them as she massages the skin (see photo n° 5).

After about 10 minutes, the child is calm and relaxed. His skin looks smooth and soft. Perpetua holds him towards *Ade* who takes him. She walks towards the clothes line and takes a few clean clothes. She dresses and fondles the child before she lets him down again on the bare ground of the courtyard.

Perpetua has carried on such a process every single day ever since her child was born and she intends to go on likewise until he starts to walk. She uses Pears products, manufactured by Unilever in Nigeria. Each 225 ml bottle costs 1,000 Francs CFA in 2002, that is €1.50. Most mothers can afford to buy them. There are five or six different brands of lotions available even in the smallest shops, the most popular being Pears and Bébé Hygiène.

In Mankon, every mother will carry on this daily process of bath and ointment for their babies. Instead of a lotion, the less affluent ones will use palm-oil which was popular for that purpose before industrial products came into use. I witnessed this type of bathing process in numerous households, and at Perpetua's particularly, with the aim of observing and filming her, as well as her father's second wife who was mother to a two month-old little girl.

The ancient practices

Perpetua has had a high-school education and passed a GCE A level. She has a notion that a child's growth is, in part, pre-programmed.

Photo n° 5. Perpetua massages her son (2002).

She has also left behind a number of practises that used to be highly valued in the past when the Mankon thought a baby is made of a kind of malleable substance which one has to mould into shape for a year or two, so as to make it perfect. One had to start by the skull, massaging it systematically from the top downwards. Then, one proceeded massaging the face from top to bottom down to the chin, to give it a shapely form and ensure that the lower jaw was well formed and perfectly mobile. Julia, born around 1920, wishes these practices of nursing babies had not been relinquished in the 21st century. The upshot of it all, she says, is that youths in the present times are not fully developed and not as strong as they used to be. She has consistently massaged the skulls of her own children, on a daily basis, for years. Her husband would hold the children up, holding their arms, and shaking them. Then, he went through the same procedure again, holding their ankles, head downwards, to stretch the children's limbs. Julia also went through a process of moving the child's joints. She would also press the baby's backbone from the bottom up then downwards again with the thick part of her thumb, so as to give it more strength and to 'fix' it.

Perpetua followed this procedure during the first months of *Ntso*'s life. Yet, she maintains that the 'shaping' procedures have little influ-

ence on a child's morphology and are not likely to change anything that is genetically pre-programmed. She would very much like to know whether a European baby's growth is better, or worse, than an African baby's. I give her a clue that, to my mind, there is not any difference to be noticed in his physical development. Yet, I assume that various discrepancies in behaviour originate from the different ways the babies are nursed. The African baby thus acquires sensori-motor capacities at an earlier age than the European baby, while it also develops a knack for calm and collectedness. My assumption has been confirmed by the conclusions of B. Bril (1997).

Among the ancient ways which Perpetua has maintained, one is the production of a paste made from the almond of the oil-palm nut. She dries the almonds in the sun, fries them so as to drain the oil out of them, then crushes the pulp together with the oil. She gets a greasy brown paste which she uses to rub the child's wounds, if any. Each time she gives the child such a treatment, she puts a small quantity of paste on the baby's tongue for him to swallow. He has to have paste on his skin and inside his body as well.

From the moment a baby is born, he is given his first bath and his unction. In the past, unctions used to be made with palm oil mixed with camwood powder which would enhance the colour of the oil and give the skin a deep lustre. From his very birth each child was presented with an oil pot called *azo'*.[2] The *azo'* I saw were roughly spherical calabashes containing about one litre, with a circular orifice, at least 10 centimetres in diameter and large enough for one to reach inside with one hand. Yet, other types of containers were formerly in use, made in carved wood or pottery which used to be more or less highly decorated. Every woman kept her own '*azo'*', one for the child, and also one for every child who slept inside her house. Each pot was personal property, with individualising features. It would be filled at regular intervals. Should the family happen to be short of oil, one would save on the oil used for the cooking, and grown-ups would relinquish their own portion for the benefit of the children.

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[2] *Azo'* is derived from the verb *zo'* (to anoint, to rub, and by extension, 'to marry someone'). For example, *a zo'o bangye bibeuba'*: 'he anointed two women', 'he married two women'.

Heads and hairstyles in the 21st century

Once it has been shaved, a child's scalp is bare so that his mother can freely spill lotion all over his skin. A healthy head is a shaved one, or one with very short hair. It has to be cooled easily by the air around to be 'fresh'. Almost all males, whatever their age, wore short or even shaven hair (see photos n° 17 p. 171 and 20 p. 218). Urban young males, among the stylish ones, will opt for a compromise, while shaving both sides of their head carefully, they leave more length to their hair on the apex, possibly with different haircuts, from a square brush cut, to a parting on one side, to a cap-shape cut with a kind of short peak. The king and notables have shaven heads which they cover with a usually black skull cap which is adjusted to the shape of their heads (see photos 4 p. 49, 9 p. 122, 10 p. 123, 11 p. 124, 16 p. 164, 17 p. 171, 19 p. 218). On special occasions, they swap this for a brightly coloured crocheted cap.

As far as girls are concerned, their scalps are maintained entirely bare until they reach the age of puberty. They are seen afterwards to wear longer hair, often done up in plaits. More and more grown up females take to wearing false long hair.

Conversely, it also happens that a number of men and women wear their hair long, even untidily. Some diviners are such, having been influenced by a personal experience, rather than a form of apprenticeship which would have been forced upon them. Thus, too, behave a number of hardcore notables in *Kwi'fo* society in the palace. Sometimes, one may find the odd member of the very small *Mombu* sub-chiefdom included in the Mankon confederation. The members of this chiefdom are generally known to have powerful medicines. Anthropomorphic masks are sometimes featured with voluminous beards and hairstyles, and masks are epiphanies of beings from the bush, who have come to visit the kingdom.

To the close-shaven child or adult one can oppose the *Kwok* mask which is familiar in the kingdoms of We, Oku, Bum, Esu, Bafut and many others. *Kwok* is a violent mask, an unruly one, and is incarnated by a male adult. In the same way as the famous *Struwwelpeter* of Dr. Heinrich Hoffmann who refused to have his hair and fingernails cut, he wears a huge mop of dishevelled hair he has never bothered to cut, covering his entire head and his face. This false hair is spherical in shape. It may be as much as 60 or 80 centimetres in diameter and thick, black and frizzy. *Kwok*, blinded as he is by this hair, does not

see what surrounds him. He is dressed in rags and runs around in an erratic way.

I happened to travel from We to Esu by a 4×4 Land-Rover, the most sturdy and uncomfortable automobile ever conceived, when I met *Kwok* who was being kept under control by four strongly built fellows who had a lot of trouble holding back the ropes they had tied to his limbs. *Kwok* who heard the car getting nearer became infuriated. His wardens feigned being unable to master him any longer and he dragged them towards the car with all his might. I pulled the car up and *Kwok* started banging wildly at the thick metal sheet with both his closed fists. The wardens eventually managed to hold him back again and pulled him away from the car.

There is only one way to calm *Kwok* down and women alone can do that, by gentle blows to his body with the little round cushions they wear on top of their heads, which help to steady weights. *Kwok* will settle, but only for a very short time; his fit of violence will start again within minutes. Thus one has to resort to the only lasting and efficient way of bringing him under control, by giving him milk. Should a wet-nurse be there, one would expect her to press on her breast so as to obtain a few drops of milk in her hand. She would then throw them at *Kwok* or she would wet his skin with the milk. This is how the enraged mask calms down and yields to a moment of peace and quiet. *Kwok* only remains peaceful when he takes the breast; nothing but breast-feeding can soothe him. He is an adult who has never been weaned, never been severed from his mother's breast and thus is susceptible to bouts of anguish and to moods during which violence prevails.[3]

There is another dimension to this, which I owe to Francis Nyamnjoh (personal communication, 1991). During the 1980s, in the kingdom of Bum, Nyamnjoh witnessed a young man stepping into *Kwok*'s cabin, driven by curiosity. He even dared seize the mask's huge wig and put it on. Sometime later, he fell ill, so ill that his life was at stake. He was taken to the traditional doctor's and confessed that he had intruded into *Kwok*'s cabin. The medicine man suggested he be initiated as *Kwok* whose wig he was to wear and whose unruly conduct he was to make his. And so the prescription saved the man's life, although it did not stave off his ailment, called *atshul*.

[3] I owe this interpretation to Pierre-Yves Gaudard.

In the kingdom of Bum, one suffering from *atshul* is invariably bound to lose substance. A man whose crop is plentiful, will store it; yet, a couple of months later, there will be nothing left even though no weevil will have intervened and the man's family will not have helped themselves from the stock—nothing can account for the complete disappearance of the grains. *Atshul*, one would say, is akin to a vanishing process or a leak that has cursed a container. Another man from Bum was under that curse. Despite being very successful with women, he never actually settled with one.

Let me underline that *Kwok* is in no way different from the men with a curse I have just described. He can retain nothing, he is nothing but a mere void. Hence he has not been shaped or produced as a container. Conversely, the process of shaving heads may be regarded as the first step towards constructing a subject into a skin-self. Weaning is the second important step. *Kwok* resembles a breast-feeding infant; he has neither been weaned nor has his head been shaved. He can be compared to a child who has not yet achieved cleanliness. It is significant that such a process of shaving, which is started at birth, has to be continued throughout a man's life.

One may object that the *Kwok* mask is not to be found in the Mankon kingdom, and that one is in no way allowed to put forward observations made elsewhere, even in very near surroundings. My own sense is that the symbolic and cognitive codes that go with the shaving of skulls, the whims of *Kwok*, the particular emphasis which is put on a subject's scalp and the way skin is groomed, are exactly the same on a regional scale and no doubt extend beyond that area. The codes are cogent for a cultural analysis and they are equally relevant to C. Levi-Strauss's assertion concerning Amerindian myths: On a regional or even a continental scale, myths are interconnected in such a way that one may find in one society a clear expression of an element which remains covered or latent elsewhere. Characteristically, and given that each kingdom or even group of kingdoms forms a notion of such a concrete interpretation of the code, this phenomenon does not impair the fact that the underlying code will materialise in one kingdom in one way, and in another one in a different way. Nicolas Argenti and I reached the same conclusion independently from each other, and were able to validate it in a number of cases by comparing notes (personal communication).

Hence one must admit that long hair is a token of disorderly mental states—madness or intoxication. Long hair as well accounts for one's

knowledge and practice of special powers, even occult or nocturnal ones, all of them being part of the mask enigma, or of the lack of interiority. One who goes unshaven is one who has never been weaned, neither has he been socialised. This means he cannot have clear ideas, or retain things or substances in his bodily envelope. Human skin in its utmost achievement is smooth and hairless, shining with ointment or lotion, exposed to the cool caress of the air. This explains why royal spouses, as late as in the 1950s, used to have their pubic hair shaved. Should women choose to let their hair grow, they will tame them and weave them into braids and leave their skin exposed between the braids.

Coetaneous contacts

In the early years of the 21st century, the particular over-investment of skin is maintained by frequent and protracted contacts between the infant and other subjects, when carried, or at rest. A woman will carry the child on her back or hip, and so will the other women of the group or the adolescents and more particularly the *ndimon*—or 'elder of the child'—whether a boy or a girl. The *ndimon* is one who will accompany a woman who has been given in marriage; he goes and lives with her. Such bodily conducts allow the bearer to busy himself—or herself—quite unhindered, with no need to supervise the baby and yet perceiving the little one's movements and reactions. The little one will sleep in his mother's bed while she lies next to him—he takes shelter by her side. As late as the 1940s, Mankon people used to sleep naked and without any bedding, lying on stems of raffia. During the night-time in the outdoors in the dry season, the temperature would occasionally drop to 10°C. Babies who slept naked could not have survived such cold, where it not for the protection of the house or the warmth of an adult's body, or being among the other children.

As soon as a child is ordered out of his mother's bed, because another birth has taken place, he goes and sleeps with the other children, huddled together, in another bed. Mankon habitat is conceived as a dense cluster of houses, close enough for a child to join another group in the night-time according to family or personal affinities. If a child does not get on with his siblings or half-siblings, he will usually look for a more welcoming abode. Boys and girls sleep together until their teens. Beyond that age, youths mostly congregate according to gender. Yet, this rule does not always prevail and one may observe young boys and

girls, most of the time close relatives, sleeping in the same bed, provided they get on together. It is noteworthy that bodily contacts while sleeping have completely been internalised and de-eroticised throughout Central Africa. Subsequently, it so happens that perfect strangers can even share the same bed and feel perfectly at ease. This is a personal observation, made when, as a lecturer at Yaoundé University, I lead some students for a study in rural surroundings. They did not have a second thought about crowding on beds where hardly any space was left.

These conventions are in no way restricted to the Grassfields. The aforementioned bodily conducts are very commonplace in Western and Central Africa and other continents. As a matter of fact, the exception is our contemporary Western world, by shunning coetaneous contacts. Relevant here are the important comparative studies led by B. Bril (1997) on early infancy in European countries, Western Africa and Korea. One particular example is the Bambara child aged under 12 months, who is handed from hand to hand, back to back and one partner to another at least 40 times a day, "approximately three times more often than for a French child of the same age" (Bril, 1997: 306). The Bambara child will sleep an average of 80 per cent of the time he is being carried (*ibid*., p. 311); conversely the French child of the same age sleeps by himself in his own cot.

All such observations trigger a response: that epidermic contacts are at the same time utterly commonplace and desired by all manners of subjects, whatever their age, and hardly ever eroticised. I will substantiate this point by the following observation: One October night in 2002, I was in the common room of a small hamlet, together with a group of about 15 people. The host wanted to offer me something to eat, but in a private room. She lead me to a bedroom where I met her daughter, about 25 years-old, a friend of the daughter's and three children, two boys and a girl between seven and 12 years-old. They were sleeping together on a double bed, piled upon one another, it seemed to me. I was asked to sit on the bed, next to the children. There was an electric bulb shedding light on them, the women laughed and spoke without restraint. Sounds of conversations, occasional shouts and even the hum-drum of a radio programme were heard coming from the common room. The children remained in a complete state of oblivion.

I noticed once or twice that one or another child would make a move, tucking himself more closely to the other ones. Things remained so for about half an hour. Then the girl's mother decided to leave. She walked around the bed, went near the girl and started shaking her shoulders,

and in doing so, shaking the other children as well. Not one of them moved. The young girl did not wake up. Since she could not succeed in waking her up, the mother pulled her from the arm, trying to prop her up. The girl opened her eyes. Her mother asked her to stand up and dropped the girl's arm. The girl fell back instantly across the bodies of her friends, still sleeping. The mother resumed her efforts, this time dragging the girl towards the side of the bed, making her stand next to the bed. She rubbed the girl's face. The girl slowly woke up. Her friends had noticed nothing. They were still asleep, snuggled up together, as I said goodbye.

Such observations might have been made anywhere in Central Africa. And bodily contacts are not restricted to periods of sleep. Even during the day, when fully awake and in front of others, it is a very commonplace for one, two or three youths to hold one another's arms or shoulders or waists or prop themselves one against the other. And so boys and girls will always be together until their teens. Beyond that age, only subjects of the same sex will seek contact publicly, with the exception of young urban couples who opt for the ways of Westernised young people.

A critical assessment by C. Onana (1999) on the corporal cares bestowed on children by mothers originating from different regions in Cameroon provide further convincing evidence to what has heretofore been demonstrated. C. Onana was concerned with the frequency of occurrences, in decreasing order, of the most important parts of a child's body, as mentioned by the mothers:

the scalp, hair and skin	100 per cent (of the mothers)
the skin	95 per cent
the eyes	87 per cent
the mouth	78 per cent
the fingers	76 per cent

The importance of the scalp and skin therefore prevails, notwithstanding the mother's ethnic group. Such a commentary is further demonstrated by personal communications from Cameroon-born subjects, particularly from the southern provinces of Cameroon and neighbouring countries (S. Abega, C. Ebale Moneze, E. Maboul Ebanga, R. Nguetza, F. Bamseck Bamseck, T. Ngoumou, J.-F. Makaya, A.-M. Degoue Touko, E. Njeundam, B.E. Lolo) to whom I owe particular thanks for their contributions. F. Bamseck Bamseck (2002) who has worked among

adolescents suffering from third-degree burns after the Nsam conflagration in Yaoundé brought further validating evidence for the psychological over-investment of skin along the lines developed in this book.

Adults' bodily conducts

Apart from the Mankon notables who were garbed in the traditional loincloth made of European imported material or from the Benue area, or the Christian converts who were usually dressed in second-hand clothes from the 1920s, the Mankon did not start wearing clothes until the start of the Second World War. The older generations which I met, either in 1971 or onwards, especially women, had lived their lives either completely or nearly naked. Their skin, exposed as it was to the cold, the sun, the heat and to climatic elements had no other protection than the ointments which were made with oil. Julia's testimony (born around 1920, interview 2002) further illustrates this point:

> At night we didn't have a blanket. I slept on my bamboo bed, without any clothes on. In the evenings, I usually found warmth next to the fire. Yet it would go out while we slept. Early in the morning, we woke up. We were cold, the bed was hard. Whenever I stood on my feet, I felt pain all over my body. I looked for a few remaining embers and made the fire start again. This is when I would get my unction bowl. It was full of palm oil mixed with camwood. I added some raffia fibre. It would get soaked with the mixture; I would take a handful and press it to extract more oil, and I started rubbing my whole body, first my head (see photo n° 6), then downwards. I would rub, rub, rub relentlessly. My limbs gradually revived. I grew warmer at last. Once my entire body had been anointed, I felt the cold no more. We had the oil, if not the clothes.
>
> In those days, I used to wear a *cache-sexe* [*eshi'e* sg.].[4] I soaked it in the oil and it would keep the oil during my day's work. Therefore, if I happened to go out to the fields, or when I worked, I was able to get some oil by pressing my *cache-sexe*.
>
> It so happened that if you were at home and a woman came from, say, *Ngom Agham* [a hamlet], she would ask you for your bowl because her own skin had got dry. She would rub her skin until it became moist and cool again. Nowadays people have beds and clothes, and shoes too. This accounts for their being so weak and often in poor health.

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[4] The most common *cache-sexe* was made of vegetable fibres plaited in the shape of a triangle with its point upwards, and adorned at its base with a fringe holding a row of beads, usually made of brass.

Photo n° 6. Julia demonstrates how she used to rub her body, beginning with her scalp and face (2002).

In the same way, the evening routine would be carried on by men and women alike. Once they had accomplished their daily tasks they would wash either at home or on their way back home, when they chose to stop by a brook and wash themselves. The most refined way of cleaning oneself was by brushing one's skin with banana tree fibre. Dry flocks of banana tree fibre are easily available. Tough as they are, the fibres make perfect 'clots' and are still in use at the turn of the 21st century.

Yet, there is another, linguistic, dimension to this. In Mankon, 'I am washing myself' is 'I wash [my] skin' (*ma suge nyɛ*). The Mankon language has two words for 'skin': *nyɛ* and *ngobe*. *Nyɛ* refers to skin as cover as well as the connective or muscular tissue underneath, to which it is attached. From such an interpretation of 'skin' derive the practices of scarifying bodies for medical purposes. It is possible for medicines to be placed in contact with the open scar, after they have

been ground into powder. The powder can permeate the deeper layers under the coetaneous tissue. It ought to be stressed that there is no such term as 'self'. 'It is good for me' is said as 'it is good for my skin'. The Mankon therefore fully endorse D. Anzieu's assertion that the 'self' is a 'skin-self'.

Ngobe refers to the dermis, but not to the tissue it contains. Whenever one uses a sentence such as 'I am washing myself', one will say: '*ma sugeu nyɛ*' [I wash (my) skin]. Whenever my skin is soiled and I want to wash its surface, I will say "*ma suge ngobe nyɛ*" or "I [am] washing [the] skin [of my] skin," or "I am washing the skin of my body". *Ngobe* is a term that applies to the bark of a tree or a fruit; it is used to term shoes or socks, as well as the condom.

This feature of the Mbam-Nkam language group accounts for the frequency of public post-mortem examinations in the Grassfields (in some kingdoms, of all the dead without exception) until recently. In 1975–76, Dieudonné Miaffo ran a scientific enquiry into this subject in the Dschang area, and was a witness to some 20 public autopsies (Miaffo, 1977: 3). One can also refer to Paul Gebauer who was an eye-witness and published a photograph of a ceremony among the Kaka community in the Northern Grassfields (Gebauer, 1964: 34). In the Dschang area, any corpse to be examined—including infants' corpses—was to be opened up by a man who lived in the neighbourhood and who had already fathered either a son or a daughter. Miaffo (1977: 71–109) gave an accurate depiction of such an occurrence:

> The deceased is entirely naked. It is of the utmost importance that no artefact, whatever it is be left on him [...]. As far as women are concerned, one is even expected to undo their braids [...]. The deceased, once he has been stripped bare, is left lying on his back over one or two large banana leaves, fresh from the tree. In recent years, the corpse is laid on a loincloth as well, which will help to bury him. (Miaffo, 1977: 73–74).

The operation will begin by incising through a long line that goes from the navel upwards and cuts through the diaphragm and the sternum along its length; then all the way down to the groin, thus uncovering the abdomen. All organs can be removed, using both hands, and with the sharp end of a knife, intestines will be spread. The autopsy is traditionally held in public. Every adult male or post-menopausal woman belonging to the family of the deceased is under strict obligation to attend the ceremony. The liver is first to be brought under scrutiny, then come the lungs, the stomach, the kidneys, the heart, the intestines, the bladder, the pancreas, in a more or less random succession. Everyone

is somehow expected to express an opinion. On one occasion, facing the corpse of a four year-old, which lay wide open, a man said, sighing: "I really wish I had his ribs!" (Miaffo 1977: 76). Autopsies will last between 45 and 130 minutes, the average length of time being one hour. Once the ritual is over, the organs will be placed back into the abdomen and then the burial can take place. Meanwhile, the senior men in the assembly will withdraw, engross themselves in talks and appear again to make a public statement on the reasons why death occurred. They will comment on the relationships of the deceased to his family, or about whatever event may have taken place that had an impact on members of the group. They will also comment upon the likelihood of witchcraft or 'bad death'.

Everyone in turn will put in a remark of his own. The group will then make an assessment of a number of signs deemed relevant: the colour, texture and size of the organs. Particular attention is paid to the presence of parasites, fluids, blood, etc. Eventually conclusions are drawn once the corpse has been examined and one has pondered upon what were the causes of death.

One can therefore see both the principles on which the autopsy is based and its aims: the experience of a subject inscribes itself on its "skin" (its self, or body) and its contents. After death, it suffices to open the corpse to read the truth about the dead person as in a book, observing the organs and making an account of the contents. Miaffo (pp. 57–59) stressed the emphasis placed on the abdomen, the seat of human activities, and I would insist that it is also laden with the specific notion of being a 'container' for the substances that have been placed there.

During an autopsy, precautions have to be taken regarding certain kinds of dead. Miaffo is utterly convincing when he claims that life is akin to 'panting breath', to air exhaled. He then presents the testimony of the Reverend Fathers Tchouanga Tiegoum and Ngangoum (1975: 41) who state that whenever a notable dies, the man's head is hooded closely in a clay pot. The head can be wrapped closely in a new raffia bag or tightly bandaged in the leaves of the *mbuabua* plant. The purpose of these procedures is to stop the man's breath from escaping and taking a living person's life.

The forensic examination is sometimes started as soon as the subject passes away and even within the precincts of his dwellings. Miaffo then itemises the tokens of what is held as a bad death (p. 97), *i.e.* a swollen belly, oedema, women who die when pregnant, dysentery or leprosy.

All such occurrences are linked to an idea of surplus of something, or a void, or to some disorder affecting the coetaneous envelope. It is noteworthy that, should the death occur as a result of an accident or an infectious disease that does not affect the volume of the corpse or its skin, suspicion will not arise. Conversely, whenever there is evidence for a bad death, the corpse will not be carried out of the house through the door (we shall see later that the subject identifies with his house). The door is kept closed, an opening is carved next to the bed, on the wall, through which the dead person's body will be taken away by the medicine men, then processed out of the city and eventually abandoned in a distant forest. People will abstain from performing any funeral ceremony whatsoever.

Public autopsies prevailed in the Dschang area as late as the 1970s. They were only occasional among the Kaka, according to Gebauer, and practised at irregular intervals across the Mankon territory where diviners and medicine men tended to trust external symptoms more frequently in order to gain an insight into what the dead person had in his guts. One may surmise that the practice was still in use in the early years of the 20th century and was gradually discarded, until it was abandoned by the end of the century. However, the founding principles existed everywhere. They were obviously taken literally in the Dschang area, as demonstrated by Miaffo's compelling study and critical assessment.

The psychic overinvestment of the skin

Considering the particular emphasis which is placed on the anointing and daily massage of children, the various ways in which they are carried, the contacts between individuals and habits during sleep, shaving hair, the bodily cares, the practice of public autopsies, I believe that the bodily conducts about the skin are closely related to a psychic overinvestment. Mauss (1936) showed that such techniques of the body have a threefold dimension: biological, psychological and social ('bio-psycho-social'): they concern the body, they involve individual emotional life, and they are socially constructed. I take this to mean they are encoded sensori-affective-motor conducts if one is to use more contemporary terms in the analysis of cultural forms. They are embedded in Mankon culture throughout the history of the kingdom.

Yet, one is left to explore and make sense of this notion of *over*-investment. One has to consider the relationships between elements in need of interpretation, or reinterpretation, that would allow us to endorse the notion of over-investment. I can see two reasons: firstly, the critical assessment one can make with behaviours embedded in foreign civilisations, with a particular focus on present-day European cultural identities. The techniques concerning the body have undergone something of a change during the two previous centuries, notwithstanding the variations at a local level, and also the usual areas of social differences and social classes. Alain Collomp (1986: 516–519) underpinned that one bed was the norm in most peasant families between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Collomp insisted that a sweeping movement across Northern Europe, France included, was one of shunning bodily contacts more and more radically. Hence, people took to buying more space and a bed for each person became the new standard, with one more bed for the baby, following the example of affluent upper-class families. In France, corporal cares gradually became more refined; as early as the 18th century, improvements were noticeable. Madeleine Foisil (1985: 85) who commented on the diary of Heroard, the personal practitioner of Louis XIII, made the point that "reality, as described by Heroard, seemed to be fully resonant of the general beliefs of the time and with a culture that discarded cleanliness and was all too prone to distrust water. Besides, water was not easily available; more than that, it was far from pure. On such grounds, giving babies a daily bath was something rather difficult. The very notion of a daily bath, being clean, fresh, would progress very slowly indeed, and take a lot of time to be circulated and permeate the whole spectrum of society". Vigarello (1985) also validated this, a far cry from Nso's daily bath and unction.

The pivotal role in the belated progress towards cleanliness can be ascribed to certain aspects of urbanisation. Yet, it is also in keeping with the intensification of labour, a consequence of the industrial revolution, let alone the noticeable lack of sanitary facilities in most houses until the 1960s. In the 1950s one in two households had no indoor running water. We currently notice the reverse trend. Bathrooms have become as costly as living rooms. F. Veldman's treatise (1989) of 'haptonomy' (the science of touching) has echoed in many ways throughout our contemporary behaviours. Despite his eclectic sources and his disconcerting style, he has nevertheless succeeded in naturalising among a number of

physicians the idea that effects and touch are interwoven and that his explanation has therapeutic potential. The very first contacts between a mother and her child take place during the child's birth. Massage and carrying conducts become increasingly popular in Western countries. The parent's bed is no longer deemed off-limits for the children. (For Africans, only the mother's bed, not the parents', is accessible.) Yet, if one is to make sense of the diversified aspects of European attitudes, one dominant given remains: skin (the whole surface of the body) is less in the foreground, less often medicated, less intensely, systematically and recurrently so, than it is in Central Africa, at all stages of an individual's life. This is what B. Bril's comparative studies (1997) explored comprehensibly and demonstrated convincingly.

As for the second aspect of skin's over-investment, the lines along which I wish I could develop my analysis would be trickier than when working out an explanation on the basis of cross-cultural comparison. In this regard, although there are no figures available yet, a cogent step would be to attempt a comparison between the 'envelope' and 'intrusion' dimensions of Rorschach projective test, as well as the others, among two categories of subjects, the Mankon and Europeans. To the best of my knowledge, such a study has not yet been conducted. Bibliographical research actually has convinced me that, apart from a few occasional attempts by L. Onana (1999) and Bamseck Bamseck (2002), no sustained effort has been made to collect data on this subject. An observation made by P. Declerck (2001: 97–98), based on his practice in Paris, is worth mentioning as it gives a unique insight into an extreme case of analysis of the corporal envelope and orifices.

> A Cameroonian man[5] in his thirties was admitted to a hospital during the weekend. His ears were bleeding internally as he had filled them up with doughy balls of bread. Some of the balls had putrefied and caused infection. He was docile, did not respond when examined and would let himself be moved from place to place like a mere object [...]. What is more, he had not uttered a single word. [...] The opportunity arose for me to examine the man's passport. It struck me that he had inserted thorns beneath the staples of the photograph. The thorns were actually piercing the photograph of the man's face through and through.

The most perplexing fact about this case is that no verbal expression of this man's symptoms could be made, so adamantly silent he remained.

[5] It so happened that this man originated from the Grassfields; he was a Bamileke.

Nevertheless, his silence is a reflection of the process of filling up his ears and bodily orifices as well as piercing the photograph of his own head with thorns.

One may conclude that such information will open up partial insights into the overinvestment of coetaneous envelopes we are trying to comprehend, particularly as far as the scalp and bodily orifices are concerned.

We are left to complete this analysis by taking a further approach to the various aspects of the material conditions of the prevalent culture among this society, the ones which inflate and diversify the bodily schema. And this is what we will concentrate on next by focusing on the house and habitat.

CHAPTER FOUR

"SMOKE MUST BE KEPT INSIDE THE HOUSE"

At this point and before going any further, we need to return to certain theoretical arguments. Relying on research conducted by Julien and Warnier (eds, 1999) and Warnier (1999, 2001, 2006), it was mentioned in chapter 1 that, in humans, sensori-motor conducts (in other words, the image of the body) merge the moving body and the objects, both in perception and action or agency. Thus, for example, it would not be possible to analyse pole-vaulting without considering that the man who jumps, his outfit, his pole, are one whilst in movement. This principle was the foundation of the research in cultural technology conducted by A. Leroi-Gourhan (1943, 1945, 1964). As far as the man who is jumping is concerned, the relevant interface in the case of the jumping dynamics and the identifying features of the athlete are not to be found between the subject (who, to a certain extent, could be perceived as 'naked') and his outfit; rather, they are found between the jumper and his outfit on the one hand, and the environment on the other hand, especially by means of his shoes and his pole. Both these are instruments that connect him with the cinder track, the clamp which is used to hold the pole, the horizontal bar and the landing area. The athlete has embodied his equipment and is one with it. This perspective can be extended to any situation in which the subject participates in a material culture, either by perceiving it at a distance, or by having a direct grip on it.

Most such phenomena can be described as 'bodily conducts', 'sensori-motor algorithms' or 'embodied' practices. Conversely, anyone equipped with a scientific apparatus that could work as a microscope, might observe and explore the complexity of the apprenticeship of such conducts, the subtleties of the sensory involvement, the fact that neuro-muscular anticipations are far more effective when the subject is on the move. One could also see that the hormonal release (of dopamine, ocytocyne, endomorphine) which strengthen the motion process will, under certain circumstances, alleviate the pain that normally results from the effort. They will also foster a state of euphoria and boost the subject's attitude. In such a domain of enquiry, the analysis

can continue. By going further and further into detail, it sheds light on the centrality of such phenomena, their extreme complexity and the difficulty of giving an account of what takes place in such transient forms of conducts as a baby's bath or a pole-vaulter's jump. These will not easily translate into words.

In this publication, we shall not engage in the fine grain analysis of a neuroscientist; this is not the purpose of this book which aims to explore the wider significance of a number of cultural forms at a more general level. Consequently, the analysis will focus on the specificities elicited from the routine conducts of an adult in his house. Once he has familiarised himself with its particularities, the subject will identify with his house as a container.

C. Rosselin (1994, 1995, 1998, 1999) who studied the way people inhabit a space—more particularly a single room (four walls and a door)—makes it possible for us to conclude that the subject becomes one with the place he inhabits, even though he is not directly in contact with every single piece of furniture; unlike the pole-vaulter who has an immediate hold on his instruments and the area where jumping is practised. Central to the notion of 'living in' is the idea that a subject will always develop routine sensori-motor conducts which Parlebas (1999: 39–43) calls 'motor algorithms'.[1] These constitute the basic embodied know-how that allows one to practice all the routine actions of inhabiting, such as cleaning the house, getting washed, cooking, entertaining, or taking a rest. This makes it unnecessary to re-invent each gesture anew, which would be physically and mentally exhausting. On the other hand, those who suffer from dyspraxy need do so, which is really invalidating. Yet, anyone with average capacities will have embodied household appliances, the way they are located in the house, their bulk and weight, the different ways of handling them, etc., so that the appropriate gestures and the exact expenditure of energy is

[1] P. Parlebas (1999: 39–43) gives the following definition of the 'motor algorithm': "it is the organising scheme of a motor action which translates into a succession of regulated and automatised pre-programmed motor behaviours, resulting in the completion of the motor conduct which was intended." Driving one's car, practising sport or writing, indeed, involve countless motor algorithms which allow the subject to act as though in a state of automatic piloting; importantly, greater accuracy is achieved and a smaller expenditure of energy is needed. The aforementioned algorithms transpose and adapt themselves according to the conditions and the context of the task. They result from a number of training periods and from translating the patterns from one task to another.

always applied for their use. This human capacity to built sensori-motor algorithms, to learn them and to use them, is extremely economical, insofar as it saves a maximum of time, energy and attention devoted to what one does in order to accomplish all the actions of daily life. It is engraved in our sensori-motor apparatus in a way that if a piece of furniture is displaced, one is very likely to stumble upon it at its new location, and that one is very likely to look for it at its former location until the motor algorithms have been re-trained. Furthermore, removals are occasions when one must redefine the sensori-motor software of inhabiting and adapt it to the new house.

The identification of adults with their houses

The aforementioned remarks apply to the Grassfields and are particularly relevant as far as housing is concerned. In the past, and as late as the 1960s, every married adult, whether male or female, would own his or her personal dwellings. Ever since the 1960s, new architectural norms have emerged and so have new trends, in the way people use their habitat. Yet, one notion was maintained as late as 2003—any married man must build a house in his village, whether he will inhabit it or live in another place. Should he bypass this rule, he is deemed either to disown his origins or not to be a real man. Although modern habitat consists of gathering under the same roof spaces which in former days used to be separate, in most modern houses the husband and wife still maintain separate bedrooms. In addition, the wife can have her own kitchen, sometimes set a little apart from the house. Furthermore, it is all too obvious that similar situations are to be noticed in cases of polygamous households. Only acculturated urban monogamous couples will share a common bedroom and a double bed.

Let us turn our attention to what prevailed prior to the development of the type of habitat introduced by colonisation (raw clay brick walls, cement blocks and a number of rooms gathered under a corrugated iron or aluminium roof) and thus typical of what generations born before the 1950s experienced. One could actually trace a number of houses built according to ancient standards as late as the 1970s or 1980s. They were designed according to a square pattern and had only one door. They had neither inner partitions, nor windows. The building materials were raffia stems that made the walls lathwork, two superposed false-ceilings and the roof framework. Clay was used to

patch the wall lathwork. Thatch would cover the roof on the four sides and wood was used for the four posts at each angle of the house, as well as the door-frame.

As far as smaller villages are concerned (the 'compound' according to colonial terminology—I would say the 'hamlet'), they consisted of the 'father's' house, the houses for the spouses—each one had a house to herself—and a few additional houses for young people or for married elder brothers who had no more than one spouse and consequently did not qualify for emancipation. Those houses used to be strictly individualised and stood apart, yet at a distance of no more than a few metres. The largest one was the father's and it displayed the most noticeable decoration. In Mankon, a number of important people would have, by privilege, the right to live in a house with noble architecture, a 'house with beams', about six or seven meters in length on each side, the description of which is given in a previous work (Warnier, 1985a: 228–231).

Among the specifications of this house, one was outstanding and consisted in a double lining of all external walls. Remarkable as well were the motifs—pillars cut from trunks of the wild date palm tree *Phoenix reclinata*, carvings and the two doors, the main one, for ordinary humans, opening onto the yard, and another, hardly ever used, for the medicine men, masked humans in groups, or when the house-master wanted to enter or exit unnoticed, opening onto the garden. More deeply, it implied that the house (and consequently its occupant) had two 'mouths', and also two pairs of eyes, that is two faces, like *Janus bifrons*, and could see in the night and to the other side of things. Apart from the main house, any person of importance owned a meeting place or hall. Women's houses were approximately 4.5 to 5 meters in length on each side (see photo n° 7 p. 95).

Traditional building material and earthen floors would absorb noises; conversely, cement cinderblock houses reflect sounds. The acoustic difference between the two types of architecture is particularly obvious under pouring rain and conversation is impossible under an iron roof where rain patters and stifles voices. The narrowness of the door, the lack of windows, the colour of the walls, ceiling and furniture, smeared with black soot over the years, all of them give ancient traditional houses a dark atmosphere which is sometimes faintly enlightened by sunshine through the open door in the day-time or, at night, by glowing embers in the hearth. As soon as one steps into the house, one is caught by an intimate and silent atmosphere which is in absolute contrast with the

atmosphere outdoors: outside, the flashes of lightning, the rumble of thunder, the pelting rain, pattering on the soil and on the leaves of the banana trees; inside, a dry shelter, a silent one under the thatched roof. Outside, the cold of a dry night; inside, the warmth around the hearth. Outside, the dazzling sun which burns men's skins and crackles the surface of the earth; inside the shadow and a cool atmosphere. Outside, ominous bush spirits who 'stick to your skin' as well as the elusive dangers, latent in all the things that stay hidden; inside, shelter and security. The borders between outside and inside are the four walls protected by a thick thatched roof, and a single orifice, narrow and protective. The house stands as a world of its own, a home, both intimate and secure, which contains 'within' it the whole of one's everyday life; it is at the same time the common room, the bedroom, the kitchen, the attic, the hen-house and the room where things are stored away.

Among the older generations, most of them are nostalgic for the architecture of the past, with its dark recesses and complex mixtures of scents; the scent of wood-fire prevailing, yet tinged with the smells of palm oil, spices, meat and fish left to dry and smoke on a shelf hanging over the hearth.

After sunset, several people would gather in the house of one of the spouses in turn, or even in the house of the male head of the family. The children usually went to sleep in their beds of raffia stems, which they shared. The young ones and the elders sat on the beds or on stools talking, having laughs together or preparing the meals on the fire. This was interrupted by long silent lapses. During the dry season, nights are cold and one would find a warm temperature within the habitation. This environment was indeed far removed from the harsh neon light and a radio blasting away that one finds in contemporary housing. There, during the dry season, the cold will freeze your bones at night and, at midday, the sun will radiate so intensely you will think you are in an oven. Yet the houses built with recently introduced materials have many advantages. Importantly, they are made to last. Julia, who was born to the *Ala'a Akuma* lineage around 1920, still remembers the houses where she lived as a married woman in her youth. "I liked my old house better", she says, "but what happened to it?" (Personal communication, December 2002).

Walking through thresholds and narrow doors

The doorway, in traditional housing, generally stood at 30 to 40 cm. The lintel was never higher than 160 cm above ground level. Adults therefore found it somewhat difficult to make their way into the house. A number of specific movements were consequently needed. Men would bend their backs and step over the threshold in one movement. Yet, for the sake of decency, in the days when women wore nothing but a small *cache-sexe* (and only if they were married), they used to place one foot first on the wooden threshold, then the second foot; eventually they entered the house making the same move again to climb down the threshold, which made it necessary for them to bend their backs completely in order to pass under the lintel.

The higher level of thresholds in the architecture of the Grassfields was mentioned by P. Harter (1986: 95, transl. NC). Yet, the way in which he explains it as "a way to prevent animals from going into houses or to stop the rain, or to force any potential intruder to face the house and be in an imbalance when trying to go in", is merely a utilitarian one, and not based on field research. The goats, pigs and dogs which wander around a village yard will find it even less difficult than humans to go through doorways, as they are not hindered by the upright position of bipeds. According to circumstances, dogs and certain fowls are even admitted into houses. The hens with their chicks can spend the night under beds. The chicks can jump over the threshold more easily than a toddler. The dogs come for the leftovers of food around the hearth. As for intruders, these will have already been identified long before they get near the house—significantly, houses never used to be locked when their owners were away. It was so because they benefited from the protection of the medicine men and, for notables, the protection of the carved figures on the door posts on either side of the door.

There is another important dimension to these doors. They are so specific because they form an integral part of the routine bodily conducts of the inhabitants. When one approaches the house, it is impossible to just walk in straight through the only orifice (or 'mouth'). The movement has to be suspended as one has to lift one's legs quite high and bend one's back in a single movement. To perform these gestures, one has to stop physically on the border of this space before entering. Men lay their machetes on the ground outdoors; no one can ever go through this entrance carrying a bulk. Men and women will deposit the things they hold into the hands of a person inside, or, should the

house be empty, they proceed in a succession of movements: the bulk first, then the 'carrier' (or the other way round). Confronted with doors of this type, the average Western Robinson Crusoe would probably want to widen the opening so that a standing human may go through together with all the things he carries. "Here is how to make things more efficient," he would think.

Medicines lay buried in the soil within the house, a few centimetres from the threshold. The visitor necessarily must pause in front of the doorway and the medicines. He certainly cannot avoid taking his time to bend and lift his legs. Such an essential crossing from the outside to the inside inscribes in his motor algorithms by means of the gymnastics he is submitted to because of the way the doorway is built.

In this respect, C. Rosselin (1995) points out that, as far as the notion of threshold is concerned, the motion into the house is ambiguous, much more so than the motion from inside to out. The reason is that any possible intruder will obviously come from the outside. Yet, what Mankon subjects commonly dread is not so much being physically assaulted (in 30 years, I have never heard of a single occurrence), it is the penetration of medicines, objects, or smells adhering to the skin of visitors which they then deposit themselves in the house.

This is exemplified by Julia, of *Ala'a Akuma* lineage (personal communication, November 2002):

> If you come with medicines in your bag to provoke the housemaster, you will never manage to go in. If you do enter the house, you'll be castigated. If you aim at harming the compound head with your medicines, you're bound to be defeated. His own medicines will prevail over yours [if you cross the doorway]. The compound head's medicines will certainly force you to answer a question such as 'did you really intend to take your medicines into the house and take them out of your bag once inside, and harm his skin?' Well, take good notice of this, the compound head's medicines will make your hand heavy and you won't be able to get your hand out of the bag.

This quote must be understood as a key assumption that going through the orifice and over the medicines buried by the entrance of the house will make a malevolent intruder change his mind. He will abandon his desire to leave his noxious medicines within the habitation. Such a concern is similarly identified in *Su'* John's imprecations against anyone who might develop ill feelings against *Foba*'s house (chapter 2). Similarly, one can also trace it in the non-verbal behaviour in certain circumstances, which consists of closing the door on the people who have gathered

inside and splashing the content of a calabash on which each person has previously applied his hands against the enemies outdoors.

Grassfields art historians R. Lecoq (1953), T. Northern (1984), P. Harter (1986), L. Perrois et J.-P. Notué (1997) have published copies of the carved doorframes which used to decorate the houses of kings and notables. They pointed out the narrowness of these artefacts, which can easily be noticed on illustrations (for example, see Harter, 1986: 93). Yet no-one has commented upon the difficulty of going through them or even hypothesised on the burial of medicines beyond the entrance door, apart from P. Harter who, as observed earlier, misinterprets the high level of the doorsteps as an obstacle to the rain, to domestic animals or to physical assault. To my mind nevertheless, one should put together the four different characteristics of these doorframes: the narrowness, their link with medicines, the way in which they are commented upon, together with the iconographic motifs which adorn them. The motifs make the dead elders and a few animal species (the chameleon, the monitor lizard, the buffalo, the otter, the python, etc.) the witnesses of movements into and out of the house. Importantly, we must notice that these species are among those capable of spraying their saliva and they can disperse their breath, and consequently harm humans.[2] With very few exceptions, they are represented with their mouths open and inflated cheeks. Critics have commonly noticed that such frames never display any decoration facing the interior of the house. A disassembled frame reproduced by Tamara Northern (1984: fig. 2, p. 81) and a few door posts reproduced by P. Harter (1986: 93, figs. 112–114) show that, at least on a certain number of doorframes, the decorated sides face the exterior and overlook the path leading into the habitation. Consequently, anyone making his way into the house will first have to confront the designs on the facade, then will go through the parietal decorations on the sides of the doorposts. The two sides of the door are so near each other that the subject cannot avoid touching them or brushing past them. Among the constants are the obstacles in the physical approach to the house, the unfailing watch which is kept by the dead elders and the animals that may spill their saliva or disperse their breaths, the medicines that lay buried at a distance beyond the entrance, the imprecations uttered

[2] The conclusions of a study which would combine stylistic, praxeological and ethno-zoological approaches of the doorposts carvings might be interesting.

by the inmates of the dwelling against alleged intruders. It comes as no surprise that even the rasher impulses will be stalled, and that any malevolent energy is to be maintained outside the habitation.

In Mankon in 2002, the oral tradition maintained a trace of such doorframes ornamented with bas-reliefs. They existed in the large common houses of high-status clan or lineage heads within halls of which palavers were held, together with libations to the dead, unctions of maidens before the wedding, unctions of the successors, and even meetings of masked groups of the lineage. Common houses were distinct from the personal habitation of the group's head. The houses on the ancient architectural pattern, with their sculpted doorframes, seem to have fallen into disuse in the 1930s or 1940s. The burgeoning trade in African art contributed to their disappearance. They were eventually replaced by meeting halls made of raw clay bricks, covered with corrugated iron roofs. At the turn of the 21st century, the only remnants of this architecture are to be found in the palace or in the households of some 'traditional' doctors who are intent upon maintaining an architectural environment which is in keeping with their practices.

The high level of the doorways, narrow door frames, the decoration of the doorposts and the lintel, the presence of medicines, the difficulty in the process of making one's way through the door, all emphasise the centrality of the single doorway and brand it as both a necessary and a heavily connotative object. A last example demonstrates this unequivocally: While the common people will go through the door facing it, musicians or dancers in the masked groups, or the warriors belonging to the *mandzong* war lodges and the traditional doctors carrying a bag of medicines, will all go through doorways walking backwards.[3] I myself experienced such a practice during a funeral ceremony.

As observation, it is worth pointing out that on the 18th of November 2002, a woman belonging to the *Bon beWara*[4] lineage died; for that lineage, I am considered an adopted foreigner. In 1973, I had made a number of payments to *Su'* and *Nde'*, two notables in the lineage, with a view to becoming a member of the *Takumbeng* lodge the music of which the virtuoso harpist *Su'* performed. On the evening of the

[3] As outlined by N. Argenti (2004), this applies to the entire Grassfields area. At Oku, the palace decided to dismantle *Baati*, a women's association, because women had started going through the door of their lodge walking backwards.

[4] The names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

21st, I walked to the house where the funeral was held, with my bag of *Takumbeng* which contained the kazoo which allowed me to disguise my voice.

To my disappointment, I was told that, since the death of *Su'*, no-one was playing the harp, and consequently, *Takumbeng* would not be heard on that night. Yet the *Kwi'fo* of *Bon beWara*, with their four double iron gongs were reported to have met in one of the hamlet sheds. Given that there would be no *Takumbeng*, I was invited to join the group. I brought my contribution, several crates of beer, to *Zama*, the father of the lodge. It was almost dark and a long sleepless night was about to begin. We drank much beer and raffia wine, and then had something to eat. At around 11:30 pm, the musicians began to warm up and tune in with each other: two drums, four double gongs, two ankle rattles and some light wooden laths about 120 cm long. Six or seven members of the lodge seized a pair of laths each and began to hit them together *ad libitum.* I followed suit. The ensuing rhythms soared and followed the musical line of ankle rattles and other instruments. At 0:30, the orchestra was playing in full swing. The night air was icy and we were freezing. Everyone stood waiting or dancing around the central fire in the shed. Someone went around the lodge so as to make sure that everyone in the hamlet was safe behind doors and windows tightly shut, and that silence prevailed. *Kwi'fo* hence made their first appearance.

Sylvester, the first musician and one of the double iron gongs, told us about the route we were to follow: we were to walk up the path until we reached the road. We would then go down the path again, reaching the hamlet where the funeral was being held. We would walk across the courtyard and head for the grave, before we came back to *Kwi'fo*'s lodge, crossing the courtyard a second time.

He made for the door or rather, headed straight on into the wall directly to the right of the door, as though he intended to bump into it. He walked more slowly as he neared the wall. As his left shoulder reached the wall by the doorframe, he turned round, as if his own shoulder and the doorframe were held together by a hinge. He managed to go across the doorway in a pivoting movement, with his back facing towards the exterior. Once he had completed this movement, he passed through the door and was facing the path to the outside. All the while, he was playing the double gong. The two men who were playing the drums ceased to play their instruments when going across the doorstep so as to be able to hold their drums with both hands while rotating and passing through the door backwards. Once outside and facing the path,

Sylvester began to walk slowly, while the other members of the lodge passed the door backwards rotating on the threshold to move out of the house. Once out, they began following Sylvester.

Kwi'fo then started dancing around frantically. The orchestra played with all their might. Not a soul was to be found in the yards or the paths bathed in the moonlight. The effect was that of an acoustic envelope, that, from the point of view of the people locked inside the houses, was out there, coming from the bush, and in which they were not included. *Nkwenti* uttered strident howls. Some among them brushed their laths along the stone and concrete foundations of the houses with a rattling sound. It was *Kwi'fo*, they said, mad with grief, mourning the dead woman. This verbal comment may be at odds with the praxeological and cognitive aspect of the performance. It has perhaps been elicited by the questions raised by Westerners living in the area. In my view, I would rather emphasise that death had intruded, bringing in its path the unleashed, destructive and wild forces of *Kwi'fo* who stayed out there, out of bounds, taking advantage of the night and the disorder to encroach. They stayed within the acoustic envelope and destroyed everything on its path.

Re-entering the lodge had to be done moving backwards. After two stewed fowls had been eaten and two crates of beer drunk, *Kwi'fo* went out a second time at 4 am and performed the same routine, following the same itinerary. Once back at the lodge, Sylvester deposited the instruments on the ground, displaying them in a line, and *Nkwenti* anointed them with palm oil which he poured from a plastic bottle. The laths were burnt. *Nkwenti* and *Zama* stored their instruments away, in large bags which prevented anyone to see anything of their content.

Local informants have no comment on this kind of motor conduct other than to say "orchestras and masquerades always do that" or "this is the way of our ancestors". As is usual in the case of procedural knowledge, this cannot be interpreted unless one breaks the code behind this particular type of motor conduct, without asking the informants to procure a ready-made explanation. In my view, the way to break the code is to relate it to the praxeology of containers, that is, the way one enters into a house/container and exits again through its opening. The most likely explanation in my view is more or less as follows: the masquerades, the individuals who carry the medicines, enter the house while assuming the bodily conduct that is proper to exit, and they exit whilst assuming the bodily conduct of entering. They are neither inside nor outside; they cannot be conceived of as being indoors or outdoors.

They are at the interface, just as the king is. M. Cartry (1979) reports about similar conducts among the Gourmantché, while not referring to the ritual of the gestures during the process of going across doorways, but to the very constructs of the 'inner' or the 'outer' space in a village, and to the fact that the villagers have their own limited inner spaces. The powers which roam across the bush have no notion of what limits are and, being introduced in the village, they are therefore unpredictable. Further observations on masks, on the powers of *Takinge* and other medicines (which I will further comment upon) bring evidence to the fact that they inhere the notion of ubiquity and, to a certain extent, of extra-territoriality) within the 'circle' of Mankon—this, being the exact opposite to the citizens, as we shall see.

The woman in her own house

What is there in a woman's house once one has stepped in it? On the left hand side, a raffia partition protects the bed from the visitor's eye: we are in the darkest, and the most private corner, usually called 'the side of the house'. On the right hand side, one finds 'the front of the house' which benefits from the light coming from the door. The woman always sits by the sunlight when she busies herself preparing meals or pounding the *atshu'* paste (see photo n° 7 p. 95). At the centre of the room, there are three stones of the hearth and a shelf is hung overhead, where the woman stores her meat and smoked fish, salt and spices. Beyond the hearth, there is the 'head of the ashes'. The wall at the back of the room is equipped with two shelves that run along its length. They are made, as the rest of the furniture, with raffia stems. They are used for keeping the food, the kitchen utensils, the baskets, pots, calabashes, enamelware, etc. The maize crop is attached to the ceiling in order to dry up. (The smoke, however, does not protect the grains from the weevils and the larvae of the moth *Sitotroga cerellalea.*) Courtesy makes it compulsory for the visitor to sit down to the right of the door and to respect the intimacy of the dark side of the house.

A woman will live her life between her 'door' (the 'mouth' of the house), that of her husband, her plots of agricultural land, the marketplace and the numerous family meetings (especially, but not only, the funerals). Her comings and goings obey the daily rhythm of her going in and coming out of her own house and to the rhythm of the movements of the visitors calling on her.

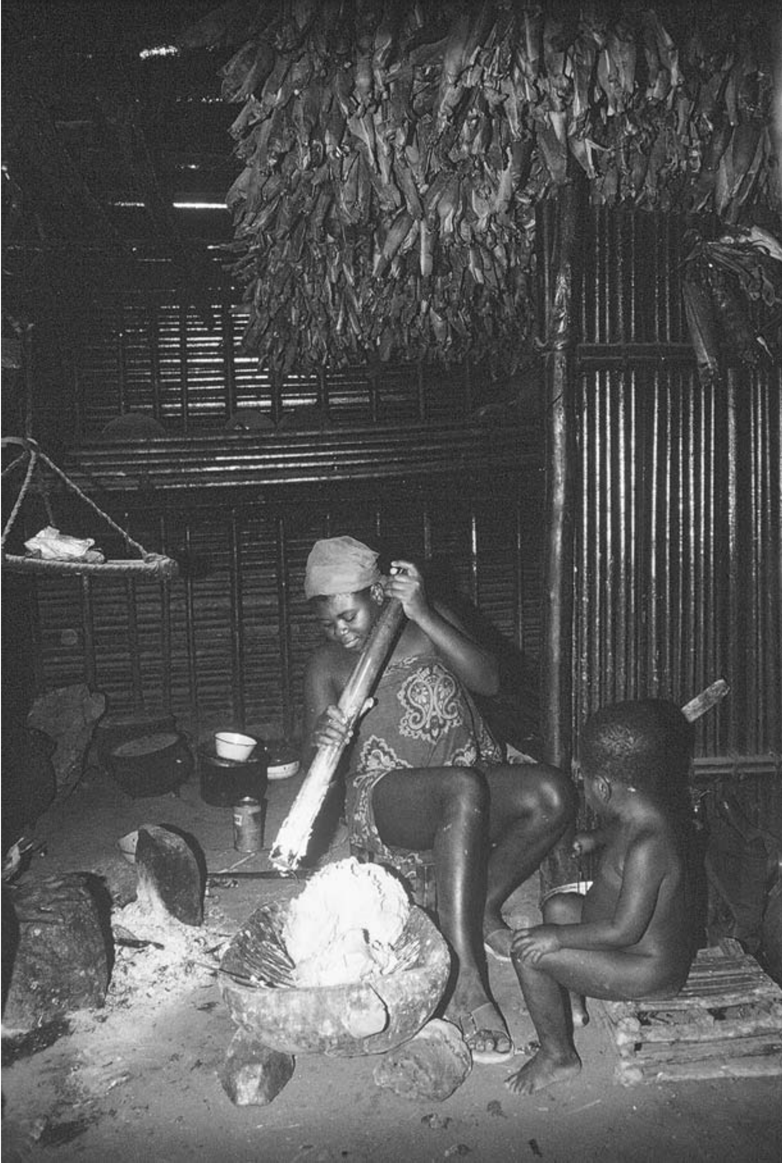

Photo n° 7. A woman in her house, pounding *atshu'* in an elongated mortar (1974).

Turning to the most important elements or commodities entering or exiting a woman's house, the grain crops (groundnuts, cow peas, etc.) are taken into the house. After they have been stored in bags and dried, they are taken away to the first level of the attic which the woman reaches from the inside of the house using a ladder, up through a hatch in the ceiling. The maize, as already seen, hangs from the ceiling, over the hearth. As for the root crops, they are piled in baskets at the far end of the house, on shelves or on the floor, aside *atshu'* bananas and pots, drums or calabashes containing palm oil. There is firewood stacked along the walls, outdoors, or in the second attic before it is brought into the house when needed.

Typical of the inward and outward movements regulating and accompanying the woman's life cycle are the nightly visits to her husband's house. She returns to her house before dawn, for it would not be fitting if she left the man's house when the other adults started coming out of their houses. During daytime too, visits to the husband's house must be discreet.

Whenever a woman becomes pregnant, the child's birth is a landmark which puts an end to the sexual relations between husband and wife for a couple of years. The mother keeps her baby in her house and there are no more nightly outings. She stays in her house, or around it, for a month or so after she has given birth to her child. The specific space and period is termed *nda mu* ([the] child's house) which in Pidgin means 'born house'. In the past, a woman who had just given birth was expected to remain within her house; she was allowed to sit on a banana tree trunk which had just fallen and was put on the ground inside the house. Nowadays, she receives visits by people who bring her food, oil and presents and pay their respects to the child who is handed from guest to guest.

As an observation, I would like to add that in October 2002, I went to the hamlet of *Ntso' Tu* that belonged to the small chiefdom of *Mombu'*, confederated with Mankon. On the previous night, one of the wives had given birth to a child. I could see the one-day old baby handed around, seven people holding him in succession within half an hour. A 35 year-old woman arrived, hot and wet with perspiration after travelling under the stifling sun. She wanted to hold the baby and took him from the hands of her neighbour. The little one started to cry loudly as soon as he was in the woman's arms. Should Julia (born around 1920) have witnessed the scene, she would undoubtedly have scolded the woman, in her own colourful language, speaking her mind

frankly as she usually did: "are you going to hold this baby in your arms when you have been walking in the sun? If you have taken medicines earlier this morning, the heat makes them ooze through your skin and the baby is disturbed. When you enter the house, rest for a while. Then take the baby." Julia also strongly believes that, should anyone walk across woodland, farmland or raffia bushes, the spirits—the good and the harmful ones—stick to your skin, accompanying you when you enter a house, and may disturb a child. This can actually be avoided, provided one sits down for a long while, waits for the skin temperature to cool down, and stays calm until one's breath and heart beat slow down. During this time, the spirits are likely to release their grip and the medicines will cease to ooze through one's skin. This is the time to hold the baby without disturbing it. More than any other, the 'new-born house' should be protected from outside influences.

Wanting to explore further the reasons for the higher level of doorsteps in habitations, I once tried to trigger additional reactions while taking care to avoid asking the question "why are the thresholds so high?" Instead, I asked 'how'. Two lines of comments were developed: firstly, the association of the high doorstep with medicines buried just behind it, and secondly, the fact that when the last born of a woman is able to go across the doorstep on his own, to go out or go in unaided, the husband and wife know they can resume their sexual relations and contemplate having another child again. Consequently, in the past, pregnancies were spaced out by three or four years. A recurring memory among women, mostly of the older generation, is one of the father who, thinking that the girl was able to go across the threshold without help, gave her a hoe in order to do some gardening near the house. A great number of women happen to have experienced this.

On workdays (six days in a eight-day week), women return home from the fields carrying farm products or timber on their heads. The next task is to prepare the evening meal in two parts: one is for their children, companions or neighbours and another for the husband, to be taken to him either by herself or by a child. Whenever a husband returns home, later than the wives, he finds the baskets, one from each wife. He has as much food as he needs and gives the rest to the children who have come to join their father, after having had their meals at their mother's houses. The children therefore eat a second time.

Siri (an assumed name), a woman who belongs to the *Nto' Fi* lineage, was born between 1910 and 1920 and married into a polygamous family. Despite converting to Catholicism in the 1980s, some 20 years later she

would still express views favourable to polygamy. She remembers fondly the father of her own household, sitting in his courtyard, enjoying the early morning sunlight and distributing the food to his children with the spouses' baskets all around him.

Moreover, a woman's house is a 'pump' of crops, spices and firewood. This 'pump' forces children and the results of her cooking to flow. Women and children participate in this ebbing movement, or to the surge of high tide which is repeated everyday. The woman is at the heart of it, and embodies these comings and goings.

During our talk in December 2002, Clement *Zua'*, the son of a polygamous notable of the royal clan, recalled different occasions from his early childhood. In those days, he says, after the morning food had been shared among the children, his father would go into his house and fetch his flask of powdered medicine.[5] The flask also contained a thin strip of the bark of raffia stem, about 20 cm in length, stuck into the powder. He would take it out of the container and apply it onto each of the children's palms, depositing some of the medicine. The children were then to lick the palms of their hands and swallow the medicine. Hence, when adults admit "I owe everything I have to my father, he gave me my life, he fed me, he protected me" this is the literal truth. A man's wives will give the food they have prepared, using the crops they have grown, to their husband. Such food transfers are made as a donation to repay for what the father has given under the guise of unction, camwood, raffia wine and other essential products. These are bestowed upon the family by the dead elders through the household or the lineage head, or by the palace. The father does nothing but redistribute the food he has deservedly earned from his spouses, as he is the one who dispenses fertility. He is the one who, eventually, has to receive thanks for nourishing the children and keeping them alive, and not the wives despite the fact that they actually have procured and prepared the food.

The ultimate conclusion to be drawn here is that a man or a woman's house is always part of a group of similar houses, with the contents circulating from door to door. The group itself is subsumed in a single envelope provided by the 'father'.

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[5] The powders are usually produced by the 'traditional' doctors, or people of importance in the palace, or by individuals who burn up plants (and sometimes dead chameleons), the ashes of which they eventually pound into powder and then sift.

Body and language

Turning to some methodological and interpretative questions, my early research about Mankon consisted of oral enquiries which provide both the easiest and the most rewarding access to information, and are used by almost every ethnologist. After 15 years of research, I decided to apply another line of analysis. The reason for this is because it became clear that the specific sensori-motor conducts of the notables—the vital piggy-banks—and material culture provided knowledge that could be interpreted more easily and foster more pertinent insights into the hierarchical organisation of these societies than the discursive corpus.

Yet, I was puzzled by the notion I had of a discrepancy between the two. The verbalisations insisted on the reciprocity between the subjects within the descent group. They seem to belie my observations about economic practices and material culture where women and cadets were seen to provide subsistence commodities and all sorts of services to the notables, and were thanked for this by saliva or raffia wine sprayed on them. They accepted this, chanting and praising the notables to which they would feel indebted for everything they had in their lives.

For several years I was led to hypothesise that the obligations of younger sons and wives to a hierarchical organisation which, in some ways, rested upon them, was tantamount to a deception to which they committed themselves without even a second thought. In my view, such a stratagem consisted of exchanging commodities and values which were in no way commensurable—goods and services for breath and saliva. The latter took precedence over everything and were deemed priceless in contrast to the goods which had a measurable market value. Added to this, a discourse forwarding egalitarian values, emancipating the notables from debt, indulging in the idea that, should any kind of debt be retained, it was the notables who ought to benefit from it. This mystification seemed to have sprung from a discrepancy between bodily conducts and discourse, between economy and the description of transfers and counter-transfers of goods and services, not unlike what is described by Marx as commodity fetishism.

I was able to check this observation on occasions when, facing audiences born to such backgrounds, I emphasised the idea that ancient political structures, namely when embodied by the 'pot-king', seemed utterly undemocratic, no matter how eagerly some propose them as models for any would-be African democracy in the years to come. I consequently triggered reactions of criticism and even anger. I

eventually decided to opt for a praxeological and economic approach of the 'pot-king,' at the expense of oral investigation which aimed at eliciting the relevant verbalisations concerning kingship. I went as far as to disqualify discourse and to trust only the practice. This theoretical and methodological approach amounts to separating body from language, bodily conducts from the vernacular comments, procedural knowledge from verbalised knowledge.[6] Subsequently, I could not consider Mankon political organisation as the outcome of a dissociated process between bodily conducts and language as a kind of collective psychosis, a schizophrenia of sorts. I finally turned to a systematic research for the Mankon verbalisations, together with their practices. I was aware of the need not to ask questions that would trigger a certain type of response. This is the reason why I focused on sayings or on the spontaneous speeches of subjects speaking on public occasions or when recounting their life stories.

A number of proverbs which I heard repeated in ordinary conversations on several occasions will give an insight into the way bodily conducts and language articulate. A first list of proverbs comes from a vernacular theory of the corporation, that is the fact that a group—descent group, household, or the kingdom—is considered as a single body which is incorporated in the materiality of a consolidated estate, a house, and in particular bodily conducts. Here are some:[7]

5. "The kingdom is given with the hand". No successor is allowed to take the initiative to declare himself a candidate when taking over the throne or as a head of a lineage or a patrigroup. The group is the only entity to have the power of taking hold of an individual, bestowing the office upon him; not the slightest comment is expected of him. We shall see in Chapter 8 that this is precisely what occurs in case of a succession to a vacant title.

6. "If the family is too talkative, one will never be able to carry the children." 'Talkative' is said 'mouth mouth'. In other words, a family where each individual will express their views to the outside world, is one where the children will never become enfranchised. Thus is acknowledged the status of the father: the only mouth to be heard is his. The house having one orifice only, it consequently has to have only

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[6] I am indebted to Zaki Strougo who made me realise that I was going to reach a theoretical dead-end, should I develop this theory any further.

[7] Each of the proverbs is taken from a corpus of 90, numbered from 1 to 90. I owe thanks to *Adenumbi* Zuah who helped me collect them.

one envelope. A household which is too talkative is one which is too open to the outside world.

12. "A single hand cannot make a parcel." The meaning is the same as n° 6: no individual is worthy, unless part of a group.

40. "A lone river will roam around." An individual by himself who has been bereft from the group is bound to wander to and fro, just as a river does.

51. "Could it be so that an animal has two tails?" A subject and his agnates are one animal. What is being done to the benefit of one is done for all. Should two agnates become distinct from one another, anyone indebted to the one would be indebted to the other. One then is bound to repay his debt to one person only as *pars pro toto* of the corporate group. An animal (that is, the group) cannot possibly be conceived as having two tails, that is, two distinct individuals in the group.

Exploring a repertoire of proverbs is tantamount to being supplied with an anthology of figures of speech. One corpus often contains proverbs which lead to radically different conclusions. This precisely is not the case in Mankon, insofar as the group holds a premium as a corporation over the individuals who are part of it. This group is conceived as a single body (or an animal) within which the subjects (men and women, the younger ones and the elderly) are strictly interdependant, and complement each other. At least, this is the moral norm constantly reminded to the individuals, since, in such a competitive and unequal society, each subject makes repeated attempts to escape from the lower ranks of hierarchy and to achieve social status and personal gratification. In Western countries, in the wake of Kantorowicz's studies (1957), it appeared that the theory of corporate groups or corporations is infused with the medieval theology of the 'king's two bodies'. Central to this is the Church, conceived as a Body, both a mystic and a physical one, the Head of which is Christ, resurrected in the flesh. This theology echoes even further in the theory of the corporate groups developed by British social anthropology. The Mankon theory is not without far reaching similarities to Western theories of corporations, inasmuch as the theory of the body politic is premised on the sacred ideal of the father which belongs to the realm of religion. The correlation between religion, the sacred, belonging to or enfranchisement is very aptly pinpointed by Pradelles de Latour (2001).

All the proverbs are relevant with the relationship between 'the one' and 'the multiple' within the household or descent group. 'The one' is the father, the absolute container of ancestral substances, the single and

isolated inmate of the house from where and to where the principles and the products necessary to the family group come and go. Women and cadets are indebted to the father for their lives and the product of their activities. In this respect, the proverbs are in accordance with practice. However, the Mankon are in no way naive enough to deny that one corporation or another is devoid of inner conflicts:

61. "A house without a conflict, a scarecrow without its attendant". When a crop begins to ripen and is to be collected, the farmers erect scarecrows in the middle of their fields. Yet these contraptions will prove useless unless individuals, most of the time children, settle nearby, sheltering themselves in small huts, to scare the predators away, by shaking the scarecrow when needed. Positively, conflicts account for the vitality of the group which stalls predators and the threat they generate around it. Yet within the family, conflicts should never become too overtly conspicuous. This is exactly what the following proverb professes:

63. "The smoke has to be kept inside the house". No proverb is more adequate and can more aptly express that the house/household, the building/inmates are one and the same entity. The house is provided with a narrow door but no opening exists either as a window or a chimney. Consequently, when smoke rises from the hearth, it accumulates in a kind of blue cloud over the heads of the people sitting and discussing around the fire. Yet, it must be so that the smoke of conflicts has to remain within the house. Should the building be fitted with several doors/mouths, should it become 'talkative', the smoke of conflicts would leak outside the house and potential enemies would easily destroy it; besides, the children themselves would become unmanageable.

In September 2002, I am sitting in my house at *Ala'a Matu*, a district in Mankon, together with a number of people of the same family whom I have known as friends for a very long time: *Bi*—a pseudonym for a woman aged about 55, two of her daughters and the husband of one of them, who consider me as an adopted relative to the lineage through *Bi*'s own father. The door and window are closed. A man is heard outside, uttering '*kwa-kwa*' in a loud voice, which amounts to knocking at the door (knocking on doors had never been done in Mankon until later). *Bi* immediately says *sotto voce* '*fendi' tshe nda*' ("[the] smoke stays [in the] house") thus hinting that we had better put an end to the conversation for the time being and keep it to ourselves. I ask "who is this?". He is a neighbour, a very self-effacing person, who will not stay for long. Yet, just before he steps in, *Bi*'s daughter whispers "let us allow this

breath of air to go through", which, in some way, allows me to show the young man in. Yet, I am fully aware that, once the 'breath of air' has departed, we will be able to produce smoke again which will be maintained within the house.

Acknowledging conflicts within a fully fledged group and making it necessary to maintain them within the group's limits so as to keep any kind of indiscretion and uncontrolled consequences at bay, this is what the following proverb brings to light:

10. "A conflict in the house has to be fought with the elbows",[8] which is hinting at many different things at the same time: that such conflicts within the house exist; that the dwelling and the group can be identified; that the dwelling is narrow; that there is hardly enough space to extend one's arm to fight with one's fists. Furthermore, the proverb highlights the idea of the contained and even the notion of a coercion which is placed upon the inmates by the very building. Lastly, one is never allowed to display publicly the arguments the family experiments with within the household.

The two proverbs above can be complemented by the following:

15. "Farting in the house isn't smelled (outside)"...since the door is kept closed and acrimony does not degenerate and give birth to open scuffles for:

39. "Javelins are a block"; when bound together and stacked together, they cannot be broken, whereas it is easy to smash them one after the other. The moral of this proverb is that, despite conflict, we must stay close together, within the house, under the unfailing leadership of the elders.

These proverbs allow us to draw a first conclusion concerning the links between praxis and language. The correlations develop along two themes. The first one is fully consistent with the praxeology of containers; it assimilates the house, under the specific aspect of a closed container with an orifice, to the whole corporate household with a possible interface between the outside world and indoors (the father whose task is to keep the proceedings a secret of his house).

[8] The Mankon text is worth quoting in the vernacular as it provides a graphic rendering of the dispute: *beto feto fenda la ne ngerenkwe*: "[they—plural prefix] fight [a] fight [in the] house with [the] elbows."

The second theme refers to a hierarchy among the members of the family which is validated by its properties. It is believed to offer a family backbone, compensate for the differences of status or role, safeguard the tradition of providing help to anyone in the group: man, woman, cadet, or elderly person. It also ensures that wealth is shared or exchanged, that solidarity exists between the members, at least as far as theory is concerned. Yet, one point seems worth mentioning, about which the vernacular moral theory is silent: unmarried cadets crowd in numbers at the bottom of the social ladder—contrary to traditional ideology and beyond common sense. Let us ascribe these conclusions to particular facts on body and language, a point that will be developed in the following chapters.

Identifications between subjects and containers

This chapter, as well as the two previous ones, has been an opportunity to collect data which brought light to the identification of the household and the house; the building and the inmates; the door and the adult who steps over the threshold on a regular basis; the body, the self, and the subject's skin. These observations allow us to use the term 'sensori-affective-motor' over-investment of the skin, of envelopes and orifices. Besides, a notion is made clear that, permanent practices on substances and containers are protective of the house and cure the subjects. We are faced with a set of actions and practices on other people's actions, a '*dispositif*' as Foucault described it. The whole set of motor conducts which have been described, as well as the embodied material objects, have produced a repertoire which every Mankon subject shares, no matter his position in the political hierarchy of his society. This repertoire can be traced along history in a number of variations (from palm oil to industrial lotions, from nakedness to clothes, from thatch coverings to corrugated iron or aluminium roofs, etc.) already mentioned.

As mentioned in the introduction, such a repertoire of conducts and behaviours has implications of a political nature: subjects, since they operate as containers, can easily be classified and ranked according to the strength of their envelopes, the fact that they are more or less full of the ancestral substances, and whether they are programmed to release or receive them. At the top of the hierarchy is the monarch and the notables whose bodies are filled by the dead elders. At the bottom of

the pyramid, are the women and the unmarried cadets; the latter are, so to speak, empty and poorly consolidated.

The second, third and fourth chapters explored the subjective side of the Mankon kingship: that of the technologies of the self which provide the means of subjecting and identifying the king's subjects. They also drew the outlines of the political side of Mankon kingship, the face of the king, which will now require our attention.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE GIFTS OF THE DEAD MONARCHS

Conclusions drawn in previous chapters make it necessary to elaborate further on a number of points. The first one is that, should envelopes be over-invested in the Grassfields, this specific, *psychological* over-investment accounts in no way for their role in the *political* hierarchy of that society by means of a technology of envelopes. At a theoretical level, we may assume that the psychological over-investment of envelopes will basically generate a vocabulary used especially in the description of specific social patterns of connecting vessels. Yet, should one start from a given set of words, one would be able to write more than one text, even texts that lead to contradictory conclusions. The text which precisely describes the pot-king holds two specific premises: the first one is "the king and his subjects operate as envelopes". The second one is "the pot-king holds ancestral substances. He stores them and dispenses them among his subjects". The two premises differ logically from one another.

There is another version, based on the same vocabulary, which would be grounded on the following two statements: "all subjects operate as envelopes", and "all subjects are the receptacles of substances coming directly from the dead elders, and they swap them among the group". One might imagine an egalitarian political organisation based on the logic of the connecting vessels within which substances would be circulated on a horizontal basis, from one subject to another. Slight variations would exist according to different circumstances or different persons but there pertains no assumption of a set and permanent hierarchy of statuses. We therefore have two separate lines of argument: do envelopes actually have a significant *psychological* importance? And to what extent do they participate in creating a *political* hierarchy among the subjects? Previous chapters shed some light on the first set of arguments, allowing us to now turn to the second.

Séverin Abega (1987, 1995, 2002) who has authored several anthropological studies on the Beti (especially the Manguissa) in Cameroon, made me realise that the ethnographic data I provided on the treatment of the skin, containers and ancestral substances in the Grassfields

could also apply to a large part of the Beti population. The Beti live in a forest region in Cameroon and can be held as the epitome of an egalitarian society (that is, between free men) as Abega, P. Laburthe-Tolra (1981, 1988) and others describe it. As far as the connecting vessels are concerned, the main difference between the two societies originates in the hierarchy of the Grassfields society. Starting from the same vocabulary describing ordinary behaviours, the two societies have achieved two very dissimilar technologies of power: the one (Beti) has the substances circulated horizontally among the male subjects who have benefited from 'So', the initiation of almost all young males, which has been explained by P. Laburthe-Tolra (1988). The second society (Grassfields) has the ancestral substances circulated vertically, from top to bottom, with no notion of equality between the notables whose titles have been bestowed upon them after the demise of their father, himself a notable, on the one hand, and women and non-initiated cadets (since initiation does not exist in the Grassfields) on the other hand.

We then conclude that no convincing explanation of a technology of power as a whole is to be found in a psychological configuration of the subjects. By establishing that psychological and bodily envelopes are over-invested in Mankon, we gain a better understanding of the specificities in the criteria of identification which are instrumental in the technologies of empowerment in Mankon society. On the other hand, considering the fact that the whole range of repertoires of identification is to be traced in both societies (hierarchical Grassfields and egalitarian Beti), the discrepancies which typify them, as far as social organisation is concerned, could not be ascribed to psychological determinants.

Therefore, in the Grassfields monarchies, the containers are politically as well as psychologically invested and, more importantly, they constitute the basic instruments of the production and maintenance of a social and *political hierarchy*. When deciding to write, prior to anything else, three chapters dealing respectively with the shaping of the subjects, and their identifications to their skin and to their house, I am aware that I could be suspected of psychological determinism. Yet I chose to take this risk, my aim being to better resist potential misconceptions and therefore articulate my answers in more convincing terms.

To sum up, the rationale of my argument is this: the praxeology of containers and substances can be assessed as a sensori-motor culture of which all subjects living in the Grassfields partake and which is fully mastered by them all (to a great extent it is shared by the Beti and numerous societies in Western Africa). This repertoire is made of all

the sensori-motor conducts, of all the material culture on which the bodily conducts are propped, as well as a whole range of verbalisations, all the images and all the investments which are illustrated with the ethnographic data provided.[1] Most importantly, its code is known by everyone. In cases when this '*praxothèque*' is not available, or not sufficiently circulated among the subjects, the consequences would be that obstacles would hamper the very practice of a governmentality of containers. On the contrary, from the moment when it is made available, nothing in this repertoire can determine the form—hierarchical or egalitarian—of the governmentality one can construct with it. Yet, the principles it encapsulates are respected and enforced in both cases. Leach (1954) was among those who first demonstrated, in the case of Highland Burma, that hierarchical or non-hierarchical systems could be generated by the same constitutive elements and reveal signs of structural transformations in the systems the one into the other.

One can even assume that this argument can still be further elaborated by using comparative analysis. D. Anzieu (1985: 6–7) notices that contemporary Western societies are confronted with a problem of limits: nuclear proliferation, the sustained increase in production and consumption which generates a huge waste of commodities, competition in performance in sports, professional achievement and earnings are here to remind us of the global nature of the political notion of limits (within the realm of the Cold War, the United States turned 'containment' into a key notion of their politics as regards the Communist block) which is precisely at the turn of the 21st century, the politics the rest of the world has in mind in the face of the US. The Grassfields are noticeable for a constant political and psychological urge for constructing limits, whereas contemporary Western countries, according to D. Anzieu, obey a reverse logic of constant pushing against, or even destruction of, large numbers of limits. As the saying goes, particularly in the United States, 'the sky is the limit'. In both cases no one would venture to say that the psychogenesis of the subjects will ever account for the differences in the political and economic organisation of these societies.

[1] Within the research group Matière à Penser, we have agreed upon the term *praxothèque*, drawing on the terms *bibliothèque* (library), and *discothèque*, that is, a repertoire of sensori-motor conducts which are made available to any individual within a group or a society.

Romain Bertrand (2005) has carried on an analysis of historical and political aspects of Javanese kingdoms and the *Priyayi* social group, an administrative nobility entrusted by the kings with the supervision of the maritime trade and the peasantry. The *Priyayi*, with their ascetic lifestyles, their meticulous material culture, the constant concern they had to control the expression of their faces or their gestures, their dandified behaviour, the constant strain they imposed upon themselves and upon their entourage, had within their reach a '*praxothèque*' radically different from the Grassfields one. Yet, Javanese governmentality—since it attributes power to the nobility as a quasi-natural property, which they are deemed worthy of exercising because they are supposed to have done away with the tyranny of the self thanks to an ascetic lifestyle—is the one which will most aptly articulate other people's conducts with certain registers of identification, of psychological investment and of technologies of the self. However, the *Priyayi*'s psychogenesis will never account for the exercise of power in Javanese kingdoms, and the latter ones will never account for the psychogenesis of the subjects.

The diversity of the registers used is a key indicator of the reasons why the *Priyayi* as a category would never be of any use as instruments of government in the Grassfields, just as a Grassfields notable could not govern in a Western country; similarly, any Western executive would not be of use in the ascetic system of Javanese governmentality, nor would any Beti 'Lord' in any of the Grassfields kingdoms. It is not possible to try to pull together any technology of the self with any technology of power. They have to fit together. Power is not some kind of raw material one can transpose as such, unchanged, from one society to another.

The reason why the choices are made for a particular form of power and governmentality remains partly unclear, yet, trying to elicit the conditions in which the choices are made, in other words, the 'how' rather than the 'why?' is within our reach. In the case of the Mankon, one can demonstrate that there is a whole range of containers, which goes from the mere calabash to the physical borders of the city; one must add to this the sensori-motor conducts induced by the containers. They can all be read as the genuine backbone of the technologies of power in Mankon. This is a matter of ethnography with an input of a certain type of theoretical questioning. It is an ethnological exploration of over-investment, more political than psychological, of the containers, the contents, the openings and the transformations. To shape

the actual background of this ethnography, let us briefly describe the Mankon kingdom.[2]

A 'supra-lineage' organisation

At the close of the 19th century, just prior to the traumatic visit of the German Explorer Eugen Zintgraff in the region (1889–1891), the Mankon kingdom, located in the Western part of the Grassfields (see map 1 p. 34) had between 6,000 and 8,000 subjects who lived together in a city bordering the Mezam, a stream about 10 m in width. E. Zintgraff (1895) gave a brief description of it. On the historical background of '*moyenne durée*', this date and the events which took place around the arrival of E. Zintgraff do not constitute such a sharp turn in the course of history as might appear. Actually, the Grassfields had already been participating fully in the global market for nearly two centuries, although in a somewhat indirect way, through the Atlantic slave trade which was active in the Bight of Benin, and which reached deep into the hinterland and the high plateaux.

The Mankon polity was made of 32 patrilineages grouped under nine exogamous clans with no genealogical connections; the most important one being the king's clan which nearly numbered half of the city's total population. Each descent group, clan or lineage (*atse* sg.) was headed by a 'father of the descent group' (*ta atse* or *tatse* sg.) whose responsibility it was to manage the consolidated estate of the corporate group he headed. This estate consisted in the ancestral substances, the rights in persons, lands and raffia bushes, associations of men and women with their masks, orchestras and musical repertoires. As corporate groups, the lineages and clans were the basic building blocks of the body politics. They were federated by a number of institutions among which was the council of notables (*bekum*, sg.: *nkum*) of the lineages and of the palace, who played a prominent role in running the town. The clans assembled together the instruments for the purification of subjects and objects and the instruments of punishment and social control. They were kept in a

[2] I have already devoted two volumes to the description of this kingdom (Warnier, 1975 and 1985a) on which I rely for the present study. However, my previous works were produced along the lines of British social anthropology and did not take into account the technologies of power addressed to the body.

lodge located in the palace, and they were entrusted to an association of men whose name was *Takinge*. Other clubs and associations of men or women would gather together people from the different clans. Namely the warrior lodges, huntmen's associations which possessed a shrine in one of the palace buildings named *Nda Ala'a* ('[the] House [of the] Country'), the medicine men who gathered in *Nda Ngang* ('[the] House [of the] Medicines') or *Alub Ala'a* ('*Alub* [of the] Country').

Embedded as it was in a lineage-based organisation, the Mankon kingdom followed an independent federal political pattern, distinct from the kinship-based organisation of the descent groups, although a number of words and metaphors used in describing the political relationships were to a certain extent borrowed from kinship. A majority among the Grassfields kingdoms would be conceived along these lines. The Bamoum kingdom which Tardits (1980) described could obviously be considered as the one example to stand apart from the general rule as its monarch had all the descent groups beheaded, replacing their chiefs by his own kinsmen. Consequently, he turned the kingdom into a single huge descent group with lineages inter-connecting, yet resulting from mere political manoeuvre.

In Mankon, the king's office was hereditary within the royal clan (*Nto'* meaning '[the] Palace'). The monarch's demise would mark the moment when the office would be handed down to (or bestowed upon) one of the late king's sons, among those who had been begotten on the 'leopard's skin', that is, when their father, having already been invested with the king's responsibility, would have sexual relationships with his spouses on a bed covered with the skins of these large cats.

The king would live in the palace, or *nto'* (wherefrom the royal clan was named) which consisted of an extended household with the sovereign, his spouses, their children and the unmarried servants, most of them aged between twelve and 35, under the supervision of a few palace notables. The number of servants equalled more or less the number of spouses. As far as the spouses were concerned, the monarch formed matrimonial unions with other Mankon lineages—the royal lineages being excluded until the time when, at the turn of the 20th century, a separation ritual occurred which allowed clan endogamy. The king also chose his spouses in the neighbouring towns, which contributed to raising the number of wives to around 150 in about 1900. The clan's chiefs also had one or several dozens of spouses, according to their wealth and social status. Approximately one man in two was excluded from marriage, fatherhood and, to a large extent, from genital sexuality; one

in three actually, considering that the slave trade subtracted a number of cadets from the number of bachelors globally. The palace servants were entrusted in the king's care by the heads of the lineages or by the sovereign's allies, for a given period of time.

Actually, it would be untrue to assert that one 'man' out of three was excluded from marriage because of the rate of high polygamy of the notables, for this is not in keeping with the Mankon analysis of their own society. Given that no initiation ritual proper existed for boys, the Mankon were provided with no specific process to generate 'men' with a vested right to marriage and genital sex out of successive cohorts of boys. Consequently, the only male subjects who were liable to reach social adulthood were the ones whose fathers had provided them with a spouse. The other ones, named '*takwe*' ('bachelor' sg.), were kept in a pre-adolescent status which could even last until old age. They were mere 'cadets'.

The palace was the heart of power.[3] It consisted of four restricted areas which subdivided into a number of courtyards with flanking buildings all around: the quarter of the king's lodgings, that of the spouses', the section of men's societies of commoner status, and a fourth section which all the citizens, men and women, could access freely. The district of the societies of commoner status was named '*Kwi'fo*'. The organs of control and police were located there and even the lodge which administered the ordeal by poison to alleged witches.

The city of Mankon was part of a regional community or ecumene within which a number of kingdoms—about twelve of them around Mankon—maintained matrimonial alliances as well as diplomatic and trade relations. Within this network, notables and kings exchanged valuables. Individuals and groups would circulate rather easily from city to city. I devoted a book to the analysis of the regional community and its geopolitics (Warnier 1985a); therefore I will not develop this point any further.

German colonisation did strike the Mankon kingdom severely. As they aimed at taking revenge after the defeat experienced by E. Zintfgraff in 1891, in 1901 the Germans conducted a 'punitive' expedition led by Lt. Pavel against Mankon, which resulted in a large number of dead; some 218 according to Stocker; see Chilver (1967: 495) and 96 prisoners according to Pavel. The palace was burnt to the ground.

[3] See *Paideuma*, 31, 1985: *Palaces and Chiefly Households in the Cameroon Grassfields.*

(The *Deutsche Kolonialblatt*, vol. 13, pp. 162–163 records the facts from the point of view of Pavel who put responsibility for the catastrophe with *Ngwa'fo II*'s 'treachery' and the Mankon resistance). As it had been placed under British mandate by the Versailles Treaty, the Western part of Cameroon and consequently Mankon fell under British administration, based in Nigeria, until 1961 when it won independence. Mankon underwent serious inner conflicts connected with the succession of king *Ngwa'fo II* in 1918–1920, which eventually resulted in the schism of the kingdom into two opposing factions. Throughout Mankon, this conflict has been called 'the Dispute' which is the translation of the ngemba word '*filame*'. Yet, from 1950 onwards, the development of Bamenda, the provincial capital, partly on Mankon territory, started drawing part of the population out of the old city's limits and so ushered it into the colonial economy.

From the moment they gained independence, there were reasons to think that such kingdoms as Mankon might well be replaced by some form of state-controlled bureaucratic organisation, to eventually disappear as functional units; yet, this did not happen. These kingdoms still offer a valuable resource in contemporary Cameroonian political life. Furthermore, ever since 1960, as was the case for a number of African countries, they have fostered a process of invention of traditions as E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (1983) depicted it, creating opportunities for calling upon the full local political resources and using them in the national competition. This amazing 'Return of the Kings' everywhere in Africa was illustrated in a conference and a publication under the direction of Cl.-H. Perrot and F.-X. Fauvelle-Aymar (2003). I conducted my own research in a regional community and a local kingdom in full revitalisation, which gave me the opportunity to witness the following practices and which further demonstrate the *political* investment of limits.

The overflowing of the royal body

In Mankon, it is the monarch's duty to feed the city and supply it with the substances he receives from his predecessors. Such substances are vital. They foster the life, reproduction and health of humans and livestock, the success of crops, the wealth of the households. The large number of the monarch's spouses is a measure of the life potential he is credited with.

Photo n° 8. The king *Abu 'Mbi'* of Bafut ca. 1910. Photo Diel, courtesy Photo-Archiv, Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, Köln.

A high rate of polygamy has been known as a dominant feature among the Grassfields kings: Tardits (1980: 245) refers to the Bamoum king's 1,200 wives in 1919: [however] "he had lost any interest in several hundred of them". Besides, in Bafut, Mankon and Bali-Nyonga, the average number of at least 150 spouses for each king cannot be doubted *Ngwa'fo III* had about 50 spouses when I first met him in 1971. In 2003, he had about 30 of them and his wish was that his successor had no more than five. On *Abu 'Mbi*'s photograph (the king of Bafut at the beginning of the 20th century, see photo n° 8), a corpulent male is exposed, the archetype of male fertility, with, to his right, about a dozen of his spouses all pregnant by him, and, to his left, a number of the numerous children he had fathered. In Mankon circa 1900, according to the data I collected, the king had 5 per cent of the total female population of the kingdom to himself, and, due to the polygamy the four previous kings had practiced, the royal clan amounted to 50 per cent of the city's total population.

One cannot but express one's surprise at reading such figures. From 1920 to 1960–1961, when the country won its independence, the League of Nations, then the United Nations expressed their concern about the number of royal spouses and about their being nude, which was deemed offensive. The feminist Rebecca Reyher (1952) similarly

disseminated this message amongst the public. Might any prerogative or despotic privilege ever account for those outsized harems? Given the fact that such mores chiefly aimed at reproduction, the obligation of achieving this aim was urged upon the king and one may venture to imagine that he must have been under unusual pressure.

At the Mankon palace, it was *Maafo*, the king's biological mother—or any woman who might have been selected to succeed *Maafo* in case she died—who chose the partners of the King for a particular night (or day), handing out a handful of grass tied in a knot (probably *Sporobolus africanus*) to the ones selected. No objection was ever expected from the king. He had one of his pre-adolescent servants from the royal clan bring the spouse to him; he called them in into his own house (*atsum*—the 'lake') when he felt like it. Thus, the high rate of polygamy and the practices which went along with it are well attested.

They actually result from a twofold principle: on the one hand, this situation is generated by marriage alliance policies with the neighbouring sovereigns and the different components of the kingdom. On the other hand, it is the outcome of the ancestral substances of which the king is a container. His body is the only one in which dead kings' dispensations are deposited. It is therefore all too logical that he should contain more than anybody else and that, better than anyone else, he might be able to behave as a stallion whose very existence was devoted to reproduction.

The monarch used to consider, and still does, that dispensing his own semen was one of the most important duties which had been placed upon him. Here is a comment *Ngwa'fo* made upon this subject, published in the daily *Cameroon Tribune* (N° 4837 of 3–4 March 1991, transl. by JPW):

> *C.T.*: Speaking of your numerous wives and children, one wonders how one person can look after 50 spouses and attend to them.
> *Fon of Mankon*: The conjugal needs, well then why not? It depends. This is precisely the reason why I say that any prince is under the obligation of preparing to become a '*fon*' [that is, a 'king'] from an early age. From that very moment there is something very different about him. He stands apart from the rest of the men. You know that a prince's ultimate ambition is fathering a large number of children. And this isn't only for pleasure's sake. A prince has to behave cautiously in order to protect himself, besides, his wives have to behave with equal care so as to protect themselves too.
> *C.T.*: It is said that '*fons*' have special cooks or specific traditional medicines which contribute to reinforcing their potency.
> *Fon of Mankon*: Indeed, it is perfectly true.

The politics of sex are a good indicator of the governmentality of containers. Yet one can hardly say that it is the only kind. The king will distribute camwood powder to the notables' funerals, whether they be of royal or commoner status, in order to anoint the corpses. He makes the men and women who come to the palace drink from his drinking horn so that they may speak to him without resorting to a go-between. On special occasions, he distributes medicines which are called 'the king's medicine'. He will also spray his saliva on certain visitors. He sends his own servants after giving them crimson camwood powder to cure the places and the persons who have been affected with acts of violence. Day after day, he will dispense his words and his breath when he receives the visitors who crowd into the palace. He will also assume the role of judge and councillor. *Ngwa'fo III* complains in these early years of the 21st century:

> Actually, the roles are being mixed up. In our days there are tribunals, lawyers, a police force and territorial administration. Yet the Mankon, instead of resorting to these institutions, call on the king. He constantly has to perform in every domain. This very morning, I even had to intercede with the Magistrate's Court and the police: a mother and her children were left in the street, their house under seal. All their clothes and belongings were inside. The clothes, schoolbooks, everything. The husband had mortgaged the house so as to have a good time himself before it was too late. What spoils everything is money. Money! Money… (Personal communication, January 2003.)

The mere fact that he has to speak costs him time and energy. He can never stop giving out and attending to others. "Within a reign of 40 years, he says, I have never had even one day's rest, apart from one occasion when I visited my son in Texas in 2002. I stayed there for two months, protected from the usual solicitors. These were the only vacations I had, ever since I was made a king, in 1959" (*ibid*). Indeed, a large photograph of *Ngwa'fo* wearing a Stetson hat is kept in the palace hall where he receives his visitors as a souvenir of these two rare months of vacation in Texas.

The king ejaculates, exhales, spits, utters words, spreads oil and camwood, dispenses the wine and the medicines. He will give out relentlessly, in large quantities. This is the 'burden of kingship' that Frazer described.

The offerings at Ala'a Nkyi *and* Neshwim

This permanent, costly dispensation is strictly dependent upon a parallel process of re-loading the king's potential with the dead monarchs' substances. Both processes of dispensing and reloading reach their peaks once a week, on the day of *Zinka'ne*, and once a year during the festival which is held at the end of the agricultural cycle. A Mankon week consists of eight days, two of them holidays. The first one is *Zinka'ne*, which commemorates the demise of *Nde'Fru, Ngwa'fo*'s father; the second one is *Samne*, which commemorates the death of *Ngwa'fo II*, the father of *Nde'Fru*. On any *Zinka'ne* it is the king's duty to go and visit his ancestors' graves in the sanctuary called *Neshwim*, adjoining the king's lodgings in the palace. This is where the two monarchs were buried. The king goes there accompanied by the palace notables, the wardens of the royal graves. Each tomb has a conduit which leads from the surface to an underground hollow where lay the royal remains. This is how one can pour raffia wine and drench the dead. On every *Zinka'ne*, the king and the wardens of the graves present the deceased with offerings, invoke them, appeal to their generosity and receive their vital breath which pervades them and rests in the king's body. In this respect, with reference to I. Kopytoff (1971), one has to stress that for the Mankon, the 'ancestors' have not departed to vanish in the void. They are 'elders', as I. Kopytoff names them, dead to the world in the foreground, yet well and alive in a world in the background which they occupy and in which their descendants can have access to them by addressing them and making offerings.

During the rest of the day, the warden of the graves walks to and fro in the palace. He takes a pinch of camwood powder and applies it on every person he happens to meet: women and children who live at the palace, servants or visitors. On December 9th 2002, I found myself with *Adenumbi* in the palace inner courtyard onto which a door opened. This was the door of the temporary premises of the future Mankon museum. An elderly man with a smiling face walked into the courtyard, holding a raffia bag. Without even a glance towards anyone else, he headed towards me. I took off my hat. He seized a pinch of the powder from his bag and applied it on my forehead as he murmured "it is good, good, the country is good" (*abone bone, ala'a abone*). He then applied a pinch onto the hair of *Adenumbi*, then Julius, then Donatus (the two curators of the future museum), while murmuring blessings the meaning of which I failed to grasp. Finally he walked away, smiling

all the time, without a single word of farewell. This man's ceremonial behaviour echoes back to my own Catholic upbringing. On 'Cinders Day', after the priest had burnt some of the box tree boughs which had been blessed during the Palm Sunday procession of the previous year, he rubbed each devotee's brow repeating the phrase "remember you are dust and as dust you will return to dust". I felt I was dust and it distressed me. We would then have a dusty grey mark for the rest of the day which made me feel ill at ease. Comparing and discovering similarities with the Mankons' bodily conducts stands out as absolute evidence, above all because in the Grassfields symbolic code, substances like ashes inhere a meaning very contrary to that of camwood powder. Any king with a mind to impose his sovereignty over any unruly group will send to them an emissary with two bags; the one containing cinder, another one containing camwood powder. Those that the present is sent to are under the strict obligation to accept either one bag or the other, e.g. either to be integrated in the royal container by accepting to be smeared with camwood powder from the king, or to be excluded by opting for the ashes, and so for war. 'You are dust' and 'the country is good', two phrases that declare and accomplish what they mean, the gesture and the substance being one and the same thing.

The other momentous element in the dispensation of the dead kings' donations is the annual festival, the preparation of which usually lasts several weeks. In the early days of December 2002, the word was spread that the king was to go to the royal graveyard of *Ala'a Nkyi* (the 'Land [of the] Water', see Map 3 p. 147) on the 17th of the month, the day of *Zinka'ne*. This graveyard was set in the premises of the ancient palace of Mankon which had been abandoned circa 1820, at the time of the Chamba raids. It lies about 10 kilometres to the southwest of the palace of present-day Mankon, and well outside the limits of its city. This is where the well identified graves of at least three kings are to be found (*Nde'Fru, Ngwa'fo I, Fomukong*), as well as stones marking the graves of their ancestors and a few tombs for the mothers of the kings and the notables of the palace. During the afternoon on the same day, the king visited the *Neshwim* shrine where the two latter monarchs had been buried. This is where he was to end his consultations.

Although I have not myself been an eyewitness to these ceremonies, the basic principle springs clearly to my mind. The king visits the late monarchs with two aims: presenting them with offerings and thus currying favour with them, as well as ensuring that they cast a benevolent eye on him. Should his presents be accepted (which can be read through

a certain number of material facts), this means that the ancient kings absolve him for the way he has reigned all through the year. *Ipso facto*, he knows that his body has been reloaded with ancestral life substances that he will dispense intensively during the annual festival and until the end of the year.

A sacrifice at Awing

Although I did not attend the Mankon offerings at *Ala'a Nkyi*, I was fortunate enough to receive an invitation by *Ngoo Ngeu*, the king of Awing, a micro-kingdom which is part of the same linguistic group as Mankon. *Ngoo Ngeu* suggested that I accompany him to take photographs and record the 'offering' ceremonies to the dead elders who are said to live in the volcanic crater lake of Bambuluwe. This is a large circular expanse of water of a diameter of 500 m bordered by the evergreen slopes of the crater at an altitude of 2,200 m.

I left for Awing on December 18th 1973, on the evening prior to visiting the lake. On his way to the lake, the king was accompanied by five notables, among whom one spouse—*Mandeekom* (the 'Mother [of the] house [of the] notables'). *Mandeekom* ranked high in the hierarchy as she was the warden of the Council Room (that is actually her own house). Two dogs had joined the party; one of them was Bingo, the king's favourite Alsatian dog. About 50 subjects had come, among whom about 20 women in their thirties, climbing the path that lead to the top of the mountain under a blazing sun. *Mandeekom*, bare to the waist, was carrying a bag. She also held an ivory oliphant which she blew time and again. In turns, a strong young girl would also blow it. A man was heavy with the burden of a ewe for the sacrifice (in actual fact it should have been a ram, but none was to be found). As climbing proved tiring, half way up the slope, he put the ewe down on the ground and dragged it along with a rope.

Eventually the group reached the grassland towering over the lake. Everyone stopped, weary from the effort of ascending, perspiring, yet with a spirit of fun. Several women, all of them called 'notables of the soil' blew bass notes from their horns. The king and five of the notables left the little group and walked towards the lake, then stopped again. They took whistles out of their bags and blew them and shouted at the top of their voices for the dead elders to hear them. The group

started again. One of the notables reached into his bag and pulled out a small bell from a church; he rang it as he headed downwards in the direction of the crater lake. The king had explained to me that the dead live at the bottom of the lake in a village similar to the one of the living. They have to be given notice that their descendants are on their way to meet them. We reached the water's edge exactly where a terrace has been erected—about 4 by 6 metres in dimension—with a sacrificial stone right in the midst of it. The stone remains there throughout the year and is used year after year.

The four notables and *Mandeekom* roughly tidied up the terrace. The men took their shirts off and donned loincloths made of 'Ndop' material. *Mandeekom* commented on their anatomy as they got undressed and her remarks triggered the men's laughter. The king laid the little bell on the sacrificial stone. Two men seized the ewe and carried it. Then they placed its neck above the stone. The king cut the ewe's throat. Blood flooded from the cut and poured onto the bell and all over the stone. As soon as the animal had ceased to move and its blood ran no more, the two notables laid it down on the ground, eviscerated it and cut it into eight pieces, putting blocks of salt and camwood powder on each one to spice them according to the deceaseds' tastes (see photo n° 9 p. 122). A share of the meat was ascribed to each of the four residential quarters of the city; one for the notables who belonged to the Council, one for the other notables, and the animal's head was ascribed to *Fomba*, the late 'Father of *Kwi'fo*'. The late kings were not to be invoked; they were to receive the sacrifice of a ram on the following day, at the palace.

All the while, as the sacrifice of the ewe was carried on, the king invoked 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."

Time and again the king gave his instructions. He said to *Mba'pe*, the notable who carved the meat: "Take the gall-bladder off. Nobody can possibly have it. It makes the meat taste bitter." *Mba'pe* carved the bladder out and cast it to the bushes.

One notable seized a lump of meat and, at the top of his voice, he called out the name of the person who was to have it. "Take, *Mbetu'*", and he threw the meat at a distance as far as he could, into the lake

Photo n° 9. A notable is seasoning pieces of lamb with camwood powder before offering them to the dead elders (Awing, 1973).

Photo n° 10. A notable throws pieces of lamb in lake Bambuluwe for the dead elders who are said to live in it (Awing, 1973).

Photo n° 11. A notable smears camwood powder on the skin of several women while the king holds the bag (Awing, 1973).

(see photo n° 10 p. 123); there was a spray of water as it fell. The same operation was done several times until the man had cast all the pieces of meat into the lake. A few pieces of meat remained close to the surface, others sank slowly and only white shadows were seen below the surface. The viscera floated away from the edge of the lake. The head sank to the bottom. The king and the notables observed and deciphered the trajectory of each one of the pieces of meat. They were satisfied with what they saw. Once the gift of meat was made, the king dispensed camwood powder to the participants and even to Bingo who kept the mark of the crimson pigments on his coat for two days. The powder, which had been subsumed into a vital substance via the sacrifice and the performative words, was held by the monarch in a raffia bag. The notables and *Mandeekom* spread it in large quantities over their shoulders and their chests. They started drinking water from the lake. *Mba'pe* filled a calabash with it to carry it back to the village and handed it to the elderly notables or to the sick ones who did not have enough strength to climb up the mountain. One of the notables encouraged Bingo: "Drink, do drink, we have so many hunting parties ahead". One of the men took an ungulate horn out of the bag he was carrying. It was filled with a black greasy paste. Each one in the group took a little portion with the tip of their fingers and placed some on their tongue, then swallowed, using the rest to rub their chests with

it. Those whose hands were stained with blood washed them. They cleaned the little bell and put it away in a bag. Everyone collected their belongings and put them away.

The group then ascended the steep slope of the crater again towards the little crowd of onlookers who were waiting for them and among whom there was a large proportion of young women with a strong yet unsatisfied desire to procreate. The king walked towards them, holding the bag with the camwood powder. As he murmured blessings, a notable rubbed a big pinch of the powder on each of the women's hair and brow and shoulders as they crowded around him (see photo n° 11 p. 124). He would later tell me that several of them became pregnant following the ceremony. Everyone had a share of the powder. All along the way back, the king stopped two or three times, sat on the grass and drank raffia wine. Passers-by walked to him, bent over and received the precious powder which the king rubbed onto their brows with a smile.

On the following day, the king poured a libation of raffia wine and sacrificed a ram in the shrine where the royal graves were. This building was rather small; it soon filled with the same notables who were attending the offering ceremony by the lake. Outside, a crowd gathered. The king then proceeded to address the dead, using the terms he had earlier used when addressing the dead elders at the bottom of the lake. As soon as the ram had been slaughtered, the monarch walked out of the shrine with the bag in his hand and started to distribute the camwood powder personally. The first ones to receive it were his spouses and their children. He spread the entire brow and part of the hair generously with the powder, giving the skin of the skull and head a priority.

Meanwhile, the notables carried on the carving process of the ram and shared its meat. The king's biological mother, and the women who have succeeded the mothers of the last two dead kings were presented with the neck, a valued piece of meat.

Whenever it is required for the welfare of the city, the king sacrifices a third animal in the lodge called 'Mother [of] *Kwi'fo*' where those desirous to bring their iron tools (hoes, machetes, axes) can do so, which the king sprinkles with blood. This was the case in 1973. The king once told me that ever since he ascended the throne, he had carried out 46 sacrifices of ewes and rams. Besides, on December 21st, 1973, he slaughtered a 100 kg pig and a cow, a present to the subjects of the kingdom, on behalf of their dead kings and elders.

Let us go back to Mankon where, *mutatis mutandis*, the late kings' presents obey the same principles and produce the same effects. Once the *Ala'a Nkyi* offerings were over, the king and the notables from the royal clan walked back to the palace, entered the *Neshwim* lodge where the last kings are buried, and reiterated offerings and consultations. Should the offerings be rejected, the monarch received nothing from his ancestors and could dispense nothing to his people. The consequence would be that the festival could not be held. The king would be heavily sanctioned and consequently he would have to suffer criticism from the king-mother (*Maafo*) and from *Tabyɛn*, a high-ranking notable of the royal clan who can, by right, remonstrate with the sovereign. One can easily imagine the tremors that seized the kingdom whenever this happened. Francis Nyamnjoh informed me that, around 1992, the dance could not be performed, in the throes of political tension between *Ngwa'fo*, a partisan of President Paul Biya's *Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Camerounais* and the great majority of the Mankon people who were followers of John Fru Ndi, the leader of the Social Democratic Front. (Personal communication, May 2003.) The tension reached a peak when the crowd walked towards the palace after they had set fire to the king's office in the provincial capital of Bamenda and the dwellings of one of the royal clan's notables. Since this restless period in the kingdom's political life, the annual festival unfolds in a normal way, and the 2002 festival was even remembered as a particularly special one.

However, one of my Mankon correspondents informed me that the 2003 festival was not held. He had no idea what the cause was. One cannot avoid hypothesising that, with the imminent presidential election, tension gained momentum in the Anglophone Northwest province, thus affecting *Ngwa'fo* inasmuch as he advocated the re-election of the outgoing president, a man disliked by most of his subjects. The king did not even visit the royal graveyard at *Ala'a Nkyi*, thus freeing the dead elders and the king himself from any responsibility. Unfortunately, I have no evidence in support of my hypothesis.

In all cases, when the offerings have been accepted the festival can be held since the pot-king has, so to speak, been 're-filled' with substances from his ancestors. He can supply his people lavishly with the large quantities of ancestral life-substances he has in store. As soon as he is back from the graveyard, the 'king's dance' is held and it usually lasts four days.

On the first day, a ritual of purification of warriors and weapons is performed by the *Nda Mesongong* royal lodge (the 'House [of] *Mesongong*')

from which the name of the first day is derived: 'the Day of *Mesongong*'. The second day is called *Ali'ti* and a war parade takes place. During this, the men perform a dance around the king and shoot towards the sky with their guns. The apex of the festival is on the third day. Its name is *Abweng afo* (the 'dance [of the] king'). The Mankon gather on the dancing field by the palace (see map 2 p. 133), dressed in all their finery, and dance around the king to the music of an orchestra and accompanied by the chorus of young girls of the palace or women of royal descent who sing the king's praises. The fourth day, which is the last one of this festival, is called *Betso Tsiteware* ('they take [away the] standard'). This is a repeat of the dance which had been performed on the previous day. When the dance is over, the little war camp that has been erected alongside the esplanade is dismantled. During the four days, the ceremonies are held in the afternoon, on the dance esplanade of the palace. In 1984, for the 25th anniversary of *Ngwa'fo*'s ascension to the throne of Mankon, 5,000 or 6,000 people made for the palace. In December 2002, in less momentous circumstances, about 2,000 people were reported to attend the ceremonies.

At face value, war parades and dancing feature prominently in the 'dance of the king'. However, they should not be taken as the most essential element in the performance. The dance is the occasion for the king to distribute the life substances he has received from the dead kings and to distribute them under many forms: spraying of raffia wine, camwood powder, food and drink given out to the notables, speech and breath, music from the orchestras, entertainment for all the subjects. The episode of spraying (*fama*) raffia wine on the crowd of dancers, which was described in the first chapter, takes place during the fourth day of the 'dance of the king'.

Throughout the festival, the king's body is displayed in all its glory under its three avatars. *Ngwa'fo III*'s physical body, its 'skin' adorned with all the fineries of the palace treasury, the body of the palace where the donations of the kings are hoarded and in which the festival is taking place, and the body of the city which is revitalised by the substances that the king dispenses. A constant flux of the substances which have been provided by the dead monarchs at *Neshwim* and *Ala'a Nkyi* circulates throughout the king's three bodies, as will be shown in the following chapter. Accordingly, the festival is the occasion to display the most important containers of the palace. In Mankon, the king wears a different outfit on each of the four days of the dance, and carries a different drinking horn from the palace treasury. He is accompanied

by servants or daughters of the palace who carry adorned calabashes and drinking horns. Valuable 'Ndop' cloths are spread around the enclosure of the small war camp. In other kingdoms, like in Bafut, splendid beaded calabashes from the palace treasury are displayed by the side of the king's throne.

Body and language—a few questions in methodology

A large number of the Mankon motor conducts operate as identification processes which are not accompanied by spontaneous discursive comments. The researcher finds it difficult to obtain verbal statements by the informants that would provide the 'meaning' of such and such bodily motion. I have never heard any Mankon subject assert that "the king is a container" or that spraying his saliva or applying camwood powder on the skin of the subjects are but one and the same process of "dispensing the king's bodily life substances". Nothing in the talks I had with the Mankon people ever underscored the centrality of substances and containers in the microphysics of monarchic power. To put it differently, motor conducts are never worded and interpreted or read through. More fundamentally, in my view, they belong with procedural knowledge and are notoriously difficult to verbalise. The only written assertion of this fact is the text of Rev. Fathers Tchouanga-Tiegoum and Ngangoum (who were not born in Mankon, but in Bamileke, Francophone Western Province): "The head of the family is a vital piggy-bank." The two priests have both a Western and a Grassfields culture, and therefore they operated as cultural brokers between the two societies and were able to put words on a number of conducts that are essentially devoid of verbal comments stating their 'meaning'.

By contrast, this chapter has demonstrated that words accompany gestures whenever a performative function occurs, and it neither partakes of a description of the action nor, *a fortiori*, of an analysis of the sensori-motor conducts and of the material culture that induce it. Indeed, it is much more akin to a performative utterance that operates the trans-substantiation of a number of material substances into ancestral life-essence. The philosopher J.L. Austin (1962) analysed such verbalisations which accomplish what they say, provided they are uttered by a qualified person, in a specific context, acknowledged by the other parties, that is, by the faithful. This is typically the words political and religious authorities as well as lawyers will use.

One can rely on the fact that by presenting offerings to the dead elders, uttering words, dispensing saliva, breath, palm oil, semen, the king transmutes the trivial material elements he uses into ancestral substances. He generates believers when he spits on their skin, or penetrates them with raffia wine from his drinking horn, or with his semen.

All along the transformation of matter into an ancestral reality, the performative utterances play an essential part. Most of the time however, the words can be said and the actions performed by a number of subjects apart from the king. The family heads, their subordinates (for example *Su'* John in chapter 2), but also the palace notables may also perform on behalf of the king; an example is the *Neshwim* priest who distributes camwood powder and utters words of benediction on behalf of the king, exactly as the king would do and with the same effects. Practical considerations may play an important role in such matters. In Awing, a very small kingdom, the king is able to distribute camwood powder to his subjects and to his spouses. In Mankon, a much larger kingdom, the king has to delegate this kind of action. Besides, given the taboo on touching the king's body in Mankon, the smearing of camwood powder by the king himself on the skin of his subject is prohibited by court etiquette.

If the performative words are not produced as a comment on the action that is performed at the same time, yet proverbs as a whole as well as a number of spontaneous utterances are expressions of a domestic morality which can be transposed to the lineages and to the kingdom as a whole, and is consistent with the inclusion of the subjects into the corporate groups as containers, following strict inegalitarian and hierarchical lines. Everyone in the kingdom's strata naturalises and materialises this very principle: the subject identifies with his dwelling, the households to the hamlet, and to the father's house which stands as the interface and opening between the inside and the outside of the descent-group segment. The city, with its material borders, identifies with the king who incorporates them and stands at the opening and interface between the kingdom proper and the regional, national or sub-continental social spaces.

Considering the methodology of this type of research, I deem it pointless to expect my informants—even the most 'privileged' ones among them—to give access to the governmentality of containers in a direct, verbal way. Words essentially partake of the nature of this governmentality since they contribute, together with appropriate sensorimotor conducts, in transforming the substances into ancestral realities.

Yet one should never expect them to unveil the code. One could say that 'it governs' in a way that is never accounted for by appropriate verbal comments accessible to the subjects. The structuralist analysis of Grassfields symbolic codes proposed by Pradelles de Latour (1991) or M.J. Rowlands (1985) do not give us the key to the interpretation of sensori-motor conducts and their connections to the materiality of the envelopes, orifices and contents. They are too close to the verbalisations and to the deceptive awareness the subjects have of what they do or perform. They can hardly go beyond the smoke screen the words generate which blurs and conceals the material technologies of power. In chapter 10, we shall return to the question of the relationship between words and bodily conducts, verbalised knowledge and non-verbalised procedural knowledge. More specifically, we will discuss the possibility of tensions and even contradictions between these two kinds of knowledge for the same group of people or for the same set of practices.

From a methodological point of view, the verbal enquiry, the interviews, the methodology of the tape recorder are invaluable to catch the performative words. Yet they are of little value when it comes to recording the motor conducts propped on material culture. It seems to me that the most productive strategy, perhaps the only one, in order to grasp the bodily and material technologies of power, is to provide oneself with conceptual and methodological instruments taken from a praxeological or cognitive approach to motivity, which will give a chance to identify, describe and analyse the relevant bodily motions propped on material culture, and to record at the same time the performative words that come along with them. This is relevant to the kingdom of Mankon and I have tried to develop my argument along those lines. Yet, it may be applied to any society, even to contemporary Western ones—a matter which is worth discussing in the last, conclusive, chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CLOSURE OF THE COUNTRY

In order to make good use of the containers and their contents, they must be maintained and repaired, their openings looked after, their proper storage ensured and so on. Stoppers, lids and other contraptions are to be used to sort out the contents and protect them. For example, the stopper that is pushed half-way into the opening of a calabash of raffia wine is usually made of a palm leaf folded several times. It prevents the insects that are attracted by the sweet content of the calabash from entering, while letting out the fermenting gases. One does not have to care just for the containers; the contents too deserve care and attention. One has to fill the containers depending on their capacity, to avoid mixing up the contents, or to achieve the proper mixture, and to keep container and content in a place suitable for their preservation.

The Mankon king is responsible for providing the kingdom with ancestral substances. In addition, he has to watch the containers in which he stores them (and first of all his own body), to keep them in a good state of repair, to control what goes into them and comes out of them through their openings, and to care for the quality of the material content. The governmentality of containers enforces a logic which would almost allow one to predict beforehand the list of sensori-motor conducts and material appliances that must be used by the monarch to accomplish his task.

At first glance, one can identify three containers of first magnitude: the very body of the monarch (his 'skin', *nyɛ*—euphemized as his 'thing', *azume*), his palace (*nto'*) and the city (*ala'a*). These three containers are different realisations of one and the same thing: the material receptacle of ancestral productions. Each of them is equipped with numerous extensions or prostheses. This particularly applies in the case of the king's body, of which the drinking horn, bags, drums, calabashes, pots and houses diversify and extend the 'image of the body'. Side by side with these royal containers, one finds the individual and corporate bodies of the subjects and of the descent groups. Like Russian dolls, they are enclosed into one another (see chapters 2–4). The Russian

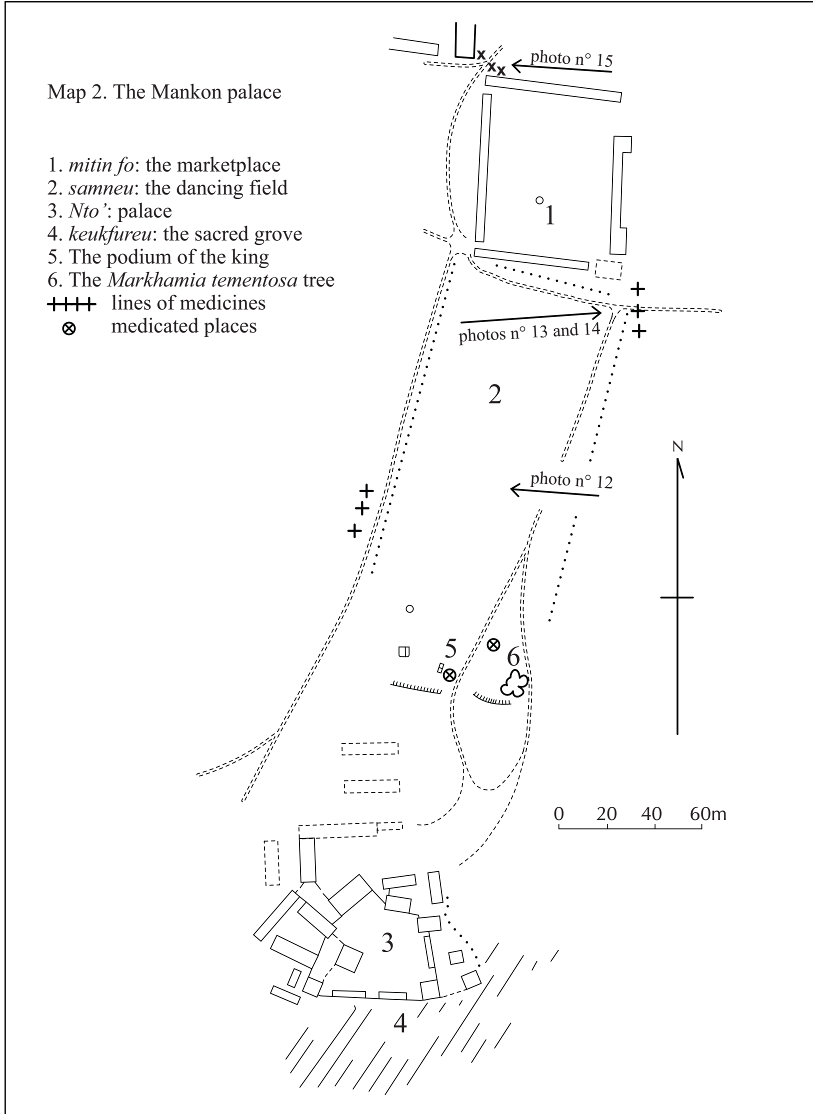
dolls metaphor also illustrates the fact that a given container (for example, a descent group) is at the same time an envelope containing a substance, such as subjects and descent group segments, and a substance contained in an envelope of higher order, such as a clan or the kingdom as a whole.

I prefer to avoid overtaxing the patience of the reader by providing an ethnography of the complete range of gestures and material contraptions that belong with the set of Russian dolls. In my opinion, a single case—that of the motor conducts and materialities used to control a number of openings and passageways at the beginning of the agricultural cycle—will suffice to validate the argument; this is called the 'medicine of the king' (*ngang fo*).

Enclosing the country with the 'medicine of the king'

In March 1973, I was invited by the Mankon palace to observe a performance known as *ngang fo* ("[the] medicine [of the] king"). It takes place every year and aims at achieving the closure and protection of the country. *Ngang* designates any substance used in curing people, animals and things. The medicines are taken from the animal, vegetable or mineral worlds. When taken exclusively from the vegetable world, they are called *fu* (sg. 'leaf'). A medicine man is called *ngwon ngang* ('person [of] medicine').

By mid-afternoon, on that day, six palace servants and two maskers came out of the palace quarter occupied by regulatory societies (already briefly described under the blanket term of *Kwi'fo*). The men carried four cylindrical baskets some 80 cm in height. The two maskers, named *Mabu'*, escorted the men. They wore hooded tunics that concealed their heads and bodies down to their calves. The tunic is made of woven vegetable fibres. It is spotted like leopard skin. They walked and ran bare-footed. Each of them carried a bundle of wooden sticks about 120 cm in length. One of the two maskers had a leaf of *tabɛrɛ* (*Piper umbellatum*) pinned onto the hood on top of his forehead. The entire party walked briskly following each other through the dancing field extending between the palace and the marketplace (see photo n° 12 p. 134). They stopped by the stone and concrete podium on which the king sits when presiding over the meetings that take place on the dancing field (see map 2 p. 133). There, a palace notable, who was himself a medicine man, and was accompanied by the carriers and escorted



Map 2. The Mankon palace.

Photo n° 12. Palace notables, servants and *Mabu'* maskers transport "the medicine of the king" (1973).

by *Mabu'*, took bunches of medicines with both hands in one of the baskets and let them drop from his hands round the base of the royal throne, on the platform of the podium, so as to form a solid line all the way round the seat of the king. The medicines were a mixture of many different plant species, chopped to pieces, withered and half decayed. They had been collected by the medicine men who were the members of the Mankon 'house of medicines' (*Nda ngang*) at the palace.

After having enclosed the royal throne with this vegetable mixture, the gang walked towards two raised stones some 20 metres away from the podium. These blue-black basalt monoliths condense a given space—in this case the dancing field. They may be found in many different spaces, such as a courtyard, a marketplace, a house (see Warnier 1985b) where can be performed a number of actions. Once they had reached the stones, the palace servants deposited medicines in a solid line around their basis. Until then, the two *Mabu'* had been standing a few metres away from the leader of the gang, watching, with their bundles of sticks held with both hands across their shoulders.

Once they had enclosed the stones of the dancing field, the notable who was leading the gang and the men made for the plots of farmland by the side of the dancing field. They came to a halt on a path leading to the dancing field through the plots of farmland. The whole gang,

Photo n° 13. The *Mabu'* maskers, with their bundles of sticks across their shoulders.

Photo n° 14. The maskers hit a line of medicines.

including the basket-carriers and the *Mabu'* maskers had followed the notable. The carriers deposited the baskets on the ground. The palace notable and medicine man took handfuls of medicines out of one of the baskets and put them down on the ground so as to make a line across the path. He was watched over by the two *Mabu'*. They were standing still in the evening light, legs apart, their bundles of sticks across their shoulders, with their two long parallel shadows extending on the ground and on the low vegetation. They made an impressive sight (see photo n° 13 p. 135). Once the line of medicines had been completed, the maskers walked a dozen metres away from the line along the path, turned round to face it, and ran side by side towards the medicines. Upon approaching them, they bent double while still running, stopped for a very short while, and hit the medicines with their bundles of wooden sticks, using all their strength (see photo n° 14 p. 136). Then they jumped over the line, ran a few metres away, turned round, and ran again towards the medicines which they hit again vigorously with their sticks. They then jumped over the line and came to a halt, side by side, by the path. All the while, everybody had remained absolutely silent. The maskers themselves, gliding barefooted over the path and the grass, had not made the slightest noise.

Photo n° 15. A silent crowd watches the maskers hitting "the medicine of the king" by the marketplace.

Then they all walked a couple of hundred metres away towards the dirt road leading from the Provincial capital of Bamenda to the Mankon palace, the dancing field and marketplace. They performed their routine all over again. This time, the solid line of medicines cut across the road and its sides. It extended over about 15 metres, with the market stalls on one side and a ditch to the other. The two maskers performed as they had done before: they walked a dozen metres along the road, turned around, ran, hit the medicines, ran beyond them, turned around, ran again, hit the medicines again and stopped by the road side. The party went to yet another road, to the other side of the marketplace and put the medicines across it. Then they returned to the palace, walking along its eastern side.

It was the first time I witnessed this performance and I was impressed. The two silent *Mabu'* maskers were especially frightening, like animals from the bush, hooded in leopard-like tunics. They did not speak. On other occasions, they may produce a shrieking sound with a kind of whistle when they escort *Minang* or *Takinge*. Around the medicines, they remained silent. They moved and gestured, beating the medicines with controlled violence. I was too far away from the palace medicine man

to hear the words he was mumbling in a low voice and too busy taking photographs in order to document the event. Later on, I witnessed other kinds of performances, and I have every reason to think that, while putting the medicines on the ground, he was voicing threats and imprecations about which I will say more below. The sight and the silence were fascinating. The small crowd watching the performance near the marketplace, although used to it, was obviously subjugated. Children kept quiet and remained close to the adults. Photo n° 15 shows the performance, and the silent spectators.[1]

The medication of the palace surroundings that I witnessed one afternoon in March 1973 was but the last episode of a sequence of performances that had begun early the same morning, with the departure of four small gangs of servants and medicine men belonging to the lodge of medicine men (*Nda ngang*) and escorted by four pairs of maskers *Mabu'*. I did not witness their performance myself, but was told about it. They walked to the limits of the city (in the past, the Mezam river and a ditch materialising the envelope of the kingdom). Each of the four gangs stopped at a particular place, on the paths leading to four neighbouring kingdoms (Bafut to the north; Nkwen and Mendankwe to the east; Bali-Nyonga to the south; and the more 'acephalous' Meta polities to the west of Mankon). There, at the borders, the medicine men put lines of medicines across the paths, the *Mabu'* maskers threw a knot of grass (probably of *Sporobolus africanus*) on top of the medicines, and gave them a thorough beating with their sticks. On their way back, the four gangs stopped here and there, to treat several hamlets, whilst lesser members of the lodge, who were not escorted by *Mabu'* to the borders, visited other hamlets to distribute the medicines of the king.

In 2002, the 'Father of the house of medicines' was Simon *Atsu' Tane*, of the *Ngulong* quarter. Although he was born in Mankon and to a Mankon lineage, he succeeded his maternal grandfather, a Bafut citizen who did not have a male successor. This is why Simon *Atsu' Tane* is identified by his residential quarter in Mankon. When I saw him in his hamlet, he sheltered a number of patients who were undergoing therapy.

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[1] Like many Mankon traditions, the 'medicine of the king' is the object of quarrels of legitimacy exacerbated during the succession conflict of the years 1920–1959. It seems that the procedures of collecting and producing the medicines changed over time. However, all the traditions and accounts agree on the final purpose of the performance, namely the closure of the country with apotropaic medicines, and the control exercised at the limits and at the 'mouths' of various space/containers.

There were also many patients coming occasionally for consultation. He had been appointed a member of the 'house of medicines' by late king *Nde' Fru*, in order to succeed the 'Father' of the lodge when the latter would not be in a position to fulfil his duties any longer.

In principle, the lodge was constituted by all the Mankon medicine men. In fact, quite a few of them never participated in its activities. The lodge is in charge of providing the palace with medicinal substances. As regards the 'medicine of the king', the lodge stores the plants brought to the palace by its members during the weeks preceding the performance. Once the members of the lodge are satisfied that there is enough stuff to achieve the medicinal closure of the country, the king medicates the material. He does this by pouring a libation from his drinking horn, by scraping *meka* tablets and sacrificing a fowl whose blood and limbs are mixed with the medicines. The king and the father of the lodge utter threats and imprecations against the enemies of the country, whether they reside within or outside its limits. The *meka* tablets, also called *meka(m) ala'a* (*meka* [of the] country) are made of five or six tablets of ebony, 6 to 15 centimetres in length, pierced on one end and held together with a rope like a bunch of keys. One of the two sides of a fresh water shell, 6 or 7 centimetres long, is added to the tablets. Simon *Atsu'* says that the king *Tako' Matsi* brought them into Mankon sometime in the past and used them to appropriate Mankon land. I do not know enough about the various uses of the *meka* tablets to tell how they fit into the technology of closure in Mankon. Simon *Atsu'* and his colleagues of *Nda ngang* are rewarded by the king with gifts of raffia wine, Scotch whisky and food.

Trapping the enemies of the city

How can we interpret the practice of the 'medicine of the king'? Until the 1950s, the town of Mankon did not extend beyond the limits marked by the ditch (see map 3 p. 147). The Mankon maintain that hostile forces may be found within and outside these limits. Such forces are capable of crossing the limits and penetrating the envelopes, absorbing the vital substances of people, livestock and crops, especially when the rains are coming at a new productive cycle. They are also capable of going out of the envelope and of carrying away the product of their misdeed. These forces may manifest themselves as violent tornadoes, swarms of wasps or other insects, hailstorms, crickets and the like.

However, although they may materialise, they may belong to an occult and invisible world. Nowadays, these forces include the potential for disorder inherent in the market economy, globalisation, national politics, and what the Mankon call 'development'. The city also contains quite a few subjects who get out of its limits and come back on a daily basis. Even if they are not aware of it, they may bring back with them 'bad things' (*enu zetebong*—'thing not good', sg.) that will spoil the country. The 'medicine of the king' is meant to trap these hostile forces, to prevent them from travelling, at the beginning of the rainy season, at a time when the cultivated plots have been ploughed by the women, when the crops have been planted, and when the reproduction of life and the production of food needs protection.

The 'medicines of the king' are traps set at the borders, across the paths and around sensitive spaces. *Asongwe Bejwi* and Simon *Atsu' Tane* explained to me that the unwelcome occult forces were caught by them. I tried asking them what kind of processes were at work to achieve these ends. But they dismissed my questions as irrelevant. From experience and by tradition, they knew that the medicines were effective in protecting the country.

Simon *Atsu'*, just like Julia of *Ala'a Akuma* and other Mankon people, emphasised the empirically established yet mysterious effectiveness of the medicines in trapping occult forces and in neutralising the medicines of the persons hostile to Mankon and anybody who may have bad intentions. If, for example, a man comes from Bafut and carries a bag of medicines that he wants to drop in a Mankon hamlet to harm its inhabitants, he will have to walk across the medicines of the king at the borders of the city or a space medicated by them (in fact the entire territory enclosed by the ditch and the medicines). Thus, Simon said, "if you have a bad thing [in your bag], it will get out of the bag and fall down [on the ground]". How would it get out of the bag? "Well, you can slip on the wet path, and fall down. Your bag will open up. The bad thing will get out of it and you will not notice it". Or "you will want to take something out of your bag. You will take it out, and the bad thing will also come out. It will fall unnoticed on the ground and get lost".

These are the various scenarios illustrating the agency of the 'medicine of the king'. However, they were elicited by the questions raised by the ethnographer. The informants confess their ignorance and actually do not care about the exact mechanisms at work. This is typically the

kind of concern of a Western mind. Whatever the processes at work, they are effective; the specialists can see the results. Whatever the means that may multiply in many possible scenarios, it would be difficult and futile to explore them in particular instances. The 'bad things' may be material objects, substances or herbs contained in a bag or in the body of the rogue person, according to the same principles that preside over the manufacture and the use of the 'medicine of the king': they are substances that have been processed by performative words, gestures and instruments, and that incorporate hostile intentions. The 'medicine of the king' is powerful enough to scatter or neutralise these substances, to alter the psyche of the enemies in such a way that they forget about their intentions, get confused or even die. The vernacular approach to the 'medicine of the king' is a pragmatic one. It rests on psychic and cognitive mechanisms. It would be magical if it were an individual practice. In the particular case, it is institutionalised by the kingdom as a technology of control and power.

There was one point of technology, however, on which Simon *Atsu'* and *Asongwe Bejwi* were quite explicit. It concerned the effect of the two *Mabu'* hitting the herbs with their wooden sticks. They said this was necessary to attach together the different components of the medicines. Simon *Atsu'* told me that there was not a single medicinal plant or leaf that could work alone. In order to be efficient, there should be several of them, and they should be tied together, either in a knot or by being hit with a bundle of sticks. On another occasion, I saw *Tumasang* tie a knot with the help of a member of the *Mesongong* lodge. The two men assembled a number of plants in a bundle and twisted it. When the herbs were tightly twisted, the two men bent them in double, with the result that the bundle twisted upon itself. They gave a couple of additional turns, and knotted the loose ends. The people of *Nda Ngang* themselves deposit such a knot on top of the medicines when they put these at the borders of the city. Thus nothing can scatter and separate the various components of the medicines, and, bound together, they will prevail against the hostile occult forces. Hitting the medicines may achieve a second purpose which is to drive their potency into the ground in which they will attract the occult forces and immobilise them. However, this second statement may well be a rationalisation induced by the questions raised, whereas the first explanation is quite consistent with the usual practice of the medicine men and with the use of herbal knots in Mankon and elsewhere in central Africa. It is also consistent

with several proverbs to the effect that one person or one thing alone is fragile and can easily be defeated, whereas several persons united together or a bunch of spears or sticks cannot be broken all at once.

The implement used by *Mabu'* is made of light wooden sticks. The Mankon and their neighbours have codified three different kinds of open fighting. Inside the household, people are said to fight with their *elbows*; within the town, they fight with *wooden* sticks; between enemy kingdoms, they fight with *iron* weapons. Using iron weapons for a fight within the kingdom would be polluting. (We will return to this point.) From the fact that *Mabu'* uses wooden sticks, one can deduct that, from a cognitive and praxeological point of view, some of the hostile forces that have to be controlled may well belong to Mankon itself. This would be consistent with the fact that *Mabu'* hits the medicines first in one direction (for example from the inside of the city towards the outside), and then in the opposite direction. It would also be consistent with the fact that the medicines are not only deposited at the borders, but also within the city, around various sensitive hamlets or places. This is also consonant with the fact that Mankon people may partake in hostile forces (or in witchcraft) without being aware of it. Occult cannibalism may consume the vital substances contained in the descent groups. As indicated by Pradelles de Latour (1991) using the metaphor of the Moebius strip, they are the same face and the other face of kinship relationships at once. The use of iron is prohibited, even against a witch, provided he belongs to the city. All the same, the instrument which is used by *Takinge* to inflict death within Mankon is a wooden club. These comments are mine and have never been voiced so clearly by any informant. They express what appears to me as the cognitive logic behind the use of wooden sticks by *Mabu'*.

I also wish to stress that the two dirt roads mentioned earlier connected the palace of Mankon (including the dancing field and the marketplace) with the outside world, especially with Bamenda, the provincial capital of the Northwest province, some 15 kilometres away. Their starting points were on both sides of the marketplace which is a dangerous place because it is a space in which things coming from the outside congregate. If there is an interface which must be protected against hostile forces, it is definitely the marketplace. Thus, in my opinion, the lines of medicines create protective limits around the sensitive places that are the king's podium, the dancing field, the marketplace, the palace, a number of hamlets, as well as the city as a whole (see maps 2 and 3, pp. 133 and 147). From my own point of view—which

is not that of the 'informants'—the 'medicines of the king' achieve a closure; they build up limits; they structure a number of discrete spaces and produce the locality.

From semiology to praxeology

The analysis of the closure achieved by the 'medicine of the king' has a semiological dimension to it. I questioned the meaning of the medicated practice of the palace in a system of communication between Mankon citizens. One may broaden the limits of the semiological approach by raising a series of questions concerning the impact of such sensori-motor conducts on the subject. Semiology answers the question "what is the sign-value of such a practice in a system of connotation or communication?" It concerns itself with meaning. The praxeological approach I am trying to develop answers another set of questions: what is it that the subject can achieve with such a practice? How does this practice change the subjects? How does it affect their sensori-motor conducts? How does it affect their subjectivities? What is the practical impact on Mankon citizens? How does such and such a practice subject them to the polity?

If communication through the sign-value of sensori-motor conducts propped against given material objects (medicines, baskets, hooded gowns, bunches of sticks, paths, etc.) were sufficient to communicate effectively the message about the protective envelope of the city and the feelings of being a citizen, if a verbal message and its meaning could achieve the effective closure of the country by the performative action of speech alone in a system of signs, then it would be enough to state that "we, Mankon citizens, share a single bounded city". Now, it is not enough to say it or to mean it, it has to be performed on the subjects themselves and on the spaces. It has to be done effectively, by gestures, things, sensori-motor conducts, in brief, by implementing a technology.

We stand at the crossroad between semiology and praxeology,[2] between the sign-value of sensori-motor and material cultures in a

[2] The praxeological approach to sports and games developed by P. Parlebas (1999) takes full account of the contribution of semiology in such notions as 'motor communication', 'semio-motor decoding' and the like.

system of communication or connotation on the one hand, and their praxic value in a system of action on the subject's actions on the other. On the day of the 'medicine of the king', four or five dozens of men and women had congregated at reasonable distance from the group of palace retainers escorted by *Mabu'* who were busying themselves to medicate the road by the marketplace. At that time of the year, men and women were engaged in agricultural work. The women ploughed their farms with their hoes. The men cleared the plots of farmland of all the vegetation. They built, mended and trimmed the fences and hedges designed to channel men and livestock. They traded and transported their commodities from place to place. Unlike the ethnologist, they were not the neutral spectators of an action that the ethnologist would perhaps qualify as a 'ritual' (meaning that it is non-technical and ineffective from a practical point of view). They consider that the palace was performing a technical action fully in accordance with their own—technical—agricultural labour. All of them, by means of tools, implements, substances, seeds, raw materials, were busy enclosing, ploughing, protecting, channelling, delineating, planting, in order to produce and protect their production. They were acting, and acting on each other's actions. The reality and the materiality of the actions performed by the palace did not depart in any way from the reality and the materiality of the actions performed by the Mankon farmers.

Following Frazer, C. Lévi-Strauss remarked that a traditional action devoid of any scientifically established results should not be considered *ipso facto* as a 'ritual' one. It may be considered as a fully technical one, even if the Western engineer denies its practical use. For example, if the smelter puts together 'male' and 'female' iron ores in his furnace, while killing a fowl on top of them, and the engineer says that the 'female' ore and the blood have no practical impact on the smelting process, it does not turn this practice into a 'ritual' action. From the point of view of the smelter, the action of putting the blood of a fowl and 'female' iron ore may well be at the same level of technicality as the fact of putting charcoal and other inputs. Similarly, the actions of the palace medicine man and retainers may be fully technical, material ones. The testimonies of Simon *Atsu'* and of *Asongwe Bejwi* leave no doubt about that. In their view, what they do is as effective as building fences. The forces they aim at controlling are as real as goats and pigs.

Yet, in the view of the Western scientist, whether an engineer or an anthropologist, the question of efficacy is of considerable concern—although it may concern two quite different things: it may be an efficacy

of the subject on the objects and the materials; or it may be the efficacy of the same actions on the subjects themselves. In the present case, the praxeological question is: what is the efficacy of the practices of closure, fencing, trapping, agricultural production, not so much on the material things out there, but *on the subjects* who accomplish them? What is their efficacy insofar as these actions may be considered technologies of power that apply on the subjects at the very point where they apply their own actions on themselves or on the other people's actions? In order to answer that question, I may call upon the description of the sensori-motor conducts presented in chapter 2 (the sharing of wine, food, and gifts, and the anointing of *Maangye* following the death of her son). From an 'emic' point of view, the Mankon implement these actions as a technology, as an action on bodies, things and substances. This can be read by the anthropologist as follows: the bodily conducts of smearing with palm oil and camwood, of manufacturing bundles of food, applying one's hands on the belly of the calabash, identify the subjects as containers. In a similar way, the 'medicine of the king' materialises the limits of the city, discriminates between an inside and an outside, determines the location of the significant openings, passageways and spaces, establishes a control over them, and links up the subjects with the interiority of the kingdom. It is undoubtedly an efficacious action, a technique. It produces locality and creates a citizenship which subjects the Mankon people to the space it defines and its structures. In that sense, it is a technology of power. Like the medicines buried behind the threshold of the houses that reduplicate their architectural structure, the 'medicine of the king' reduplicates the practical and material closure of the city by the ditch. This analysis shifts the focus of attention from the technology of things to the technologies of the subjects, which is as pragmatic as the other one and cannot be neglected by the anthropologist. Although it concerns the subjects, it is propped against an embodied material culture that is essential and deserves all our attention as we shall see in the case of the trench around the city. This is so because motor and material culture reach deep into the subjectivity of people, through their 'body'.

The ditch as a container

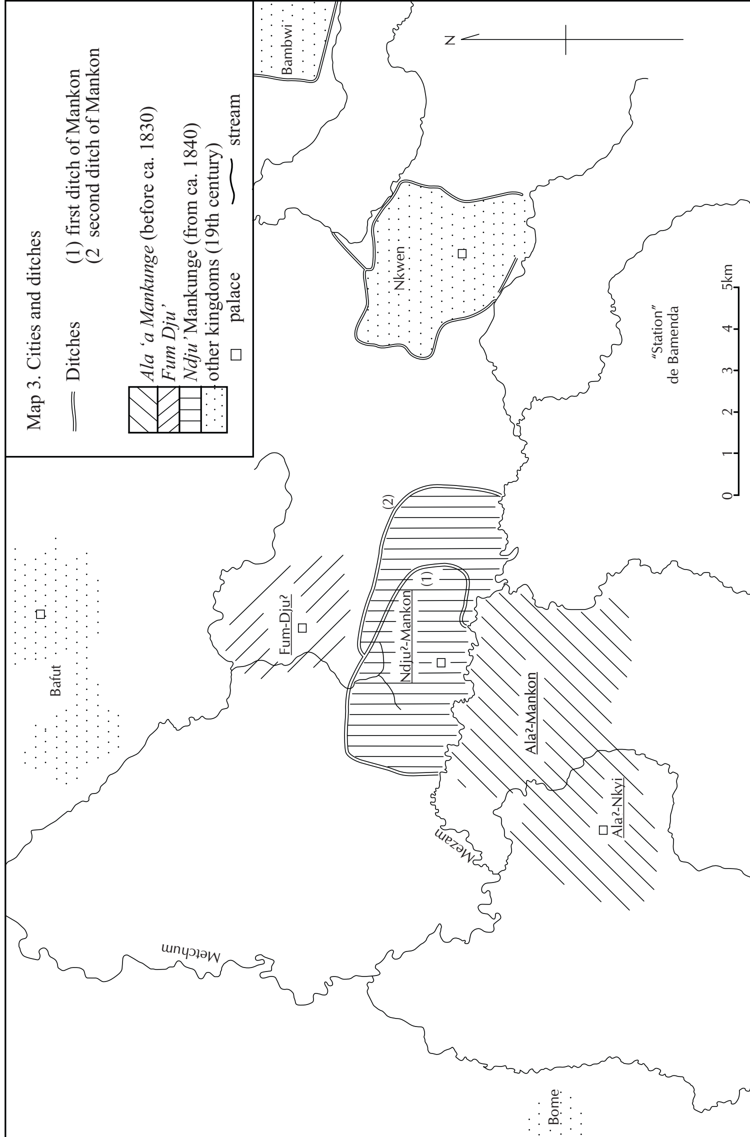
At the beginning of the 21st century, the 'medicine of the king' is still practiced annually. By contrast, the ditch that surrounds *Ndzu' Mankunge*

('[the] city (or the domaine) [of] Mankon'), and which dates back to the middle of the 19th century, has not been maintained and put to use since around the 1920s. Its sides have collapsed, crops and banana trees have been planted at the bottom of it. Some people, notably amongst the young generation, ignore its location or even its existence. Yet it is clearly visible on all its length and it shows on aerial photographs. Judging from what is left of it, it must have measured between 3 and 6 metres in width, and about the same in depth. It must have been impossible to cross over, unless one is equipped with a ladder. This, in a village, would not have gone unnoticed.

Map 3 (p. 147) has been produced from aerial photographs and it shows the location of the ditch. According to oral tradition, the latter was dug shortly after the Mankon had joined their Bafut neighbours under the pressure of the Chamba raids around 1820 (see Chilver and Kaberry, 1968; Fardon, 1988, 1990). They had been allowed to settle at first some 10 kilometres south of Bafut, at a place known as *Fum Dzu'*, and then, slightly more to the south, on the northern bank of the Mezam river which provided a natural limit. It was then that the ditch was dug, to complement the limit provided to the south by the river. It must have been around 1840–1850. Soon afterwards, the expanse of land enclosed by the ditch proved too small, and a second ditch, more or less parallel to the first one, enlarged the enclosure towards the north-east. The total length of the larger ditch is about 16 kilometres. The enclosed area has a surface of about 20 square kilometres. It is called *ala'a* (the 'country', or the 'city'). Given the dimensions of the ditch and the fact that it was dug with locally produced hoes and picks, at places through the ferralitic crust, it is an achievement of pharaonic dimensions.

Similar ditches may be found in other kingdoms around Mankon: in Bafut, Bambili, Bambwi, Bafanji, Nkwen, Foumban and all the way to the Tikar country, some 200 kilometres away from Mankon. These ditches undoubtedly had a defensive use, especially against Chamba and Fulani raids in the 19th century. However, at least in the Mankon area, a careful examination of their uses and features reveals other types of concerns than the military protection of the city.

My enquiries revealed that the functions fulfilled by the ditches were more related to the daily activities at time of peace than to military security at times of conflict. In Mankon, it could only be crossed at five or six spots, where the diggers had left open passageways some 30



Map 3. Ditches and cities.

to 40m in width between two consecutive stretches of ditch. The paths allowing access to the outskirts of the city and the other kingdoms passed through those passageways. The soil taken out of the ditch had been carried away and spread out. As a result, there were no heaps of dirt to indicate the presence of the ditch, and therefore of the passageways which in any case were effectively concealed by vegetation. One could enter or exit Mankon unaware of the location of the ditch. The few passageways received particular attention on the day of the 'medicine of the king' and were cut across by lines and knots of medicines. However, I have not been able to ascertain if these passageways were equipped with fences facilitating their closure and control at the gates.

These passageways were also used as toll barriers at which palace retainers stopped the traders and taxed them for the benefit of the palace. It is there, too, that the members of the warrior lodges called *Mandzong* intensified the surveillance on market days, and at times of conflict internally or with neighbouring kingdoms.

In order to assess properly the nature of the control and surveillance allowed by the passageways, we ought to stress that the genealogies I collected in Mankon and in some neighbouring kingdoms indicate that, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, some 30 per cent of the women married in Mankon came from other neighbouring polities. This was the consequence of the politics of matrimonial alliance implemented by the polygamous notables who also maintained active exchange networks in long distance trade in luxury commodities or in the regional trade of subsistence goods. These networks have been described in detail in another publication (Warnier, 1985a). As a result, the households and the kingdom were ethnically and linguistically composite. The kingdom was by no means an 'ethnic' unit. It was a political construction made of heterogeneous building blocks and unified by the closure achieved by the king, and by the royal substances distributed to the subjects.

As a linguistic area, the Grassfields of Cameroon are characterised by an unusually high linguistic density and diversity of mutually unintelligible yet related languages. In an area the size of Belgium, the linguists have identified some 50 different languages. Until the beginning of the 20th century, when 'Wes cos' Pidgin and European languages were introduced, there was no *lingua franca* in and around Mankon. As a result, the children brought up in polygamous households became easily multilingual, as were their parents. Most polygamous households were multiethnic (if there was any such thing as ethnicity in the Grassfields)

and multilingual. Besides, household heads often sent their favourite sons outside Mankon, to stay with their maternal grandfathers or their successors in other, neighbouring cities. This mobility subtracted them from local witchcraft and jealousy, it socialised them more widely, it increased their social capital and prepared them to succeed their fathers. Consequently, marriages, funerals, the mobility of wives and children, market exchanges, diplomatic exchanges fed a heavy traffic of people and things through the gates of the city and from one kingdom to the next. In addition to the busy regional traffic, the slave trade reinforced the need for closure and control. It was active up to the German colonisation and beyond. S.D. Miers and I. Kopytoff (1986) stressed the fact that, in Africa, and perhaps elsewhere in the world, there exists a continuum between the status of parent and that of a commodity. One may pass from one status to the other in a progressive and reversible way, since rights in persons are negotiable. For example, a descent group may acquire the rights *in uxorem* and not the rights *in genetricem* as far as a particular woman is concerned. Similarly, in the Grassfields, the so-called *nkap* alliance system allows a notable to exercise matrimonial rights on a number of girls who are not his daughters. He may give them out as wives to lower-ranking men without bridewealth payment and be compensated by acquiring the matrimonial rights on the daughter or daughters born to the first woman. In the Grassfields, such processes were closely linked to the slave trade (see Brain, 1972) and made it possible to feed the slave trade by shifting from kinship ties to alliance and then to commodity exchange. The Grassfields fed the African slave trade, which was extremely active, without having to resort to warfare and slave raiding.[3] Members of descent group segments or households succeeded in selling out a parent in secret. The sale was considered fraudulent, but it was covered by the notables who controlled it and benefited from it. Clan heads owned a slave trading licence materialised by a 'slave rope' made of human hair plaited with vegetable fibres. It was wound around their walking sticks for anyone to see. It allowed them to engage in slave-trading. The monarch was assisted by the *bigwe* (*gwe* sg.) who were quite good at selecting undesirable people on behalf of their masters to sell them. The owners of the slave rope and the king established an ambiguous link between the city and the regional community, the inside and the outside. They brought

[3] I developed this point in a previous publication (Warnier, 1989).

the forces of the world market inside the confines of the kingdom while providing the means to control them to a certain extent.

Accordingly, the ditch fulfilled an important practical function: it helped to control the comings and goings of *bona fide* travellers, but also the fraudulent infiltration or exfiltration of slaves and secret envoys of neighbouring kings. It was a limit, a border. It produced locality and separated the inside from the outside. It allowed the monitoring of what was going on around the envelope of the kingdom and the movements, not only of human beings, but of livestock, commodities, medicines, occult forces. In case it was needed, the palace could exercise a tighter control or even close down all the gates. The order was given by drum-language and could be executed in an instant. For example, if a person was declared missing in dubious circumstances during a funeral that had attracted many neighbours and relatives including from other kingdoms, a message was sent to the palace. The palace could shut down all the gates of the kingdom. The city could be searched to retrieve the absent person or the latter would be declared missing, presumably sold, in which case the palace would get a share in the deal.

Thus, the ditch and the 'medicine of the king' fulfil the same praxic function: to construct the limit of the city, provide it with a material, tangible and localised envelope equipped with openings that ensure the two-way circulation of things and people between the inside and the outside. They also allow the vetting, control, action upon and transformation of the fluxes passing through the openings. This function directly addresses the 'body', its materiality, that is, the sensory-motor conducts of people, substances, goods, livestock, etc. They are directly addressed to the dynamics of the exchanges, to the motivity or mobility of people and things in space. They provide what M. Foucault would call a '*dispositif*', that is, a finalised set of practical contraptions and procedures that go along with a given governmentality. They are the instruments needed to sort out things, to destroy or reject the 'bad' ones out of the city, and to absorb the 'good' ones into it. This distinction—praxic and structural at the same time—between an inside and an outside, is articulated in the use of violence as we shall see concerning the medication of iron weapons.

'Metallic violence' and its domestication

To the Grassfields societies, iron was, and still is to some extent, what nuclear energy is to industrial societies: a resource and a formidable

threat.[4] As already mentioned, the use of iron weapons is reserved to the conduct of warfare *outside* the limits of the city. From a praxeological and cognitive point of view, it seems to me that the problem with iron weapons (mostly, in the past, machetes, knives and spears) is that they cut through the skin, burst it open, and let out its contents. This, understandably, cannot be done between Mankon citizens or within the city as it would be highly polluting. Once more it is a problem of envelope and contents.

However, these iron weapons are kept *within* the city, and exhibited in dramatic, spectacular and bellicose shows during funerals, the annual festival and, in the past, the meetings of warrior lodges. Under such circumstances, as well as in actual warfare, accidents were, and still are, fairly frequent. According to the theory of double causality formulated by E.E. Evans-Pritchard (there is a 'natural' one and a relational/social one), the Mankon believe that iron weapons have to be medicated to prevent their potential for danger to be released against people's will in situations where Mankon citizens may not be entirely at peace with each other, which may call for an accident caused with an iron implement. This medication takes place on the first day of the annual festival. On that day, the palace processes the iron weapons and the men who use them, in order to divert their inherent violence away from the city and towards the enemies of the outside. This statement is mine and has not been voiced by any informant. It is meant to give a verbal expression to the cognitive content of the performances described below.

The first day of the festival is called the 'day [of] *Mesongong*'. *Tumasang*, who is the 'father' of the lodge *Mesongong* (*Nda Mesongong*), presides over the performance. This is the narrative of the very last sequence of sensori-motor conducts after the party of men led by *Tumasang* go to the brook named *Nkyi Sa'* to wash the red and white kaolin previously put on the butt of their guns and on their arms and faces. The last time I saw this was on 31st December 2002:

Some 50 guns of various kinds lay in the grass, neatly lined up next to each other. The men, under the direction of *Tumasang*, put them in front of the king's podium, on the dancing field. About 200 people surround the monarch, the guns, the orchestra and *Tumasang* himself. The latter holds a fowl. He is dressed in a '*Ndop*' loin cloth, knitted cap, and a necklace of *ndor* vines round his neck and hanging on his bare

[4] I commented on violence and iron production in another publication (Warnier, 2004).

chest. *Tumasang* stands by the guns, his face tense. He pulls the wings and legs of the fowl together and holds them tight in his clenched left hand. The fowl protests. The orchestra is silent, as is the crowd.

> *Tumasang* (briskly): "*Mesongong* is something that comes from the olden days, is it not?"
> The crowd: "*Abe*" ('it is so', or *amen*).
> *Tumasang*: "If a foreigner eats within Mankon and betrays us, is he not risking his head?"
> The crowd: "It is his head."

Presently, *Tumasang* seizes the head of the fowl in his right hand, twists it vigorously, and tears it off the body of the bird. The crowd, frozen by the violence of the gesture and the emotion, keeps still. The silence is such that the sound made by the head of the fowl thrown by *Tumasang* towards the base of the monarch's podium can be heard when hitting the ground. It leaves no doubt regarding the fate of the foreigner who would come from the outside, stay and consume without bringing anything in return. The beheaded fowl fights in agony. *Tumasang* brushes all the butts and barrels of the gun with the fowl, its blood smearing the weapons while *Tumasang* carries on with his imprecations:

- *Tumasang*: "If you give fresh water to a foreigner and he gives you boiling water, is he not risking his head?"
- The crowd: "It is his head."
- *Tumasang*: "If you come within the Mankon circle and you do not behave properly, do you not put your arm at risk?"
- The crowd: "It is your arm."

Tumasang breaks a wing of the fowl. The silence is such that the bones cracking can be heard distinctly. The leader of the *Mesongong* lodge piles up threats upon imprecations, always approved by the crowd: "If you come with bad intentions... Mankon soil is slippery even in the dry season... May God, give us a good harvest... Is it not the arm of the witch?" (He breaks the other wing of the fowl.) "Is this not the leg of the witch?" (He breaks a leg of the fowl.) "We draw a wide path; if you come with hostile intentions, are you not going to fall on the ground?" (He breaks the second leg.) "If we deviate from our path, won't God bring us back?" He looks at the disarticulated carcass of the fowl in his right hand and throws it towards the king. It rolls in the low grass and stops by the head of the bird. The crowd relaxes. People cough and a few of them giggle. Several people shift or make a few steps.

Tumasang then seizes a raffia bag containing camwood powder that has been placed on a step of the podium. He goes round the guns while sprinkling the butts and the barrels with camwood on top of the blood of the fowl: "We want peace... *Kwi'fo* illuminates the palace. It will illuminate the people... New year, new behaviour... Can ripe fruits become green again?... If a woman comes across an animal and hits it with her stick, won't she pick it up?... May God give us food, good harvests and children."

Tumasang leaves the raffia bag on the steps of the podium, climbs them and receives from the king the *meka* tablets—that is, the bundle of half a dozen ebony pieces, pierced at one end and held together by a rope. Once more, he turns round the guns, bent double, dragging the bunch of tablets that rattle on the butts and the barrels. He adds a few words: "Is it not *meka* that holds the city together?... Mankon may defeat its enemies just with words of abuse... We have no hatred for strong people."

He puts the *meka* back into the king's hands. Each man looks for his gun and picks it up. The monarch stands up, takes the microphone and says a few words to his people. He urges the men to purchase a gun, to register it at the district office, and to participate in the festivities of the three following days at the palace dancing field. He climbs down from the podium and retires. The crowd quickly scatters.

Tumasang, the king and the people take the closure of the country as a given, an evidence. Everything that comes from the outside and is profitable is welcome, especially foreigners that Mankon is quite willing to take in and assimilate. By contrast, everything that is bad will be destroyed forcibly, by the strength of the weaponry applied to the hostile subjects and to the things within and outside the country. The iron weapons, included in what *Tumasang* called in his speech the 'circle' of Mankon, are reserved for external use because of the danger and violence it contains**.** Iron is medicated so that it spares the citizens who stay within the 'circle.' (For more on this topic, see Warnier, 2004.)

Blending processes and the construction of the limits

There is something universal about the identification of the psyche as an envelope. Since Anzieu's synthesis on that question (1985), it has become widely accepted that the psychic construction of the self as an envelope is built up by 'anaclisis' on the functions of the subject's

skin right from birth. Similarly, there is something universal about the use of containers in every single society in the world even before Neolithic times (bags, nets, ostrich eggs, textiles), then, from the Neolithic onwards, pottery and other kinds of vessels. The Mankon kingdom is no exception to this universality of the psychic experience of the self as an envelope and of material containers for daily use. But, in Mankon, there is more to it than that: the kingdom has taken skins, envelopes and containers as a basic technology of power, and has turned the universal experience of containment into the single principle of a specific governmentality and of its technology of political subjectivity. Why is this? This requires an explanation that could indeed be extended *mutatis mutandis* to all Grassfields polities, and perhaps to other sacred kingships in Africa.

It seems to me that the answer to this question must be sought in the mixed or composite making of the Mankon kingdom. In the past and today more than ever, the Mankon polity is multilingual, 'multiethnic', made of heterogeneous descent groups of diverse origins and migrants. It is wide open to regional and long-distance exchanges, to a point that is difficult to fathom by whoever has in mind the Orientalist stereotype of the closed, homogeneous, tightly knit, monocultural and monolingual 'traditional' communities. In other words, what constitutes the diversity of the outside world is present within the limits of the kingdom, and what is inside is in constant connection with the outside. Just like any Grassfields society, this kingdom is facing severe problems of limits, opening, containment, penetration, expulsion, in order to deal with its internal diversity, keep it together and keep it separate and distinct from the outside world. Consequently, it seems to me, Mankon, like the other kingdoms of this region of Africa, has developed a technology of its own, based on envelopes and openings, that allow it to work on the limits of the city, the bodily envelope of the monarch containing homogenising and unifying substances, the skin of the subjects and all the containers embodied in sensori-motor conducts. This work, by means of this particular technology, aims at producing locality and unity with elements that are precisely wanting in locality and unity.

In the past, as I have already said, the kingdom used to participate in a regional system of commodity exchange in subsistence goods and in a sub-continental trading network in luxury goods between notables and kings. These two systems were not restricted to the 'economic' sphere, concerning the production, the distribution and the consumption of goods and services. They were social and political practices directly

linked with the hierarchic organisation of local polities, descent groups and households.

I have already published a book on these economic and political networks (see Warnier, 1985a: *Echanges, développement et hiérarchies dans le Bamenda pré-colonial—Cameroun*), the analysis of which has been validated by more recent publications (Austen and Derrick, 1999; Argenti, 2004; Warnier, 1980, 1993, 1995).[5] Regional exchanges concerned subsistence and manufactured goods produced for the market: palm-oil, root crops, beans, groundnuts, maize, tobacco, small livestock, iron implements, clay pots. Local communities specialised, depending on comparative advantage costs. Palm-oil production developed in the western lowlands beyond the edge of the Bamenda Plateau, and craft production, including metallurgy, developed in the Ndop Plain, at the centre of the Grassfields. These two basic activities occupied the two extremities of the Bamenda Plateau trading network, spreading over some 80 kilometres. Commercial transactions took place in between, at regional marketplaces with market days synchronised on a regional basis. They also took place at local marketplaces usually attached to king's palaces and in trading households, by means of various currencies (cowries, iron and brass rods, beads, salt in bags). Well before the onset of colonisation, rotating credit associations promoted commercial capitalisation by the traders. There are good reasons to think that the regional trading network has a historical depth of ten centuries.

Long distance trade in slaves, imported European goods (guns, gunpowder, beads, cloth, Toby jugs), kola nuts, salt in bulk, ivory, Benue textiles and wooden carvings was practiced by kings and notables. These were royal and noble exchanges of valuables. However, long distance trade developed and changed considerably when the Grassfields included the Bight of Benin trade at their periphery, from 1750 onwards. At that time, the Grassfields, with their comparatively high

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[5] Concerning the hypotheses and arguments I develop regarding the regional dynamics in the Grassfields, I am indebted to many people. Igor Kopytoff supervised my Ph.D. research and directed my attention to the regional approach in reference to E. Leach. Mike Rowlands (see Friedman and Rowlands, 1977, Rowlands, 1979 and during many instances of personal communication) made a crucial contribution regarding the relationship between, on the one hand, regional and interregional exchanges and, on the other, the development of socio-political systems, as regards their localisation and closure in particular. The Rev. Fathers Tchouanga-Tiegoum and Ngangoum (1975) invented containers as the basic technology of power in the Grassfields kingdoms. Dieudonné Miaffo then conveyed this to me.

population density, became a reservoir of slaves that fed the Atlantic trade until around 1850, and the inland trade until about 1900.

All those exchanges took place along matrimonial and political alliances, formal friendship between traders, and constant, voluminous and multidirectional fluxes in persons and goods all over the Bamenda plateau and the Grassfields. The fluxes of people took place daily, weekly or occasionally, depending on market days, funerals, marriage ceremonies, and the transfers of some children from their father's household to that of their maternal grandfather. Witchcraft accusations, succession crises and various other conflicts ended with the departure of descent group segments or households and their adoption in another kingdom. As a result, an important proportion of the plateau was formed of translocal people: oral traditions and genealogies prove these facts.

Each kingdom had its own royal dynasty and identity determined by its territory, its sacred places, its specific federal structure, and, so to speak, its official language. But it was composite, multicultural and multilingual. These facts are recognised by the Grassfields people themselves. We saw that, in Awing, where the king offered a piece of mutton to the 'children of the country', that is, the autochthonous section of the population, which implies that the other quarters were made of adopted strangers.

Robin Horton (1971) published a much quoted article on the origin of chiefdoms and kingdoms in Africa. He underscored the fact that, in historical circumstances in which descent group segments happen to shift residence and to come together with other genealogically unrelated groups, they have to work out some kind of political regulation. The kinship idiom may do, to some extent. However, beyond a certain frequency and volume of what R. Horton calls 'disjunctive migrations', the kinship idiom will not suffice, and the political organisation will have to resort to other modes of regulation. Most of the time it will take the form of a more or less federal kingdom or chiefdom. Such situations may be found when the 'disjunctive migrations' break up the local descent groups and produce composite local communities. Chiefs, kings and cities are not the forces behind the development of networks of all kinds when they engage in exchange relationships. Quite the reverse, exchange networks and the circulation of persons foster the development of disjunctive migrations when these may help solving a conflict or a local crisis. Exchange networks and disjunctive migrations produce extremely diverse forms of local polities which

then must address the question of how to regulate the relationships of groups that do not share any common origin. The closure of space and its unification under a 'sacred' king having access to the dead elders is one of the few possible answers.

A similar argument has been developed, along nearly identical lines by the politologist J.-F. Bayart (2004: 53–132: "L'Etat, produit de la globalisation") in order to analyse the relationship between the globalisation of a world-economy and the formation of the State. His concern is to criticise the argument according to which the globalisation of financial, commodity and other fluxes would weaken the States. It is actually the reverse, writes Bayart. The State does not antedate the development of inter-community relationships, it follows it. These relationships, in their transnational dimensions, and even in their least regulated or legitimate dimensions (predation, traffics of all kinds, smuggling, piracy) constitute the humus that feeds State formation and the closure it achieves:

> The process of closure—of territories, cultures, identities—has been the active principle of the expansion of societies and of the growing integration of the international system. There is another paradox: the territorialisation of sovereignty and the crystallisation of particular identities are at least partially produced by the 'modernity at large' (Arjun Appadurai) rather than within the bosom of societies—or more exactly in the relation of the latter to the globalisation 'at large'. The 'integral' State notably institutes itself at its 'frontier' as much as at its centre. In that respect, it consists of a global configuration of 'domination' or 'subjection' that may not be reduced to the more explicitly political relations alone. (Bayart, 2004: 131, transl. JPW.)

This applies to the globalised situation of the 21st century. However, for the same reasons, this very process of closure has been at work in an obscure African kingdom at the semi-periphery of the world system from the 18th century to the 21st.

It seems to me that a composite polity, made of unrelated groups of diverse origins, can organise and last only if it implements a technology of power and subjection that will produce a territorial unit and attach the subjects to it, in its physical reality. It has to produce some kind of locality, one way or another. The Mankon governmentality of containers is well equipped to accomplish this at least on two accounts. Firstly, it achieves the physical, material, closure of the city and provides it with an inside, an outside, a limit and openings. Secondly, it unifies the subjects who are kept within its boundary by sharing with them the

material ancestral substances coming out of a monarch. There may exist other similar technologies of power to achieve the same end. But the Mankon solution to the specific requirements of territorialisation and subjection is that of a technology of containers, and it works (within limits as we shall see). This governmentality unfolds itself according to a praxic logic concerning the city, its material limits, the ditch, the 'medicines of the king', the palace, the king, all their contents, all their openings, and the motion of transit through the openings associated with the processes of control and transformation at the openings. It is a smart solution, an aesthetic one insofar as it mobilises material things and bodies as means of sensori-affective-motor symbolisations. It is directly addressed to the subjectivity of the citizens. It encompasses and concerns both the subjects and the king. They apply the same technologies of power and of the self in their daily lives and in the specific activities of the palace.

What does it do to the subjects to put lines of medicines in particular, significant, places of transit, to beat them down with wooden sticks, to build up fences, plough the soil, sow seeds, dig a ditch, to cross over this limit at certain passageways together with commodities, livestock and various substances, to control and be controlled? Amongst other things, all these actions identify the subject with a sort of demographic substance, circulating through the openings of the container-city, and filling it up with people, goods, livestock, crops and all sorts of things, while exporting all the people and goods that feed into the regional and long distance exchange networks. The pot-king reigns at the heart of the city, and his three bodies will now hold our attention.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE KING'S THREE BODIES

Some theologians and lawyers of the Middle Ages, attached to the European royal courts, elaborated a political theory and a common law based on the duality of the king's body. This theory, discussed by E.H. Kantorowicz (1957), makes a distinction between the natural body, subjected to disease, decrepitude and death, and the social body which incorporates the subjects and is neither subjected to illness nor death.[1] This metaphor is borrowed from Christian ecclesiology. The king, with his natural and carnal body, is a mortal, as was Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified under Pontius Pilatus and put in a tomb. The very same king, anointed when he succeeds his deceased predecessor ('the king is dead, long life to the king'), adorned with all the paraphernalia of the monarchy—the crown, the sceptre and the globe—is like the resurrected Christ who is the head of the church—his body on earth. The king in glory incorporates his subjects just like the Christ in glory incorporates the faithful members of the church. The analogy has its limitations, of which the theologians and E.H. Kantorowicz (1957/2000: 841) were well aware. They come from the fact that Christ, as the Verb of God, is eternal, whereas no earthly kingship can ever entertain such pretensions. However, limited as it is, this analogy, Kantorowicz said, had a considerable impact on practices, law and the European tradition concerning the 'corporations' or 'corporate groups'. It is interesting to see that this theory has received unexpected developments in

[1] I am indebted to Nicolas Argenti (2004) who has picked up my argument regarding the king as a container (see Warnier, 1993) and has developed it with reference to Kantorowicz. Argenti conducted his research in the kingdom of Oku, which, as far as the king's body is concerned, does not differ significantly from Mankon. Analysing the Mankon data, however, I am led to increase the number of the king's bodies from two to three: the king himself, his palace and the city. I am also indebted to Anne-Hélène Allirot who brought my attention to the work of the historian Alain Boureau who qualified the point of view developed by Kantorowicz on the sacrality of the European kings (or, rather, its absence). This allows to cast an unusual light on African kingship, as becomes apparent in this chapter.

British social anthropology, with its application to the descent groups and kingdoms in Africa.

The critique addressed to E.H. Kantorowicz's thesis by A. Boureau (1988) and A. Boureau and C.S. Igerflom (eds, 1992) bears specifically on the notion of 'sacredness' as applied to European kingship by the theologians and lawyers of the European royal courts, especially in Britain. A. Boureau and C.S. Igerflom remark that, despite the coronation ceremonies (even called '*sacre*' in France), they failed to establish the sacredness of the king because the Church has always considered the king as a layman, and the coronation as no more than a benediction, and definitely not a sacrament. Besides, the Gospel establishes a clear distinction between what belongs to God and must be returned to him on the one hand, and what belongs to Caesar and must be returned to him on the other. In no way can the confusion be made between the king and a priest, Caesar and God, the profane and the sacred.

However, if I quote Kantorowicz, it is because his work seems far more relevant to Africa than to the European kingdom of Saint Louis or any other European king. Indeed, until very recently, no African king was reminded of his lay condition by a Christendom weary of maintaining its monopoly on access to a saviour God. An African king all alone saturates the space of the sacred. In comparison with European kingships, African kingships are really 'sacred' ones.

In Europe, the dual body of the nobility—king, count, bishop—is illustrated by the tombs in the form of a 'double monument', the photographs of which are reproduced by Kantorowicz (1957: figs. 28, 30, 31, see pp. 431–436). The tomb is decorated with two recumbent figures, one above the other. The one on the higher level shows the official adorned with all his paraphernalia: the mitre, the ring, the crook, the priestly ornaments of the bishop (for example, Archbishop-Primate Henricus Cantuariensis in dalmatic, the pallium around his shoulders, the precious mitre on his head, the feet in pontifical shoes; pp. 433–434); the armour, the sword, the gauntlets, the hunting hound of the count. Their faces are fleshy and healthy. Their eyes are closed as if they were having a rest. It is the face of a living, yet sleeping, man or woman. A metre and a half below, a recumbent figure of the same person shows a naked corpse, with the exception of a fold in the shroud which covers the sex. The figure is definitely that of a dead person, emaciated, eyes and cheeks hollow, ribs showing. The process of putrefaction has started. Some sculptors have gone as far as representing maggots on the abdomen of the corpse.

It was already mentioned that the distinction between a natural—perishable—body, and a sacred—imperishable—one is peculiar to the Christian world. It does not apply to African kingships. What keeps the two worlds apart—the European and the African—is the belief in the resurrection of the dead following that of Christ. By contrast, the medieval distinction between a single, incorporating and sacred body on the one hand, and an incorporated collective body on the other hand, is probably of universal relevance. In medieval Christendom, the coronation ceremony was an attempt to achieve the transformation of the 'natural' body into a 'sacred' incorporating one. In Mankon, it is the positional succession (that the Anglophone Mankon often call a 'coronation') which achieves the identification between the king and the city. However, this identification is also the result of all the practices of which we have seen several examples in the previous chapters. The unique physical body of the king, insofar as it is the container of the consolidated heritage of ancestral substances, and its caretaker, incorporates the second one. The limits of both have been materially established, one by the coetaneous envelope of the king lined with his garments, the other by the systems of closure of the kingdom: the ditch, the 'medicine of the king', and the control exercised at the gates of the city.

The medieval theologians who tried to substantiate the sacredness of the king were concerned with constructing a coherent argument in conformity with a *ratio*. Consequently, they produced a corpus of *texts* on which E.H. Kantorowicz relies for his analysis. By contrast, Mankon is a non-literate society and does not possess any similar corpus of texts. However, one may remark, following Pierre Clastres (1973), that "any law is written [and] any writing is a token of the law", even in a non-literate society. I will broaden this argument by stressing the fact that material culture is a trace and a writing and that Mankon kingship is inscribed in three incorporated and incorporating material ensembles: the body of the monarch, with its embodied objects (drinking horn, calabashes, bowl *azo'*, etc.), the palace and the city.

From that point of view, one may notice a significant difference between European kingships and those of the Grassfields: the former tend to be metaphorically thematised by means of verbalised comments and representations. The latter tend to be acted by means of sensori-motor conducts in material culture. To this must be added a second difference: European kingships distinguish two bodies ('natural' and 'social') whereas in the case of the Grassfields kingships, I distinguish

three of them (the 'skin' of the king, the palace, the city). This said, these differences may be more superficial than it seems at face value because they reflect the nature of the sources taken into account to produce an anthropological construction. Kantorowicz draws on the texts (the painting of the smoking pipe). I draw on the sensori-motor conducts propped against material culture (the smoking pipe). A praxeological approach to European monarchies would certainly reveal unexpected similarities between Europe and Africa. After all, one of the major concerns of Louis XIV was to build a castle in a park, with a large ornamental lake as a proper material setting for the royal court. (We will return to this point at the end of this chapter.) He identified with his palace, which, consequently, may be considered as yet another body of the king.

Three sets of data allow us to speak of the three bodies of the Mankon king. The first one pertains to the structural homology between the three bodies. Each of them is made of an envelope equipped with openings that are the focus of many significant practices. The second one concerns an homology of functions between the three bodies: all three absorb things and substances (and even people) coming from the outside, transform them by the way, store them, and expel whatever cannot be assimilated. At the same time, they all are the focus of practices of closure, of consolidation of the limits and of the envelopes, of control and sorting out of the contents. Last but not least, the three bodies live a symbiotic life by being irrigated by the same substances coming from the dead elders and kings, that circulate between the citizens, and onto the surfaces of their skins, into their envelopes and from one body to the next. All the substances that achieve the symbiotic life of these bodies come from a single source, that of the *monarch* in the etymological sense of the term, that is, the single origin or principle out of which spring the substances which keep flowing through the palace and towards the city.

In my opinion, the previous chapters have allowed us to establish the validity of these statements. I now wish to unfold and substantiate them as regards the symbiotic relationship between the king's three bodies, the circulation of raffia wine, the sacredness of the royal body and the taboo on touching it. I will take my point of departure from a reminder concerning the 'spraying' of the raffia wine.

The king 'sprays' (fama)

The event took place on January 2nd, 2003. The date matters: two weeks before, the king had gone to the royal graveyard at *Ala'a Nkyi*, made offerings and received the life essence given out to him by his dead ancestors. In the wake of this performance, he had entertained his people for four days, during the annual festival which had culminated on the third day with the 'dance of the king'. On such occasions, between 500 to 3,000 people can congregate on the dancing field at the palace.

In 1973, *Tsendi* of *Ala'a Akuma* said that, in such circumstances, the king entertains the notables gathered at *Nda Bekum* (the 'House [of the] Notables') with drink and food; not, however, any kind of food. He presents them with a stew of plantains, meat and palm oil in a large wooden trough, accompanied by five balls of salt per person. This is precisely what a wife taker must give to the wife givers (as we saw in chapter 2). The king, who has just received the dispensations from the dead kings, gives a return gift of food to the notables as an acknowledgment of the debt he has contracted by taking wives without compensation. However, the fact that this return gift takes place just after the offerings to the dead elders and during the annual festival shows that the king, together with the food, gives out ancestral life substances to his in-laws.

Returning to January 2nd, 2003, the fourth and last day of the festival referred to as *Betso' tsiteware* ('they remove [the] flag'), the king donned an assorted crocheted beret and an ample gown with multicolour designs embroidered on a black fabric. The crowd was less important than the day before: 300 to 400 people instead of 2,000 to 3,000. The king enjoyed more freedom and mobility. He took advantage of this to tour the entire dancing field (see photo n° 16), greeting many of his subjects on his way, looking straight at them and exchanging a few words while they bowed and put both hands in front of their mouths. The dark clouds of the political unrest that disturbed the kingdom in the first part of the 1990s had dissipated. The palace, threatened by an angry mob at the beginning of the 1990s, was back to its usual function as a meeting place. The 'Fon's office' in the provincial capital of Bamenda was the only testimony of those troubled times. Burnt to the ground, it was not re-built and its charred ruins were covered by vegetation. The palace, by contrast, had been embellished, and was about to be complemented with a museum.

Photo nº 16. King *Ngwa'fo* tours the dancing field during the annual festival (December 2002). In the background, the car park and the palace museum building.

Having completed his tour round the dancing field, the monarch moved towards the orchestra. To his sides, one could see the kings (should we say 'chiefs'?) of the tiny village-kingdom of *Songwa* and *Mombu'* who had participated in the first three days of the festival. A couple of metres behind him stood two palace stewards, each holding the ivory oliphant of the monarch and blowing them at times, and several 'daughters of the palace'. Each of them carried a royal object: an ornate drinking cup carved in a buffalo horn, a calabash of raffia wine, a spear, a raffia bag (containing camwood powder) and a fly-whisk made of horse tail.

The king gestured with his right hand. His daughter who held the drinking horn presented it to the king while bowing to him. The king seized it while still dancing. In the meantime, he kept beating to the rhythm with a fly-whisk. There was no haste in his gestures and he danced for a few minutes before engaging in the next action. One of the palace notables anticipated the king's moves and took the calabash of raffia wine from the hands of the 'daughter of the palace' who was holding it. The king turned towards the palace notable and faced him. He propped his drinking horn and the notable filled it cautiously. The king turned again towards the orchestra. He smiled, cup in hand,

obviously at ease. He took a long sip. *Maafo*, the titular queen mother, started shouting '*wuleeee*' and the other women joined in. The shout was repeated twice, and the last '*wuleeee*' lasted a lot longer than the other ones, while the two horns imitated the sound of the elephant. The king kept dancing. Without haste, he brought once more the drinking horn to his mouth. Some 20 or 30 people, many of them women, had gathered in front of the orchestra, facing the king and watching his motions. On the first row, people pushed themselves close to *Maafo*, knowing by experience that the king would spray the raffia wine first in her direction. By her side, there were a few 'women of the palace' and one of the youngest 'daughters of the palace', a cute little girl of three or four, with varnished black shoes, white socks, and a black frock with a rounded white collar. She held a fly-whisk as big as she was.

The monarch took in a deep breath, raised his head and sprayed (*fama*) a large mouthful of milky mist in front of him. It landed on *Maafo* and a dozen people around her. The king did not stop dancing. He brought again the drinking horn to his lips and took a long sip. Then, twice in a row, he filled his mouth and sprayed a group of five flute-players to his left and to a group of people next to *Maafo* on the second and third ranks, that had not benefited from the first spraying. Thereafter, the king turned to the right and began to walk towards the palace. The palace stewards bearing the horns followed suit, as did the 'daughters of the palace', a few notables, *Maafo*, and a retinue of 30 people or so. The feast was over. The luckiest amongst the dancers and musicians went back home with their heads, chests and arms wet with a mixture of raffia wine and royal saliva.[2]

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[2] From a psychoanalytical point of view, I am puzzled by the possible displacements, in the case of certain subjects and in certain contexts, from raffia wine, to semen, and possibly to the milk of lactating women. This is a pure hypothesis as regards Mankon, although in photograph n° 17 one can notice the motherly facial expression of the king when he pours raffia wine in the hands of a notable. Also, in Mankon, the king assumes the role of an interface between the inside and the outside of the kingdom, the royal clan and the commoner clans, the pure and the polluted, and, last but not least, the men and the women. The king is male and female. By contrast with Mankon, where the displacement between raffia wine, semen and milk is plausible but not expressed, De Boeck (2004: 113–114) mentioned that the aLuund of Congo (ex-Zaire) explicitly amalgamate these three substances which resemble each other by their whitish and liquid nature, and their relationship with fertility.

Raffia wine and the king as a calabash

Raffia wine (*melu'* sg.) is the most common and prominent mediator of the kind of interaction illustrated by the gesture of spraying, that is, not only between the king and his subjects, but also between notables and cadets, superior and inferior, men and women. It is processed from the sap extracted from the stock of the palm tree *Raphia farinifera*. In order to tap it, the men carve a channel into the trunk, between one and two feet above ground level, with a gouge produced by the local blacksmiths for that purpose. The carving of the channel has to be done slowly and spread over a number of days, otherwise the sap stops flowing. Often, the man who starts exploiting a new tree will light a fire along the trunk below the channel he is in the process of carving. It is supposed to accelerate the production of sap. When the tree is ready, the man puts a sort of gutter at the mouth of the channel which directs the sap into a container large enough to accommodate the product of the tree between two visits, that is, one to three litres. The man blocks any possible leakage around the gutter with banana tree fibres and protects the contraption from insects, rain and dirt with leaves and sometimes plastic bags. In the end, he puts three or four large raffia palm stems on top to hold everything together.

Everyday at dawn, the men walk down from their hamlets to their raffia bush, with a large empty calabash, a cow horn used as a funnel, their machete and the raffia-tapping gouge. The raffia palm grows in swampy soil and although the men put raffia stems on the ground along the paths and try to put their feet on them, they usually have to cross a few places knee-deep into the mud. When he has reached one of the trees, the man puts his tools on the ground and removes every piece of the contraption: stems, leaves, container, etc. He empties the content of the container into the large calabash, through the cow horn used as a funnel and a filter, as it is stuffed with banana tree fibres that retain the insects and other unwelcome bits and pieces of waste. Then he refreshes the cut of the channel by removing a very thin slice of wood with his gouge. He cleans up all the pieces of the apparatus, puts them back together carefully and walks to the next tree. Each trunk is exploited for four or five days in a row, twice a day (at dawn and in the evening) and then let to rest for three or four days. A man, depending on his other occupations and on the size of his raffia bush, may exploit ten to 30 trees simultaneously.

The proceeds of the day are bulked in calabashes of some 15 litres each and in large glass or plastic jugs, left to ferment according to taste. The first two days, the wine is still sweet and mild. It is called 'woman's wine'. After two days, the fermentation takes momentum and the beverage becomes slightly alcoholic, while producing bubbles of carbon dioxide. This is called 'men's wine'. Actually, men, women and children drink it at all stages of fermentation.

Large quantities of raffia wine are a necessity in all gatherings, funerals, rites of hospitality, meetings, meals, etc. Vast quantities are produced, traded and consumed. Hundreds of men congregate every morning in small rural wine marketplaces. The largest of all in Mankon is that of *Ntsu Alam* (the 'Mouth [of the] Forge'), some 8 kilometres from the provincial capital of Bamenda. At the marketplace, the wine is bulked by traders who taste it, buy it, and pour it into their own containers attached on their bicycles. A full load is made of five to seven calabashes or plastic jugs, almost 100 litres. The traders, heavily loaded, ride or push their bicycles all the way to the raffia wine bars in town, called 'mimbo bars' in Pidgin. Such bars can also be found everywhere along the roads and next to small retail shops.

When a meeting takes place, each man brings a calabash of wine. In such meetings, the contents of the calabashes of diverse origins are blended in a single large container, thus incorporating the substances coming from the various compounds, as seen in chapter 2 with the ceremony at *Foba*'s (see cover photograph).[3] Once the large container is full, the cup-bearer draws from it with a small calabash with a large triangular opening to the side for quick filling, and uses it to fill a number of decanters of two to three litres each. They may be glass or plastic jugs, but calabashes are preferred. These decanters are either ordinary, undecorated ones, with a plaited rope attached to the side of the neck and without anything to support them, and 'noble' decanters, provided with a circular stand at their bottom, fastened to the neck by four plaited attachments running vertically along the belly of the calabash, from the bottom to the neck.

The man who distributes the wine and fills up the smaller calabashes goes round the assembly and deposits them in front of the adult and

[3] Before it was closed down in the middle of the 1990s, the Bamenda provincial museum possessed two or three pottery jars of more than 100 litres each, heavily decorated. They came from Grassfields royal palaces.

married men in the group. He gives an ornate calabash to each notable, usually brought by the notable himself. In the absence of any notable or married man, the master of ceremony will go down the social hierarchy. If there is only one male teenager in a meeting of women, the calabash will be deposited at his feet, so that he can serve the others.

The men who have received a calabash have an obligation to serve other people—men or women—with wine. Most men who do not have a calabash at their feet request decanters from their neighbours, help themselves, and return them. If there is a hierarchic difference between wine-taker and wine-giver, the former will get up, walk towards the other, bow or squat in front of him while presenting his empty drinking horn. The wine-giver will then take his decanter and help the wine-taker with the beverage.

Each important notable has an ornate decanter for his exclusive use. Notables hardly ever offer a drink to other members of a meeting, and no one would dare to request wine from them. The king does not personally give wine to other people, except on one occasion, that is when a notable makes special payments called *miyɛ* by which he will obtain the privilege to clap hands in front of his sovereign and to address him directly, while covering his mouth with both hands or his clenched fist.[4]

A woman who wishes to drink will walk while bowing and will stop, still bowing, in front of a man who has a decanter and whom she is in a position to approach. Then, she will prop her drinking cup (carved in a calabash neck) held in her right hand, while sustaining her right forearm with her left hand. The man takes his decanter and fills up the woman's cup. The woman expresses her thanks by a restrained

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[4] Personal communication from Séverin Abega (Nov. 2002) exemplifies the difference between the more egalitarian societies of South Cameroon (at least between men), on the one hand, and the hierarchical societies of the Grassfields, on the other. In egalitarian societies, the calabashes keep circulating from one man to the next, horizontally as it were. A man receives a calabash, helps himself, and, while holding it in his hand, states the circumstantial reasons he has to pass it on to the next man: "If I am here", he says, "it is thanks to so-and-so who has done this and that in my favour". He then passes the calabash on to the man to whom he has paid homage in his toast. The latter, in his turn, will do the same in favour of a third man, and so on. In the more egalitarian societies of the forest, everything contributes to promoting the horizontal circulation of goods and substances and to avoid concentrating them in the hands of the (should we say 'happy'?) few and to make them circulate vertically through the social hierarchy.

reverence and walks back to her place, still bowing.[5] If there are no more than two or three men in a meeting with a vast majority of women, they spend a good deal of their time filling the cups of the women. Raffia wine is definitely a male substance, produced by men and given out by them.

A woman who bows when requesting and receiving wine is said to 'honour' or 'respect' (*wu'si*) men, and also herself. The enduring bodily practices around raffia wine, the fact that it holds its ground against industrial beer (called *melu' mekare*, that is, the 'wine [of the] White [man]') and other beverages are signs of its psychic and political importance.

Each adult Mankon owns a drinking cup that conforms to his or her status. The generic term is *ndong* (sg.) and applies to both the drinking cups and to the large calabashes. The cups of the king and of the high-ranking notables of commoner status are carved in buffalo horns (*Sincerus caffer*). The notables of the royal clan are privileged to use the horns of the trypanotolerant dwarf cows. In the past, each king of the Bamenda area had a herd of these. The king himself, as a member of the royal clan, owns and uses some of those horns. The cups of the women and cadets are carved in calabash necks. From the 1960s onwards, these were more and more often replaced by glasses, and china, aluminium or plastic cups generically referred to as 'White man's cup'. More men use drinking cups carved in the horns of Fulani cattle, plentiful in the area, cut to size and polished, available at all marketplaces.

The wine which is specifically produced for the palace is carried there in calabashes topped with a stopper made of two palm leaves folded and stuck in the calabash neck in such a way that the two pointed leaves protrude about 20 cm above the opening. The king never eats in public. Indeed, no king is supposed to eat any solid food. They are said to thrive on raffia wine and *ndor* leaves. To this day, the kings who stick to court etiquette and behave with dignity—which is the case of *Ngwa'fo III*—never drink in public anything but raffia wine. The only other substances they are expected to absorb are apotropaic and aphrodisiac medicines. The king of Mankon was quite explicit about this fact in an interview to the national daily newspaper *Cameroon Tribune*

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[5] During my stay in Mankon in 2002–2003, I did not notice any change regarding the praxeology of raffia wine when compared with the 1970s. If there is an aspect of Mankon culture which seems impervious to change, it is everything that pertains to the production, the circulation and the consumption of raffia wine.

(n° 4837 of 3–4 March 1991, reproduced above p. 116). Unlike simple mortals, a king is not supposed to be fed with ordinary food, but with ancestral substances—raffia wine being the most essential one.

'Follow the wine': This is the advise that could be given to an anthropologist who would be interested in penetrating the arcane social and political organisation of the Mankon. Wine is the substance that irrigates all the organs and tissues of the kingdom. In that respect, the palace operates as a heart or a pump. It sucks in, blends and pumps out, as does the king when he sprays the precious beverage on the dancers. The incorporation achieved by dancing and playing music is duplicated by an incorporation by wine and by the containers in which it is bulked, stored, and distributed—the king himself, the large jar, the palace store named *Nto' melu'* (the 'palace [of the] wine'), the calabashes for its transportation, the decanters, the drinking horns, the bodily envelope of the subjects sprayed with it, and the stock of the raffia palm. The latter, it is said, is much appreciated by the elephants, who are credited with the invention of raffia wine and are very fond of staying in the shade and dampness of raffia bushes. In the past, there were herds of them all over the Grassfields. It must be remembered that the king himself is sait to *be* an elephant as well as a calabash of wine. There are several features showing the identification of the king to the elephant: the two horns imitating the loud sounds of the pachyderm, the cap made of elephant tails and worn by the king during the annual festival (see photos n° 1 and n° 2 p. 29), the great size and capacity of the elephant, its preference for raffia wine and raffia bushes, and the fact that the king does not only belong to the inside of the city but also lives outside of it, in the avatar of an elephant. Here is an observation which illustrates the status of vital (and male) substance of the raffia wine.

Wara 'miyɛ' *the king*

I have already mentioned the fact that the king gives out raffia wine from his own drinking horn to a notable when the latter acquires the right to speak directly to him. The circumstances of the following case deserve to be made clear as they will enhance the significance of the performance. *Maafo*, the mother of *Ngwa'fo III*, was born in the commoner clan *Bon Anyerengum*. At the time of the 'Dispute' which split Mankon into two factions from 1920 to 1959, several lineages of this clan sided with the opponents of *Nde' Fru*, king of Mankon and father

of *Ngwa'fo III*, whom they considered as illegitimate. When he succeeded his father, in 1959, *Ngwa'fo* made repeated attempts at reconciling with his father's opponents. The fact that his mother, who held the highly prestigious title of *Maafo* ('Mother [of the] king') and enjoyed considerable personal charisma, had been born in the clan *Bon Anyerengum*, was of great help to the king as a go-between.

In 1973, the notables and the head of the lineage *Makwu Shwiri*, one of the lineages of the rebellious clan, decided to reconcile with the king and to pay a formal visit to the palace for the first time in 50 years of hostility. It had been agreed that, on that occasion, *Wara* (pseudonym) would accomplish the ceremony called *miyɛ* which would earn him the privilege of addressing the king without an intermediary. One may imagine that people were quite emotional about it.

After the gift exchanges of palm oil, raffia wine and food had taken place, as well as a short exchange of greetings and songs, the monarch, who was seated in his armchair, beckoned to *Wara*. The latter was an elderly charismatic man, in his late seventies, a sworn opponent to the father of *Ngwa'fo*. As punishment for participating in several riots against the king, the British magistrate had ordered him to be sent in to exile for several years in Esu, near the Nigerian border.

Photo n° 17. The king pours raphia wine from his cup into the hands of *Wara* assembled in front of his mouth (1973).

Wara approached *Ngwa'fo*, squatted in front of him and joined his open hands in front of his mouth so as to make a kind of gutter with them. The lower parts of his palms were joined together and to his lower lip. The king began to pour the raffia wine from his drinking horn into the hands of *Wara*. The wine flowed down the gutter and into *Wara*'s mouth. The latter started drinking (see photo n° 17). However, the monarch was pouring faster and in greater quantities than *Wara* could absorb. The wine overflowed and ran along the chin and forearms of *Wara*, and down on the concrete pavement where it began to make a pool. Whilst pouring, *Ngwa'fo* was smiling, with his head leaning over his left shoulder—an icon of genuine maternal solicitude and nurturing visible in photo n° 17.

As from that day, *Wara* has the privilege to speak directly to the monarch, provided he abides by court etiquette. This dictates that, when speaking to the king, one has to screen off one's breath and speech by putting one or both hands in front of one's mouth or else, one's clenched fist. The king, by contrast, speaks to his subjects in such a way that his breath and speech reaches them directly. However, he is often spared the effort of speaking to a crowd with a voice loud enough to reach all its constituent members. He may instruct a public speaker, who will deliver the message in a loud voice. In such a case, the speaker stands to the side of the king, then bows at him so as to bring his ears close to the monarch's mouth. He collects the breath of the monarch while shielding his own by putting his hands in front of his mouth. Meanwhile, people cough loudly to cover the whisper of the king that is directed exclusively to the public speaker. The king, then, chooses a spear out of the bunch of ancestral spears he holds in his hand. He gives the spear to the speaker who will brandish it on behalf of the authority. He then stands up and addresses the people in a loud voice. In the year 2000, the palace was equipped with a sound system which allowed *Ngwa'fo* to address his people without having to make a vocal effort unworthy of his highness (although he would not have experienced the slightest difficulty doing so).

When the king gives an audience in one of the palace halls, he speaks directly to the people in attendance or to any single one of them who generally answer while covering their mouths. Most of them do it for a few seconds, and then drop this piece of court etiquette.[6]

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[6] The political functions and the personal undertakings of *Ngwa'fo* in matters of

To summarise, first, the raffia wine is the most common substance given out from the top to the bottom of the hierarchy. The king shares it out during the annual festival as a refreshment and also as a 'spray' on people's skins. When someone performs the ceremony *miyɛ* in order to acquire the right to approach the king and to speak to him, the substance which is shared between him and the king is raffia wine from the king's cup which is embodied by the monarch. This means the person cannot address the king unless the two of them share the same (ancestral) substance. Once their bodies contain the same substance, the person can address the king without any risk for himself or the king.

Secondly, the bodily conducts and the material culture—especially at the climactic time of the annual festival—amount to a scenography of the three avatars of the king's body and their ultimate connexion by means of the raffia wine that circulate through them. Those three bodies are the 'skin', euphemistically designated as the 'thing' (*azume*) of the king, the palace (*nto'*), and the city or the country (*ndzu'* or *ala'a*). The raffia wine goes from the king's body and the palace to the citizens.

In the following pages, we will turn to discussing the relationship between the three bodies. The Mankon language substantiates the identification of those three entities with each other. For example, the wives and children of the king are referred to as the women and children 'of the palace'. However, those three entities remain quite distinct. This is made clear by the taboos on any physical contact with the king, whereas part of the palace is accessible to the *vulgum pecus* which is quite welcome to patronize it. The city itself is the preserve of the citizens, and the taboos on touching the king's own body do not extend to the city. If the king incorporates the city, yet, none of the subjects can approach him closely. His physical body, his 'thing', is untouchable.

agriculture, economy, rural development, cultural programs, etc., put him into contact with all sorts of persons who have not acquired the right to address him directly. Consequently, court etiquette has been altered and made far less stringent than it used to be. However, notables who have *miyɛ* the king and enjoy the privilege to address him directly make a point of following the bodily conducts in conformity with their privilege, that is, clapping hands, saying '*mbɛ*' when the king has spoken, covering their mouths with their hands, etc. Ordinary people do not usurp the right of adopting these bodily conducts except the gestures of covering their mouths.

The untouchable king

The bodily practices of the royal wives are a good indicator of the relationship between the Mankon subjects and the unique body of the monarch. His wives, as mentioned already, are called the 'women of the palace'. They can easily be identified by their cowries bracelets, and sometimes by a head-band adorned with a single shell. Whoever meets them on his way must yield, divert one's gaze and greet them with the appropriate term, that is, '*mangye Nto'*'. In the past, and still to a great extent nowadays, it is prohibited to touch them, for example by shaking hands. The men, especially the unmarried servants of the palace had to avoid any exchange of words with them. In the past, the defilement of a royal spouse deserved the capital punishment for the two lovers. In the 1970s, I heard of two cases in the Bamenda area, that were dealt with by the immediate repudiation of the wife said to be unfaithful.

In Cameroon, especially amongst expatriates, there are persistent rumours regarding the favours supposed to be given by frustrated royal wives to the palace servants. Without ruling out *a priori* the existence of such practices—impossible to verify anyway—there is a counter-argument in the fact that some kings were proven to be sterile. This was for example the case of *Nywifon*, a king of Babungo, at the end of the 19th century, of *Mbu Nggong* of Babanki at about the same time, and of one of the first Bamoum kings. The royal succession of Bamali was the reason for severe conflict from 1920 to 1950, when the heir to the throne proved to be sterile.[7] All this implies that the royal wives were faithful to their masters and that the Grassfielders recognised the possibility of male sterility—quite conspicuous in cases of high polygamy. This is a rare enough case in Africa and it deserves to be mentioned.

In the past, no precaution was spared to keep the royal wives away from the men—especially the numerous unmarried men of the kingdom. For example, pounding the staple dish named *atshu'* is performed in a wooden mortar that is likely to resound at each stroke of the wooden pestle. The royal wives, and the spouses of the king's sons, learned how to push the pestle silently along the length of an elongated, shallow, mortar. This technique increases the difficulty of a long and painstaking task. If a commoner woman produces too much noise

[7] Personal communication with Ian Fowler. See Fowler (1993).

while pounding, someone in her entourage is likely to tell her: "do you want to crimp the bachelor?" Indeed, it is said that unmarried cadets, who do not have a wife to cook their food, beg for food by walking towards a resounding mortar. The technique employed by the 'women of the palace' when pounding *atshu'* can only be implemented by being seated on a low stool (no more than 20 cm in height), usually a log of wood, and by using an elongated shallow mortar. Once all the paste has been pushed at one extremity, the woman turns the mortar around and starts pushing in the other direction. In the past, this equipment, and the corresponding motor conducts, were compulsory for the royal wives, and frequently used by the other women (see photo n° 7 p. 95). In the 1960s, except at the palace, the women began to use a different technique consisting of pounding vertically in a deep circular mortar while being seated on a chair or a fairly high stool. This technique is as noisy as the old one was silent. The discretion of the more antique technique had its cost in terms of apprenticeship, discomfort, and the fine tuning of proper motor algorithms. Sensori-motor and material culture, in that case, as in all others, operated in a systemic way and left a permanent trace or writing in the image of the female body. Thus, the control of the royal wives was written in their motor conducts as efficiently as tattooing or scarification would have done it, yet in a way invisible to the profane.

No one may touch the royal wives except the co-wives, their children and the king himself. They, in turn, like any other citizen, cannot touch the king. However, the king's semen (which is never mentioned as such) is one of the most important ancestral substances, if not the most important, that cannot be given out without intimate contact between the monarch and his spouses. Consequently, for the royal wives, the taboo on touching the king is lifted, at least for the duration of the sexual intercourse. In public, they always address the monarch from a distance of about one metre, bowing to him, with their hands on their mouths. In the past, sexual intercourse with the king was submitted to numerous constraints. It had to take place exclusively in the dwelling house or *atsum* (which means the 'lake') of the monarch, on the royal couch lined with leopard pelts. *Maafo*, the real or titular mother of the king determined the turn taken by the wives by giving out a knot of the grass *ma ala'a* (*Sporobolus africanus*) to those she had chosen.

The king had always a couple of young boys of the royal clan in attendance in his dwelling. When he wished to receive one of his spouses, he sent one of the boys to call for her. I know nothing regarding

the codification of the gestures of the royal couple nor about the techniques of the body which were in use before, during or after its union. A. Halloy and I were wondering in a private conversation about something like an *ars erotica* learned by the royal wives in order to stimulate their husband. There may be an indication of such a know-how in the fact that inexperienced couples were helped at marriage by duennas who entered their house with them to help them perform. I expect only a female anthropologist could possibly learn more along those lines from the royal wives.

The taboo on touching the king does not apply to the young 'children of the palace' (*mon nto'* or *manto'*, sg.) who are encouraged to maintain physical contact with their father. The taboo is enforced at puberty. *Ngwa'fo III* appears as a tender and loving father with his young children. During his audiences, it is frequent to see a couple of them leaning against him, and leaving or coming back as they please.

Lastly, the prohibition of physical contact with the king applies to the palace servants (*ntsenda* sg.), although some of them share the intimacy of the monarch and care for his needs. Actually what happens is that a few of the palace servants are entitled to have coetaneous contacts with the king, even if they are of commoner status. This was the case of *Tsendi*, a palace servant of commoner status who was born at the end of the 19th century. In his youth, he had been a palace servant for a good number of years. In the 1970s, he was a strong elderly man, measuring about 1.85 m and powerfully built. He explained to me that, in the past, the kings who had to travel were carried by their servants in a chair. When the British administered Western Cameroon and were under scrutiny by the Society of Nations to curb the high polygamy and lifestyle of the kings who were perceived as tyrannical African despots, they prohibited that mode of transport. Given his strength and stature, *Tsendi* did not have any difficulty carrying *Ngwa'fo II* on his back when the king was tired of walking, when he had to cross a stream or when he had to pass through muddy or steep places. It is true that he was smaller and much lighter than *Tsendi*.

The latter absorbed the apotropaic medicines taken everyday by the king. This allowed him to touch the body or the personal objects of the monarch without spoiling the medicines the latter had taken or without affecting his health. At the time (beginning of the 20th century), this was also the case with half a dozen palace servants of commoner status. However, to be in a position to touch the king, they had to fulfil a second condition: they were prohibited to have any contact with

women—whoever they were—and not only the 'women of the palace'. They could not even have a private conversation with any of them, said *Tsendi*. A palace servant who had been caught having a private conversation with a woman was disgracefully chased out of the palace by the other ones who threw at him the desiccated and inedible fruits of the shrub *Solanum aculeastrum* Dur. (a solanacea). The content of this is poisonous and, in the past, it was used to catch fish by throwing a decoction of fruits in the water, whereby the fish died and floated to the surface where they could easily be caught. No decent woman would ever be interested in such a man who was condemned to remain an unmarried cadet of low status for the rest of his life.

The privilege of touching the king, and the responsibility of caring for him, assisting him to take a bath, dress, eat and of attending on him in case of illness, was shared by a small group of wives, palace retainers of commoner status and notables. *Tsendi* remembers that, at the beginning of the 20th century, four notables—*Tamandam*, *Mutsi*, *Atso'o Tingo* and *Zama Shwe Tengye*—enjoyed the unrestricted confidence of the monarch to such an extent that no-one objected to their sharing a common bench with royal spouses. Accordingly, they were called 'women of the palace,' thus loosing their male nature.[8] The first one belonged to the commoner clan *Bon beNde' Siri* (the 'Children [of] *Nde' Siri*'). The other three belonged to the royal clan. Their office was not a hereditary one. It did not belong with the corporate estate of their title. It depended on the trust put in them by the monarch, on his personal liking for these notables, and their privilege was bestowed on them *intuitu personae*. Amongst the four of them, *Tamandam* seems to have enjoyed a preference on the part of *Ngwa'fo II*. He had a house of his own at the palace (*nda Tamandam*) and superintended the stores and the kitchen of his lord.[9] The royal food was prepared by a very small group of royal wives, all of them of Mankon descent and belonging to families of excellent reputation (in which, in particular, there had

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[8] The case is nothing exceptional in that part of the Grassfields. In another publication (Warnier, 1985a: 287, 289), I mentioned the fact that in Bambwi, a small kingdom some 20 klometres to the north-east of Mankon, the king was attended to by three notables said to be 'female notables'. Just like the royal spouses, they had access to the private spaces of the king, and accompanied their lord when he visited the royal graveyard.

[9] It is worth mentioning that *Ngwa'fo III* was born from a woman belonging to the clan *Bon beNde' Siri*, who was therefore considered as a classificatory daughter of *Tamandam*.

never been any evidence or even suspicion of witchcraft or sorcery). One never talked of 'food' in the case of the king, but of *ndor* (*Basella alba*)—from the name of a vine used in various rituals, and especially as a kind of necklace put around the neck of the king, the notables, the warriors and the successors (see photo n° 20, p. 218).

When the king was sick, the 'female notables' could call upon the local practitioners and specialists of herbal medicine. *Ngwa'fo II* is said to have called upon *Asongwe Bejwi* (the leader of the dreadful *Takinge* lodge) and upon his own *Ndifo* ('elder [of the] king')—one of the palace titles. At the end of his life, between 1916–1920, when he became more and more incapacitated and unable to fulfil his royal functions, *Mutsi* of *Mande, Zam Shwe Tengye* and a couple of others cared for him.

By contrast, the young unmarried palace servants of commoner status who attended to the needs of the monarch and could touch him seem to have had this privilege by right of birth and succession. *Tsendi* told me that he could touch the king because his own father—himself a palace servant in his youth—enjoyed such a privilege.

In any case, as already mentioned, all the people—even the wives and the notables—who were in physical contact with the king, had to absorb the medicines he took. He took them on a daily basis in order to protect himself and stay in good health. Those who approached him had to absorb them so that the king would not suffer from their coetaneous contact; again, it is a question of skin.

In a nutshell, the royal spouses, the servants, the children of the king past the age of puberty had to comply with the taboo on touching the king. However, in the case of the wives and the servants in his direct service, the taboo was arranged so as to accommodate the practicalities of life. This court etiquette was focused on sexuality. The young unmarried servants were excluded not only from genital sex, but from any interaction—even verbal—with women. The royal spouses exercised great restraint in their possible interaction with other people—to such an extent that they abstained from making any noise while pounding the staple *atshu'*, lest they alert the lonely bachelor. The royal children ceased to have any corporeal contact with their fathers when they came of age and became fit for sex. Lastly, the married palace notables could only touch the king on the condition of being considered, as it were, as 'honorary' females, which was a denial of sorts of their—male—sexuality. By contrast, all this underlines the fact that in the palace, the only male whose sexuality was admitted—even magnified and overempha-

sised by court etiquette, the great number of his wives, the daily practice of genital sex as a technique of the body and the epitome of the royal dispensation of ancestral substance—was (is) the king.

The sacred king

What has been discussed so far can be easily connected to two anthropological paradigms. The first one was developed by A. Weiner (1992) in her reassessment of Trobriand exchange as described by B. Malinowski (1922) and discussed by several authors in the light of the 'Essay on the gift' by Marcel Mauss (1923–24). As regards exchange and reciprocity, says A. Weiner, one has to distinguish between *alienable* goods (that can be given out or sold) and *inalienable* possessions (that the group and the subjects must keep to themselves). This distinction fits with the distinction between descent and alliance: one cannot alienate one's ancestors, and the family relationship cannot be dissolved although adoption, fosterage and other similar practices offer a number of means to reformulate descent and consanguinity. By contrast, matrimonial alliance requires the circulation and exchange of the subjects, male or female, between descent groups or kindred.

These two categories of persons, goods and things are tightly connected together. A. Weiner shows that one has to keep certain categories of things so as to be in a position to give out other things. The reverse is equally true: by engaging in exchange and trade one finds the means to perpetuate the group and to keep safe its heirlooms and inalienable estate. By practicing sisters' exchange one acquires the means to have children and to transmit the inalienable possessions of the group to them. Alienable and inalienable possessions construct each other. They are defined together and in contradistinction with one another.

M. Godelier (1996: 237–295), who re-read M. Mauss in the light of A. Weiner's contribution, endorsed this distinction:

> Our analyses lead us to conclude that there could not be any human society without the two domains, that of exchange, whatever it is that people exchange, and whatever the form it takes, from gift to potlatch, from sacrifice to sale, to purchase, to the market, and the domain in which individuals and groups keep things preciously to themselves, and then transmit them to their descendants or to those who share the same faith, or things, narratives, names or forms of thought. (M Godelier, 1996: 281, transl. JPW.)

He then stressed that this distinction covers exactly the two domains of the profane and the sacred. Profane things can be alienated, whereas anything sacred is inalienable.

As regards the pot-king, these two categories (alienable/profane and inalienable/sacred) cover exactly the two categories of contents and containers. Saliva, raffia wine, camwood powder and palm oil are alienable. They are meant to be given out. In that sense, even if they belong to the king, they cannot be taken as sacred. By contrast, the king's body (his 'skin'), his drinking horn, the palace buildings and the city, as containers of alienable substances, are inalienable and sacred. The taboo on touching validates this distinction as regards the king's body. The profane can drink raffia wine from the king's drinking horn, but without touching it. He may be covered in raffia wine sprayed from the king's mouth, but he is prohibited from touching his lord, as this would be a sacrilege.

Ch.-H. Pradelles de Latour (2001) concords with the contributions by A. Weiner and M. Godelier. He defines religion as a belief in the sacred ideals of the father, that belong with descent. One cannot get rid of one's origins. By contrast, matrimonial alliance is an exchange and nothing sacred dictates a particular choice as against another. The rules of endogamy, exogamy and a number of contingencies dictate choice.

This first anthropological paradigm concerns the distinction between alienable/profane/contents on the one hand, and inalienable/sacred/containers on the other. The second anthropological paradigm to which the sacredness of the Mankon king can be related is the much older one of the 'sacred kingship' in Africa, elaborated by a long series of authors, from G.H. Frazer to Luc de Heusch. Oddly enough, historians and ethnographers of the Cameroon Grassfields made hardly any reference to this tradition, with the exception of N. Argenti (2004) and Nathalie Nyst (1998–99: 164–194). Reading the accounts of travellers, missionaries and other sources, G.H. Frazer was the first one to underline the frequency of the monarchic organisation in Africa, the magical powers of the king and the control he exercises on the forces of nature, especially the rain. The frequency of testimonies concerning ritual regicide led him to consider that the collusion between the king's bodily forces and the cosmic order was such as to cause, in the eyes of the king and his subjects, a parallel decline of the royal and cosmic order as the king was ageing and losing his potency. Regicide (which could assume many different forms: automatic at a given dead-

line, for example after seven years, or by exile, by proxy, suicide, etc.) aimed at restoring the potency of the monarch and the functioning of the cosmos.

After its invention by G.H. Frazer, the *topos* of sacred kingship never ceased to be visited by Africanist scholars. L. de Heusch (1982: 14) voiced his scepticism as regards the analyses provided by British social anthropology in the Durkheimian tradition which saw in sacred kingship the projection of the unity of the kingdom and of its good social functioning upon the person of the monarch and his good health. This reductionist interpretation, de Heusch pointed out, does not take into account the political constraints and, more importantly, the symbolic setup. In his opinion, the sifter that was used to sort out the relevant facts had too large a mesh to retain the symbols, the signs and the representations.

De Heusch's own interpretation (see L. de Heusch 1972, 1982) was inspired from the structuralist method of C. Lévi-Strauss, and more importantly, from the structural history of G. Dumézil. By taking into account the *verbalised* narratives, epics, discourses and rituals, he proposed to explore 'Bantu symbolic *thought*' (my emphasis). His approach assumed the existence of a structural homology between the founding mythology and the rituals of the monarchy, an opposition between nature and culture, and a system of disjunction/conjunction between the different elements of the structure. The king, in his view, is a structural operator between society and cosmos, the dead elders and the living, between life and death, the inside and the outside, incest and exchange.

In yet another synthesis, de Heusch (1990: 12, transl. JPW) explained the ritual murder of the king: "the question is always to anticipate the *natural* demise of the king, to impose on him a *cultural* termination as if society meant to appropriate anew the control over the cosmic order sheltered in his corporeal envelope" (author's emphasis). This sentence summarises all my reasons for being sceptical concerning the attempt by de Heusch at a structuralist analysis of African sacred kingship. In my opinion, the nature/culture distinction is not substantiated by the African data: very few African civilisations, as far as I know, take it as an effective operator of their symbolic universe.[10] This interpretation

[10] I became aware of this failure of the paradigm developed by L. de Heusch after publishing an article (see Warnier, 1979) strongly influenced by the Belgian anthropolo-

is imported from elsewhere, especially from Amerindian mythology *via* Lévi-Strauss.

Concerning the 'as if', so frequent in the structuralist writings in such expressions as 'everything happens as if . . .', it is most of the time useless.[11] In my view, the allusion made by de Heusch to the 'bodily envelope' of the king puts us on the track of a much more concrete and mundane reality: if the body of the king, as a material container, cannot contain and withhold any longer the ancestral substances, it is like a broken calabash. One has to be pragmatic, discard it and procure a new, serviceable one. This alone suffices to justify the act of regicide or the many procedures allowing his entourage to remedy the failures of the king. One has to apply Ockham's razor to such a case, and between two possible interpretations, choose the one that is simplest and sticks more closely to the data. In the 20th century, on the Bamenda plateau, two kings are said to have died in dubious circumstances and, according to public opinion, from regicide. Several palaces have been more or less deserted by the subjects who were dissatisfied with their monarch because he appeared incapable of retaining life substances as well as all kinds of commodities, and let them escape.

When looking for the explanation of given political practices exclusively in the 'structures of thought' and in the verbalised narratives, de Heusch becomes the prisoner of his structuralist paradigm and prevents himself from taking into consideration motor and material cultures, and the corresponding procedural knowledge, more in gear with the political practice and the historical trajectories of African kingdoms.

What A. Adler (1982, 2000) and J.-C. Muller (1990) did when revisiting African sacred kingship is somewhat different from the approach advocated by de Heusch. Both of them relied on monographs of localised polities (the Mundang of Chad and the Rukuba of Nigeria). Both tried to return to the enlightening if rough intuitions of Frazer,

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gist. In it, I attempted to force the Mankon data into the nature/culture divide, by trying to work on the equation 'king/*Takinge*: culture/nature'. It was clearly a failure. Subsequently, I have not found any clear relevance of this distinction in the African continent.

[11] The expression is borrowed from Freudian psychoanalysis where it rests on a topic. It is justified by the distinction between conscious and preconscious, manifest and hidden, verbalised and repressed. Indeed, 'everything happens' in the verbalisations of the subject (for example, in a lapsus) 'as if' it obeyed such and such a repressed drive hidden in the pre-conscious. Most of the time, when used in anthropological writings, this formula is no more than a figure of speech as it does not rest on any topic.

beyond the social anthropology inspired by Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown. They endeavoured to take into account the relevance and the relative autonomy of the symbolic levels in the production of sacred kingship. In order to do so, J.-C. Muller made reference to the theories of R. Girard on the relationship between violence and sacredness, and on the process through which a society is founded by designating an expiatory victim in the person of the king. A. Adler (1982) agreed with Muller and de Heusch in their return to Frazer and their critique of the functionalist approach: "A Frazerian perspective is preferable to (functionalist) political sociology that can only head to a dead-end" while disregarding ritual and symbolism. This is why Adler paid much attention to the rituals of Mundang kingship, while refusing to consider sacred kingship as a political 'type' or essence. In his view, sacred kingship belongs with the genre 'variations on a theme' which extends far beyond the limits of Africa and which would resonate with European kingships, if only the academic division of labour were to yield to comparative studies cleared from the impediments introduced by the multiplicity of scientific traditions.

I agree with de Heusch, Muller and Adler on the necessity to go back to Frazer and integrate the symbolic dimension to political analysis. However, I disagree with de Heusch as regards the structuralist paradigm which seems inadequate, and with Muller and the reference he made to the theories of A. Girard who predicated the sacred on the presence of a founding violence. I depart from the three of them on the question of the kind of data relevant in the case of sacred kingship: it is not only the verbalisations, narratives, and signs, not only the 'rites' as systems of signs. The relevant data also belong to the motor/material cultures of kingship, to procedural knowledge, and to the material technologies of power and of the subject. I would also make the hypothesis of a possible gap or discrepancy between the procedural knowledge of kingship and the verbal constructions produced around it.

The king is indeed 'sacred'—and on this point I agree with de Heusch, Adler and Muller. In my view, he is sacred because his person is inalienable whereas his contents are alienable. It follows from this that his three bodies, in their *material reality*, must be maintained, sometimes mended, possibly replaced. The theme of the king's three bodies is absent from the existing analyses of African sacred kingship. They addressed exclusively the person of the monarch and left aside his other avatars. A. Adler (1982) is the only one who underscored the significance of the royal palace—in the particular case, that of the

king of Léré—a superb circular compound, remarkably enclosed and closed. However, Adler did not establish any relation of identification between the body of the king and the body of the palace.

It is my view that we are in a position to proceed to a symbolic analysis (bearing on the symbolisations by the sensori-affective-motor medium, by images and words) and to integrate it to a political sociology. However, we ought to take into account the motor and material cultures of kingship and use an adequate conceptual tool box.

A final comment regarding 'sacred' kingship concerns the critique addressed by A. Boureau (1988) and A. Boureau and C.S. Igerflom (eds, 1992) to E.H. Kantorowicz already mentioned in the introduction. It is clear, they contend, that the theologians and layers of several European royal courts attempted to substantiate the sacredness of monarchy by the theory of the king's two bodies. However, contrary to E.H. Kantorowicz (who actually does not seem to have even raised the question), A. Boureau and C.S. Igerflom are convinced that their attempt was a failure because of the constant refusal by the Catholic Church to consider the king as anything else than a lay person. As I said, the king's coronation has never been considered as a sacrament. As against a sacrament, it does not have any relevance concerning salvation. Moreover, the Church has always insisted on the distinction introduced by Jesus between what belongs to Caesar and must be returned to him and what belongs to God and must return to him. The realm of the king is distinct from the realm of God and is not included in it. The share of Caesar (and of the king), explicitly identified by the Gospel, constitutes a radical obstacle to the sacredness of European kings.

By contrast, this is not the case as regards African kingship which does not have to compete with any other source of sacredness, grounded in its relationship with the dead founding fathers of the kingdom as a source of life and reproduction. If the Mankon talk about a god (*ngwi*, sg.), this or these gods belong with the dead elders who exercise a monopoly over the life substances given out to the living. Not a single church has ever challenged this monopoly exercised by African kings until the coming of the first missionaries (in the Grassfields, it was in 1903) and until colonisation. As a result, African kingships are (or were until recently) really 'sacred'. They realised the ambitions of the European theologians and lawyers of the royal courts who wished to overcome the obstacle put in their way by the Church. Paradoxically, the thesis of Kantorowicz may be more relevant to Africa than it is to Europe.

The palace as an 'intermediate body'

Until now, our argument has consisted in stressing the fact that the kingdom, as a city constituted by subjected citizens, had a material limit which operated as a container equipped with openings. Our argument regarding the king was quite similar. As Nicolas Argenti (2004) remarked, the relationship between these two bodies is underscored by the fact that the king, and he alone, controls the limits of the kingdom and its openings, and also by the fact that the king, and he alone, irrigates the city with his bodily substances (breath, saliva, semen) and their extensions (raffia wine, palm oil, camwood) obtained from the dead monarchs.

Yet there is a third avatar of the king's body, and this is the palace (*nto'*) towards which we should now turn our attention as it is a body and an envelope on its own right. As mentioned, the vernacular language provides an indication in this direction. It identifies the monarch to his palace. The spouses and the children of the king are the spouses and children of the 'palace' (respectively *bangye bento'* and *bon bento'*, pl.). One does not bring gifts or contributions to the 'king,' but to the 'palace'. Raffia wine, goats, agricultural lands belonging to the king are never mentioned as such: they belong to the 'palace'.

However, in the context of a praxeological paradigm, language is not sufficient to establish the identification between the king and his palace. One has to show the praxic homology between the three bodies of the king regarding the envelopes/limits, the openings, the contents, and the motor conducts. The palace is constituted by so many interconnected yards. Each of them is surrounded by a number of buildings.[12] They are all enclosed within a wall or fence equipped with a few doors or gates. There is a main gate called *ntsu nto'* (the 'mouth [of the] palace'). The bodily substances of the king and their extensions are stored in specific houses. The house of the raffia wine is called the 'palace [of the] wine' (*nto' melu'*). In most Grassfields palaces, during meetings, the many calabashes of raffia wine brought by the men attending the meeting, are blended and mixed together in a large jar put in one of the courtyards, before it is shared by the notables and the people.

The material culture of the palace shapes the motor conducts of the subjects around the buildings (*nda* sg.: 'house'), the yards (*sang*), the gates

[12] See *Paideuma*, 1985 (31): *Palaces and chiefly households in the Cameroon Grassfields.*

(*ntsu* sg.: 'mouth'), and around the objects contained in each house. We shall see an example of this in the next chapter as regards the 'house of the poison ordeal' (*nda ngu*) and the 'house of the Secret' (*nda Minang*). The palace etiquette insists on the fact that the king is the only subject who can have access to all the houses of the palace: his dwelling of course, but also to the burial house of last two kings (*Neshwim*), all the lodges, such as those of *Mesongong, Takinge*, the poison ordeal, the spouses quarters, and to the patch of untouched forest at the back of the palace he is the only one to have access to. From a praxeological point of view, this is quite consistent because if the king and the palace are identified with each other, then the king encompasses the whole palace and may have access to all its components. His subjects belong to restricted categories: men or women, commoners or members of the royal clan, etc. As a result, their access is restricted to certain parts of the palace and they are barred from others. The king is the only person who is not restricted in his movements because he identifies with the palace and he transcends all the social categories.

Another point about the camwood powder kept in the palace (usually in raffia bags) and smeared on people and things is that this is extracted from the tree *Pterocarpus soyanxii.* Its crimson wood is cut into pieces and ground with a grinding stone. It is stored in a variety of containers: mostly raffia bags, but also boxes made of bark, of sections of mountain bamboo collected at altitude, clay or wooden bowls, small calabashes. It is always given out from the top of the hierarchy downwards, never the other way. Palace notables rub some of it on the forehead or the forearms of people who happen to come to the palace on the week day of *Zinka'ne* on which the king makes weekly offerings to his dead elders.

Consequently, there is a homology between the king's 'skin', the palace and the city. The three of them are made of a material envelope: the king's body (or rather his skin or, more appropriately his 'thing', since there is no other word for 'body' in Mankon), the enclosure of the palace, and the ditch surrounding the city. The three envelopes are equipped with openings through which the substances of the kingdom and its excreta may flow and be transformed. The envelopes and openings are protected by royal apotropaic medicines. The ancestral substances flow from the king's body to the palace and to the city. As a result, the three bodies are identified by their contents. Each of these three bodies is complemented and diversified by an appropriate material culture which is embodied by the king himself, or by proxy through a

number of palace notables. The king props his motor conducts on his clothes, drinking horn, camwood bag, dwelling, thrones, bed covered with leopard pelts, palace yards and gates. All these objects are extensions of his own body and share in its radiating aura. They are art objects, much decorated. The carvers are careful of always representing the king with an embodied container: drinking horn, calabash, bowl, smoking pipe, cap. P. Harter (1986) has documented aptly this fact.

A final point about the king's body and its three avatars, is the question of his transformations (or, so to speak, his *Dopplegänger*)—the leopard, the elephant, the chameleon—, and also of the beliefs, representations and practices attached to these transformations. One may come across a chameleon in the neighbourhood of the palace, within the enclosure of the city. By contrast, leopards and elephants are found (or, rather, were found) outside the ditch which prevented them from entering the city. Consequently, the king's transformations belong mostly with the *outside* of the city. It means that the king belongs with the inside and the outside at the same time. He may be in his own skin, within the palace, within the limits of the city. But he may also be in the skin of a chameleon, a leopard or an elephant outside the palace and the city. He is an interface and an opening which allow the communication between inside and outside. He alone can mediate between his three bodies and the regional ecumene of the Grassfields or with the world at large.

The identification between the three bodies or envelopes of the king goes along with the identification between the contents of the three bodies. The main content of the city is made of its subjects. The people, the descent groups, the households constitute a substance which is swallowed (*dzie*) by the king on the day he succeeds his father, and on a permanent basis afterwards. This point will be developed in chapter 9, devoted to the process of succession. All the people, goods and commodities passing through the openings of the city may be considered as passing through the openings of the pot-king: livestock, valuables of the long-distance trade, migrants, medicines, subsistence goods, palm oil, craft produces, etc.

This list of containers and substances given has been reduced to its essentials, without which the hierarchy could not operate, or would operate in a different way. However, a careful inventory of the material culture of the palace would be needed to have the complete picture and to meet more surprising objects or more ordinary ones. I am thinking of the smoking pipe, the tobacco and the smoke of many monarchs,

which makes their breath visible; or guns, with the sudden release of a loud noise together with a cloud of white smoke produced by the combustion of black powder; the powder itself, still manufactured somewhere in Great Britain for the African market, traded in casks or cartons; also money which antedated the onset of colonisation, and is now playing a central and prominent role in Grassfields palaces.

The themes of retaining, storing, building up limits, giving out and exercising control at the openings are strong reminders of what the psychoanalytical tradition has elaborated under the expressions of the anal stage or fixation. The transit of substances and the discharge of bodily wastes form a part of these themes. As a result, the next chapter will focus on a discussion of the king's excreta.[13]

[13] Many thanks to psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Dr. Berthe Elise Lolo who brought my attention on this point when we were talking about the slave trade in Mankon: "the slaves are the excrement of the king," she said. Her comment was the starting point of the next chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE ROYAL EXCREMENT

Even the kings have to urinate and defecate, like mere mortals. Such gestures are unworthy of a monarch, and, in most societies, are performed privately. (Not in all societies: Louis XIV sat in public on his night-commode). Accordingly, not a single ethnographer of the Grassfields has enquired about the relevant habits of the kings. I raised the question a couple of times, with little success, so my information is indirect and incomplete. The body of the king is sacred and only alluded to by metaphors. His eyes are his 'stars', his 'skin' is his 'thing'. He does not defecate but 'he harvests his medicines'. This information is weak but significant. The royal faeces are compared to medicinal plants. They are 'harvested', that is, collected, and not expelled. They have power. One should conclude that, as is usually the case with medicines, they can be beneficial or malefic depending on the use that is made of them, and on the intentions behind such use.

To the best of my knowledge, the only point of comparison in such matters is provided by A. Adler (1982: 395) who says that the faeces and urine of the king of Léré, Tchad, were considered as dangerous and were collected by a slave. However, Adler does not say what the slave did to dispose of such dangerous waste. Such practices are quite consistent with a materialistic representation of power. For the Léré, as for the Mankon, the things and persons absorbed by the king's body and expelled by him are relevant to the technologies of power and to the techniques of the royal self. As a container and an open space of transit, the king's body fulfils two functions: it absorbs the good substances in order to distribute them, and he expels the bad ones.

If I miss the relevant information regarding the king's excreta, much can be retrieved by following the logic of the king's three bodies. Accordingly, it may be worthwhile investigating what is expelled from the palace and from the city, and how it is done. There is indeed a lot of available information on the witches, criminals, slaves and 'bad dead' that are pushed out of the limits of the kingdom.

The ngu *poison ordeal*

Until 1920, the Mankon palace supervised an ordeal against suspected witches. The ordeal provides an impressive scenography of the excretion of its wastes by the city and its king. It used to be practiced every year towards the end of the agricultural cycle, before the offerings to the dead kings and the 'king's dance'. In other words, the king and the city had to be cleansed of their waste before receiving the gifts of the ancestors. The last officially known ordeal took place in 1919.

In the Grassfields societies, the people who may become the targets of witchcraft accusations were either the quarrelsome contenders to prestigious successions, or men, women and children who were involved in conflicts within their kindred, and were likely to become the scapegoats of the misfortunes experienced by their kin according to their alleged duplicity, jealousy or bad temper. However, from a structural point of view, as indicated by Ch.-H. Pradelles de Latour (2001: 89–101), witchcraft is essentially constituted by the reversal of the alliance relationships. The latter are always accompanied by mutual debts, and by tensions between in-laws, and between husband and wife.

The oral tradition keeps the memory of some of the convicts. *Nkwenti Ngang*, of the royal clan, told me in January 1974 that the king *Ngwa'fo II*, the grand-father of *Ngwa'fo III*, had a wife who was born in the neighbouring kingdom of Nkwen. Although she belonged to the prestigious and protected category of the 'women of the palace' (the king's wives), she was accused of witchcraft together with her two children who had been fathered by the king. The three of them were submitted to the ordeal and all three died of it. These tragic events took place at the beginning of the 20th century.

High-ranking notables and the king himself were above such accusations, contrary to practices in the more egalitarian societies of the Cameroon forest, where witchcraft accusations were primarily directed to wealthy men and worked as a levelling mechanism compelling them to redistribute their wealth. Indeed, in these societies, people considered that wealth in persons, livestock and things was in limited supply and that the wealth accumulated by a single person had been obtained at the expense of others, mostly by occult means. L. Mallart-Guimera (1981), P. Geschiere (1982, 1995) and Ph. Laburthe-Tolra (1981, 1988) have analysed these levelling mechanisms.

It is noteworthy that Grassfields kings and notables, in societies where wealth and power tended to concentrate at the top of social hierar-

chy, operated on a logic which was the exact opposite of those of the Cameroon forest societies. Since they were the 'vital piggy-banks' of the ancestral substances, the king and the notables were at the origin of any wealth in persons and things. It was conceivable that their wealth could have been accumulated by means of witchcraft. But there was another explanation for their wealth: they were wealthy because they had been filled by the dead elders with ancestral life substances. They were seldom suspected of witchcraft, and no-one would ever dare to question their means of accumulation since these were the counterpart of the substances they received from the dead elders, stored and gave away to their people. Their wealth was not taken as a symptom of witchcraft but as an indication of their fullness. Witchcraft was indeed perceived as the absorption of the life essence of the kin group, as a kind of occult cannibalism practiced by tearing apart with one's teeth (or 'chewing'—*kfuru*) whereas the notables were expected to absorb the good substances that would nourish the corporate estate of the descent group by swallowing without tearing apart with their teeth (or 'swallowing'—*dzie*). At face value, in the two cases it is the same act of eating, witchcraft and legitimate wealth accumulation. However, the gesture of eating is not the same: in the case of witchcraft, one 'chews', in the case of accumulation, one 'swallows'. We shall see that the successor to a title of nobility is called *ndzie nda* (the 'eater [of the] house' or the 'house eater').

The witches were accused to threaten the life, the health and the wealth of the other subjects and of the group by their habitual behaviour of jealousy, selfishness and squandering. These accusations benefited the notables and legitimised the accumulation they practiced. The accusations and rumours circulated from the bottom to the apex of the social hierarchy. The household heads were particularly concerned with keeping their household free of witches. The lineage heads conveyed the accusations to the king in council sitting at the palace in the hall *nda bekum* (the 'house [of the] notables'). I do not know much about the preliminary investigations regarding the accused except that, most of the time, the diviners (*ngwon nikwabe*—'person [of] divination', or *nkum shye*—'notable [of the] ground') had already been consulted somewhere along the line of transmission. The king in council listened to the indictment, discussed it, and concluded on a list of convicts to be submitted to the poison ordeal. I do not have precise figures in any single year, but, according to oral tradition, it seems that anything between one and three dozens of people were indicted every year.

In Mankon, the ordeal consisted in drinking a beverage containing a powder obtained by pounding the bark of the forest tree *Erythrophlaeum guineense* (*ngu* in Mankon). This bark contains an alkaloid similar to prussic acid. If absorbed in sufficient quantity (depending on the weight and health of the subject) it can cause death by heart seizure. The *ngu* tree does not grow near Mankon. The bark was traded, and came mostly from the Metchum valley some 80 to 100 km away from Mankon. Although it contained a highly poisonous substance, trading in it seems to have escaped the control of the kings and notables. They procured it in the marketplace or through the medicine men.

The ordeal was banned by the Germans early in the 20th century and, subsequently, by the British and the French in their respective mandated territories. After independence, the Cameroonian state followed suit, although the practice was never entirely suppressed. It came to be practiced on animals, usually fowls. The birds substituted for the accused who held them in his hands as the poison was forced down the throat of the animal. In 1974, I took a guide in the Metchum valley to go in the forest and identify the tree. After a couple of hours of walking, we reached a medium sized tree (say 25 to 30 m high). Its bark had been freshly removed on a surface of about 40 × 50 cm. The identification made at the National Herbarium in Yaoundé and by the Mankon notables (who asked me to procure more of the same), left no doubt: it was the *ngu* tree and its bark, still in use.

Two former palace retainers, who had participated in organising the ordeal in their youth, gave the following account: on the given day, at dawn, several *Minang* masquerades concealed under their hooded tunics, left the palace escorted by the masker *Mabu'* and several palace retainers. They dispersed in small groups to reach the compound of each of the accused. Upon reaching the hamlet, *Minang* received from the retainers a bunch of the grass *Sporobolus africanus* (in Mankon *mabyen* or *ma ala'a*, that is 'mother [of the] country') twisted in a tight knot. This grass is particularly tough and sturdy. The palace retainers identified the persons to be submitted to the ordeal and pointed at them. The dreadful *Minang* (the 'Worry' or the 'Secret') approached the persons and threw at their feet the knot of grass. It seems that the accused never attempted to escape. The accusations came from their own entourage. It was useless to try and escape as they would have been caught within seconds by the young palace servants. Besides, all the gates of the city had been blocked and put under surveillance for the occasion.

The accused had to get rid of clothes and ornaments. They walked entirely naked towards the palace, holding the knot of *Sporobolus*, escorted by a group of parents, neighbours and palace servants, while *Minang* and its retinue visited another compound.

At the palace, the accused and their escorts were coming from various directions. They walked into the first courtyard of the palace, next to the compound of the *Kwi'fo* regulatory society. The accused were put in an inner courtyard while their kin and neighbours stayed in the main courtyard. One can imagine the anxiety and mixed feelings of the participants anticipating the moment of truth when the accused survived and were cleansed of all suspicion, or fell on the ground and were confirmed as witches.

The palace servants took one accused at a time and lead him in a house with a single room—*nda Ngu* (the 'house [of the] *Ngu* [poison]'). At the centre of the house lay a stone on which climbed the accused. He was given a bowl of the mixture of raffia wine and *Ngu*. The accused was then invited to leave the palace as fast as he could, to run towards a hill called *Nta' Ngu* (the 'Hill [of] *Ngu*'), north of the palace and *outside* the limit of the city and the ditch surrounding it. His kin and neighbours followed suit as best they could. Once in a while, still running or walking fast, the person had to rub his belly while saying: "if witchcraft... stays in my stomach... may *Ngu*... find... and destroy it". Soon the accused were running round the small hill, one to three dozens of them, naked, spaced out, and faring as best they could, under the anxious eyes of groups of onlookers. Once in a while, one of them collapsed and died. Others felt gnawing pains, bent double and vomited the poison. Those were declared innocent. *Ngu* had not found anything in their stomach and was coming out again. They were surrounded by their kin, helped back to their compound, washed, anointed with palm oil and camwood for a quick recovery and a reintegration into the envelope of the group and the city. The dead were left where they had fallen, without burial nor funeral, outside the limits of the city, to be disposed of by scavengers. Family and neighbours walked back to their compounds, sad but avenged from a witch who cannibalised their substance.

This is how the king, the palace and the city expelled their witch-excrement, before the offerings to the dead kings took place, followed by the annual dance and the dispensation of ancestral substances to the living.

Criminals and bad dead

The poison ordeal is administered at the palace. It is from the palace that the witches are expelled like excrement. The agents who dispose of criminals and bad dead also come from the palace. They belong to two houses or lodges: *Takinge* and *Minang*. These houses were located in the quarter of the palace globally known as *Kwi'fo*.

Thanks to Joyce Dillon, I have a photograph of *Takinge* taken at Meta (photo n° 18). The Mankon, who are the neighbours of the Meta, recognise their own *Takinge* in the photograph. It shows a slim man, clothed in the rough hooded gown common to many masquerades. The gown is made of brown vegetable fibres not unlike that of a gummy bag. The gown goes down to the knees and leaves the arms uncovered. The masked person carries two objects: a thick wooden club about 100 cm in length and a raffia bag. The club (*mbang*, sg.) is used to inflict the death penalty. It procures an *alias* to *Takinge*, equally known as *Kwi'fo mbang* ('*Kwi'fo* [of the] club'). The bag measures about 60 × 80 cm. Its handle is made of a plait sewn on its upper side that the masked person has passed onto its forearm. This bag has only one pocket. The Meta photograph allows one to guess that it contains a few objects or substances. In Mankon, this bag is called *aban adi* (the 'bag [of] evil'). The awe it inspires is fully justified. Even within the royal clan, many people pretend that the king hides in his house when *Takinge* comes out of its quarters and manifests itself (as did Dan *Nde' Tsambi*, of the royal clan, who mentioned it in an informal conversation in November 2002). This is quite unlikely and it is denied by *Ngwa'fo* himself. The king includes everything that is contained in the palace, and he does not shun the darkest or more obscure bodily functions of kingship.

Takinge is contained within the palace precincts under the supervision of the king. It is a foul and dangerous organ, yet essential to the functioning of the city. A number of facts to which we will return later show that *Takinge* is perceived as a foreign body included in the palace and the city. It belongs with the inside and the outside at the same time. In other words, it functions as a point of contact. It is an opening, a passageway. The king identifies with this function of contact between the inside and the outside, yet secretly, as one goes to the stool. In public, the king exhibits only the positive side of this function of contact and opening by the envelope of the city.

Takinge destroys and pushes out of the city the criminals and the bad dead. It wipes out and cleanses any pollution they may have caused.

Photo n° 18. The *Takinge* of Meta. Courtesy of Joyce Dillon (Meta, ca. 1970).

The disgust it inspires comes from its acquaintance with death, rubbish, waste and pollution. Its main function is to rid the country of the bodies and substances that defile it. As an illustration, here is a second-hand account of an execution performed by *Takinge* a few years before the German conquest. This account was narrated to me in 1973 by *Fomukong*, of the royal clan, and was confirmed by the members of the *Ala'a Akuma* and *Makwu Shwiri* lineages of the clan *Bon Anyere Ngum.*

The execution of Su' Nta

A man called *Su' Nta* of the lineage *Ala'a Akuma* had contracted leprosy. *Kwi'fo* had ordered him not to share food or a common vessel—drinking horn, calabash, lump of *atshu'*—with anybody, in order to avoid further contamination. However, he carried on sharing the same containers. *Kwi'fo*, represented by *Mabu'*, repeated the injunction time and again, to no effect. The notables, assembled around the king, sentenced him to death. *Takinge*, embodied by two or three men wearing the hooded gown and armed with the wooden club, was escorted at dawn to the hamlet of *Su' Nta* by two or three *Mabu'* masked men. *Mabu'* blew a strident whistle thus creating an acoustic envelope within which whoever is not initiated in *Kwi'fo* is under a strict prohibition to enter and see. When hearing *Mabu'*, everyone hides as best he can, preferably in the nearest house. No one should look at or even catch sight of *Takinge* and its escort.[1]

Upon arrival at the hamlet of *Su'Nta*, the masked men dragged him out of his house and into the courtyard, and clubbed him to death on the head. They abandoned the corpse mutilated by leprosy and the execution, and made for the palace with quick pace, *Mabu'* and its whistle taking the lead. However, one of the hooded palace retainers, called *Wara Mesom*, had seen the beaded necklace worn by *Su' Nta.* As he was walking away, he had second thoughts about it, and he ran

[1] Nowadays, *Takinge* tours regularly around Mankon land to cleanse the places that have been polluted by acts of violence. At the end of 2002, a holiday was ordered by the king to allow the maskers to go round the kingdom while people kept in hiding when *Takinge* passed by. Besides, the maskers went at night, in a minibus, to a spot in the Mankon part of the town of Bamenda—the provincial capital—where a police officer had been murdered. The palace servants quickly built a small enclosure to allow *Takinge* to perform, unseen from the very few people who were still in the street at pitch of dark.

back towards the corpse to take the necklace, as he was entitled to do according to Mankon law and morality.

However, the affair turned sour because, at the same time, the parents of *Su' Nta* were converging towards his body. They found *Wara Mesom* bent double above *Su' Nta*, trying to get the necklace. One of them—man or woman, there is disagreement on that point—killed him in anger with a spear and fled from Mankon before the alarm could be given and control at the gates established. Obviously, despite his condition or perhaps because of it, *Su' Nta* had the full support and affection of his entourage who did not accept the injunctions of *Kwi'fo*. His lineage was heavily fined for his burial by *Takinge*, without any funeral ceremony, for the murder of *Wara Mesom*, and for the cleansing of the place where the execution and the murder had taken place. Once the fines had been paid, *Takinge* disposed of *Su' Nta* by burying him face down, under a layer of thorny branches to prevent his breath and spirit from coming back to disturb the living. In addition to that, *Kwi'fo* never delegated its orchestra any longer to the first or second funeral ceremonies of a lineage head of *Ala'a Akuma*.

The leader of the *Takinge* lodge is *Asongwe Bejwi*. Just as the bag of which he is the caretaker, *Asongwe Bejwi* is said to have come from the outside of Mankon. He would be the descendant and successor of an assimilated stranger (*ankyeni* sg.) adopted in the royal clan.[2] Assimilated strangers are numerous enough for the immigration phenomenon to be recognised and the migrants to be designated as such. *Asongwe*, it is said, had come from *Bejwi*, a community in the Metchum valley, where he would have enjoyed a high social status, although the inhabitants of the Metchum valley, studied by Masquelier (1978) are considered by the highlanders as being of inferior condition, almost slaves, exposed to the dreadful powers of the tropical forest.

The repertoire of *Takinge*, who has the power to inflict capital punishment and to deal with the bad dead, tells a lot about the pot-king. *Takinge* comes from the outside, but it belongs with the king and the

[2] The word *ankyeni* refers to an edible grasshopper that makes a seasonal appearance at the end of the rains and constitutes a delicatessen. The assimilated strangers are compared to these grasshoppers, coming out of the blue, to be taken in and swallowed or assimilated like a good food. Immigrants are welcome, provided they bring something nutritious along with them. As an anthropologist, I belonged to this social category (actually *Ngwa'fo* had asked E.M. Chilver to send him an anthropologist), together with Raymond Mériau—a French baker who had established a bakery in Mankon and has retired there, a few NGO and Peace Corps volunteers, etc.

palace and is embodied by them. The pot-king, consequently, is not only constituted of noble organs containing the good life substances bestowed by the dead kings. In the city, as in the king, there are noble and foul organs and substances. The pot-king is equipped with an excretive apparatus to expel them. He is an ambiguous character. It seems to me that his dark and negative sides are far more explicitly displayed in some Bamileke kingdoms of the Bandjoun and Bafou area, than they are in Mankon. Members of the royal clan who belong to the immediate entourage of the king, are prone to idealise his role. They pretend that he avoids committing himself with *Takinge*, the anus of the city, and, *ipso facto*, of the sovereign himself, through which the three bodies of the king can get rid of their wastes.

The slaves as rubbish

Not unlike modern industrial societies, Grassfields societies disqualified, marginalised and expelled a number of subjects who assumed the condition of social waste. In the case of Mankon, with its non-egalitarian hierarchy, this was a palpable phenomenon. At the bottom of the hierarchy, the waste, amongst other possibilities, assumed the form of the slave who was expelled from the city. By so doing, the king and the city transformed their vile matters into a valuable income for its economy. I have already devoted a publication to this theme (Warnier, 1995), and will summarise the most essential points.

In the Grassfields, contrary to what took place with the Fulani raiders of the 19th century in the wake of Usman dan Fodio's Jihad, the slaves were seldom procured by warfare and armed raids. In the Grassfields, slave trading without raiding was fed by the fraudulent sale of the subjects who enjoyed less protection than most others. In the Kom region, for example, a number of accounts bear witness to the fact that families suffering from food shortage and hunger sold a child to purchase cereals. The follower of the child who had been sold was nicknamed 'grain of maize'. In the Mankon area, there are numerous accounts of sales of children and young men and women, with the compliance or even help of the notables who owned a slave-dealing licence under the form of a 'slave-rope'. I have described this type of event in chapter 5 when dealing with the ditch surrounding the city and with the control exercised at the gates.

Children and youths were treated in a deliberately non-egalitarian way. The adults in charge—that is, the 'father' and the married women with children—put them to the test. The qualities that were looked for were obedience, intelligence and willingness at work. The young people—boys and girls—who exhibited these sorts of qualities were slowly extracted from the mass and differentiated from the others. The boys were fed into the informal category of those who would be given a wife or would succeed to a vacant title. The girls would be married to high-ranking notables or the king.

The other young people were slowly and informally pushed towards the bottom of the hierarchy. Neglected, in need of stimulations, often taken to task and beaten, they were exposed to various kinds of abuses. Some of them were sold by their kin group with the complicity of the king and the notables. They were not de-socialised or marginalised as sometimes happens in contemporary Western societies. They were well integrated in the household and the descent group to which they belonged. However, this sort of integration was non-egalitarian and pushed them into insignificance or exposed them to being sold.

Once they had been handed over to the trading networks, they joined the slave caravans leaving the edge of the high plateau to reach Douala, Bimbia and Kalabar, until the beginning of the 20th century. They travelled south, *via* Bali-Nyonga and Moghamo, and, in the Eastern part of the Grassfields, *via* the Bangwa-Fontem where R. Brain (1972) says that the slave trade constituted the 'backbone of their economy'. The edge of the highlands in the area of Guzang and Batibo, before dropping down towards the Mamfe depression, constituted the limit beyond which it was impossible to reclaim and redeem a slave. Some of the household heads of the highlands who had lost a child against their will sometimes tried to outplay the traders and to recover their child. But if they failed to do so in the area extending between their own kingdom and the edge of the highlands, they did not attempt to go beyond, and they considered their child as lost. Thus, the edge of the Mamfe depression was a kind of exit or overflow through which, according to my estimates, up to 0.5 per cent of the Bamenda Plateau population could pass every year. This figure may seem enormous for a Malthusian demographic situation, but it does not seem to have jeopardised the demographic dynamics of the plateau. The production of slaves was not the result of destructive warfare and, as far as men (who accounted for two thirds of the slaves exported) were concerned,

did not diminish the reproductive potential of the population because of the widespread practice of polygamy. However, one may question polygamy as the best means to insure high levels of fertility.

The earnings of the slave trade enriched the highest ranks of the social hierarchy and reinforced the conditions of their reproduction. The hierarchy of the notables pushed a fraction of the youth into a status of insignificance and surplus good enough to be exported against luxury commodities. Thus, the gates of the city, like the anus of a human body, allowed the expulsion of the city's waste, that is, the witches, the bad dead and the slaves. As an illustration of such practices, the following is the narrative of Julia (born around 1920), concerning a transaction that took place as late as the 1930s:

> My father went to Bali-Nyonga (20 kilometres south of Mankon) and purchased a girl. He purchased a slave. It was a girl who had been taken away and sold. He came back to his hamlet and entrusted the girl to his wives. Early the next morning they got up to go to the farms. They took the girl along with them. In the farm, instead of working, the girl stood up and looked at the skyline towards the mountains and all around. Alas! The women began to work the soil, bending. The girl was standing, motionless. The women told her: "we asked you to come along to the farms. Why don't you do your work? Why?" She did not reply. She was lost in her thoughts; or perhaps she was pondering on how she could find her way back to her village. She began to sing. [Julia hums a song in a foreign language.] Tears began to flow down her cheeks. The women left the farms early in the afternoon. They returned the girl to their husband. Then my father stood up, took the girl along with him and walked to Meta land (the neighbours of Mankon to the west, close to the edge of the plateau). There and then he sold her.[3]

The witches, criminals and slaves were not the only ones to be expelled from the interior of the city. Miaffo (1977: 41) explained that, in the Dschang area, at the time of death of the king, his useless body was expelled from the city, in the person of a slave "dressed in the clothes of the deceased king, and having received many gifts" including the last wife of the monarch, and yet under a shower of blows. This is reminiscent of what Frazer wrote about one of the possible ritual patterns around the death of African sacred kings.

Miaffo again underscored the fact that the bad dead (those who had swollen or had wasted away, that is, those whose envelope was too full or

[3] Personal communication with Julia, 9 December 2002.

not full enough) were taken out of the city and abandoned in a distant forest. He wrote (pp. 109–112) that married men and women who had died without progeny were buried far away from their house, outside the limits of the city, face down, "their mouth against the soil". The door of their house was shut down after the corpse had been taken out. These people had not produced any other subject. Their bodily envelope was empty of any value.

In Mankon terms, I have not found any verbal expression equivalent to 'the anus of the city', although it may have escaped my attention. The analysis I propose is a construction which aims at giving a verbal expression to the non-verbalised cognitive content of Mankon practices. Such contents are not necessarily verbalised, as we saw when dealing with the notables as 'vital piggy-banks'. By contrast, the metaphor of the anus, although it does not have any verbal expression in Mankon, is explicitly formulated in other societies belonging to the Grassfields region. Such was the case in Ide, some 80 kilometres away from Mankon, in the Metchum valley. B. Masquelier (1978), produced a monograph of this community in which he stated that each of the six villages in a small valley around Ide was partially surrounded by ditches (as was Mankon and many kingdoms around it), and "when people coming from the outside had penetrated, the passageways were removed to keep the visitors inside" the limits of the ditch (p. 42). The Aku community, next to Ide, was similarly delimited. Occasionally, the six Ide villages met together, and on that day, the maskers blocked the paths leading to the palm bushes and the fields, in order to cut the Ide off from the outside world and encourage participation in the forum (p. 55). The last speaker to express himself was the representative of the Ifakpa village that was considered as the 'anus' of the valley. His words were supposed to expel the excreta—death and illness—that had been stigmatised during the meeting. All the Ide, says Masquelier, said they formed a single body (that is, a single 'skin').

The concern with limits, openings, control, storing and expelling is universally shared in the Grassfields. It defines what, following A. Leroi-Gourhan, one could call the Grassfields elementary means of actions on the subjects by the use of containers and substances in the acts of receiving, retaining, closing down, opening, pouring, absorbing, pushing out, etc. These means are shared by what I. Kopytoff (1981) called the Grassfields ecumene. By contrast, the local repertoires of these elementary means of action on the subjects (or, in Foucauldian terms, of technologies of the subject), their style and actual practice,

the verbalisations with which they are associated vary enormously from place to place. The Mankon make use of excretive techniques at least at the level of the palace and the city, but do not designate them as such as against the Ide. Could we relate this to the fact that the Mankon had (and have) a king whereas the Ide had (and have) none, were despised by the larger kingdoms of the plateau which considered them as slaves deprived of interiority? In the kingdoms, the court etiquette never expressed anything concerning the bodily functions of the king in his palace, except in veiled metaphors. Naming the excreta of the city as such (as the Ide did) would have probably attracted attention to the excreta of the king since the king and the city identify with each another. The court etiquette prohibited this kind of discourteous expression.

In line with this, I underscored in chapter 3 that Nicolas Argenti and myself are convinced that one may find in a Grassfields kingdom or community the key to what can be observed elsewhere. Just like the Amerindian myths, according to Lévi-Strauss, the Grassfields kingdoms think together or about one another.

This kind of pattern may be widespread in Africa. Far from the Grassfields, in Burkina Faso, Michel Cartry (1979) took note of the spatial structure of the Gourmanché society in its environment. He underscored the identification of the village territory to a 'body-space':[4]

> A lot of data show that the Gourmanché perceive the territory of the village as a bodily space. The *dogh* (village) is *tin'gban'yendo*, a 'single skin earth' (lit. 'earth skin one'), thus meaning that the unity of the village is conceived of on the pattern of a body [that is, a 'skin', JPW], and that the larger spatial divisions (what is wrongly called a quarter) were sometimes referred to by comparison to the presumed organs of this 'single earth body' ('towards the mouth of the earth', 'towards the anus of the earth', 'towards the belly of the earth' were the standard expressions to indicate an intention to walk to the West, the East or the centre of the village). This way of perceiving the territory of the village as if it were a body implicitly says that the bush which 'pumps' [a number of substances] is not itself a body. The three examples of ritual attitudes we selected [in the present study] can be subsumed under the following axiom: for each newcomer, for each individual located 'at the margins', there is no way to escape the necessity of having to incorporate into their own body the other body of the village.

[4] Michel Cartry (1979: 278–279).

The contrast between inside and outside, and the identification of the village space to a body (a 'skin') seem to be universally shared in Central and West Africa. The organic metaphor as it is elaborated in Africa stresses the importance of the skin (see chapter 3) and the functions of assimilation, transit and excretion. Similarly, J.-F. Bayart (1989) underscored the universality of the eating metaphor in Africa and the way it structures the 'politics of the belly'. He stressed the way Africans talk of 'sharing the national cake' and of consuming one's share. The metaphor of the excreta complements the metaphor of the belly.

Investigating the hidden connections between mysticism and torture, and the practice of torture in many societies, Michel de Certeau (1987: 219–238) considered that the institutional game consists in designating waste and rotten substances, whilst assigning them to a given space or place. The institution, he said, "would be the designation-localisation of what is rotten within [the institution], according to what the discourse may be 'grandiose'; it would be the combination of the nocturnal *voice* which assigns itself a number of powers, with the *manifestation* or the 'theory' of the sublime" (pp. 237–238). This line of investigation echoes the discourse of the pot-king, yet in different words: the 'grandiose' discourse of the monarchy does not institutionalise itself except by designating and localising its wastes and its dangerous excreta. From a structural point of view, this is consonant with the analyses of M. Douglas (1966) concerning the danger and defilement concentrated on persons and things which do not belong to a single space or category. Being inside and outside at the same time, they do not have any clear location as regards the established limits. Consequently, they are dangerous. This is the case with the excreta, the witches, the slaves, the masquerades, the 'bag of evil', the powers and paraphernalia of *Takinge*, and the newcomers. This is also the ambiguous and blurred status of the king himself who is the opening through which the inside of the city communicates with the outside and through which good and bad people and substances may pass. Consequently, he belongs both with the inside and with the outside. Yet the discourse of the king has to be 'grandiose', and this is why he delegates to *Takinge* (to which he belongs and that he embodies) his own statutory share of rotten and dangerous people and substances.

The scheme of the excrement does not operate exactly like the coetaneous scheme. In the case of the latter, the subject identifies with his skin (*nyε* in Mankon). This one is over-invested by the bodily practices, from childhood to adulthood. The governmentality of the

vessels or receptacles is geared to the subjective side of the coetaneous identifications in such a way that the subjects may function as containers from the top to the bottom of the hierarchical scale. Thus, the mouth and its functions of eating and throwing up under their different forms—positive (the good food) and negative (the bad food, or witchcraft, or again the bad way of eating and tearing apart with one's teeth)—is articulated with the metaphor of the skin-self and allows the subjects to identify with the technologies of power.

By contrast, most subjects cannot identify with the excrements or the anus of the body politic. The rubbish is always the witch, the person who has died a bad death. The king, and to some extent the notables, may and must identify at times with the function of excretion and with the anus as an organ. However, we saw that the monarch does not identify easily or willingly with an anus, at least not in the open. This is a hidden function and identification.

Excreting is a technology of power that is derived from the other technologies. It is less exposed to the public gaze than the technologies of the limits, envelopes, openings and surfaces, except during the performance of the poison ordeal which is dramatised and given a lot of publicity. The ordeal being the exception, the rule is that excretion, because of the shame and pollution attached to it, remains hidden. Yet it is absolutely essential to the functioning of the three bodies of the king.

A governmentality of containers

The question raised at the beginning of chapter 5 was the following: given that there is a *psychic* over-investment of the skin and of the containers in the societies of southern and western Cameroon, should we not consider that the main difference between them resides in a *political* over-investment that would be diversified according to local historical circumstances? That is, the political over-investment would be of a more hierarchical nature in the Grassfields kingdoms, and of a more egalitarian nature in the societies of the forest.

As a conclusion to the present chapter, I will summarize the data which support a positive answer to that question. These data may be organised in a standard annual cycle which is at the same time a logical and a chronological one.

At the end of the agricultural cycle, towards the months of October and November of the Gregorian calendar, the rains have stopped, the granaries are full, and people have deserted the farms, with the exception of a few plots along the streams, that are cultivated throughout the year. Then the witch-hunting may begin, because the threat of witchcraft is being felt all the more when it threatens the harvested crops, and prevents the king from addressing the dead monarchs with a purified body, in order to receive and give out their life substances for the next agricultural season. The *ngu* poison will search the entrails of the suspected witches in order to destroy the witchcraft material which, every year, extends its rhizomes to a number of people by taking advantage of the intra-family conflicts, the alliance debts, the power struggles and the jealousy within the kindred. The servants of *Kwi'fo* expel the principle of witchcraft and the witches from the city. They reintegrate the innocent.

Once the city (that is, the king) is purged of its waste, the monarch can approach his ancestors at the graveyard of *Ala'a Nkyi* and at *Neshwim*, and consult them about their dispositions concerning the living. If the king and the city have behaved themselves and are pure of all waste, the dead kings accept the offerings, and, in exchange for them, the monarch receives the gifts of his ancestors. There and then, he stores the ancestral life substances in his own body, brings them back to the palace, and gives them out during the annual festival and throughout the year.

If the king and the city are in a bad state (that is, contain bad substances and persons), the offerings are rejected by the dead sovereigns. The king does not receive the life substances coming from his ancestors. He has nothing to store, to bring back to the palace and to give out. The annual dance does not take place. It is postponed for the following year. The king is remonstrated by his mother and by a couple of high-ranking notables who have a right to do so (the most prominent of them being a notable named *Tabyɛn*).

In case the offerings are accepted, the annual dance may take place. It begins with two days during which the king medicates the iron weapons to prevent them from doing any harm to the citizens (that is, to burst their coetaneous envelopes and spill the blood contained in it) and to load them with power against the enemies outside the city. He complements this work by giving out his speech, his breath and some medicines that will increase the immunological defences of the kingdom.

The following two days are devoted to a scenography of the king's three bodies: the subjects of the city assemble on the dancing field of the palace, and get together with their sovereign who presides over the festivities, dances in the middle of the crowd, and sprays on their skin the raffia wine of the palace mixed up with his saliva. He speaks directly to them, or through a public speaker. He feeds and entertains the notables inside the palace.

Three months later, when men and women have cleared the fallows, dug the fields, and planted the seeds and tubers, the king sends palace retainers to put medicines in various places in order to trap the evil powers which roam about and threaten the reproductive potential of people, livestock and crops. When the rains come back, in April or May of the Gregorian calendar, the crops begin to grow, until the harvests, between July (for maize) and October (for the cereals that used to be cultivated in the past, like sorghum and millet). In Mankon, the success of the crops, together with the health and well-being of the citizens and livestock depend partly on the life substances given out by the monarch and the palace. This dispensation intensifies when the king has visited the royal graveyards and, so to speak, has filled the tank, as one does at the petrol station.

This cycle is accompanied by the performance of bodily conducts around the three bodies of the king, the skin of the subjects and the substances that cleanse and reinforce the iron weapons, protect the city, promote the growth of the crops and the fertility of the living. The vital principles circulate from the top of the hierarchy to its bottom. They spring from the royal source and flow down through the notables. As a counterpart, the palace is provided with women, servants and goods of all kinds: livestock, crops, medicines, luxury goods and subsistence goods taken in regional trade. The functioning of all those containers is political in nature. It defines a governmentality based on a political over-investment of containers, contents, openings and transformations, from the top to the bottom of the hierarchy and back. From the perspective of the subjects, it cannot be said that such an organisation is non-egalitarian in nature, since there is a reciprocal exchange between the apex and the base of the hierarchy. Persons, luxuries and subsistence goods are exchanged for ancestral substances. From the point of view of the subjects, again, it cannot be said that it amounts to an exchange of 'material' goods against 'spiritual' ones. All those goods are material. The saliva and the camwood powder given out by the king are as material as the livestock, the guns, the yams and the palm

oil given in exchange. This is true, above all, of the wives and servants who are sent to the palace. By contrast, these persons and goods do not have the same origin and are not loaded with the same potential: some come from the dead elders, the others from the city, the land and the commercial networks. The exchange between the material goods and bodily substances, and their transit is what procures the prosperity, health and subsistence of all the Mankon subjects—king included—whatever their age, gender and hierarchical position.

All this would be perfect, in the best possible Mankon world, if only the pot-king could not be broken. The Achilles tendon of sacred kingship is death. In chapter 7, it was already indicated to what extent the ill health or death of the monarch could be a problem: if the pot ages and cracks, what will happen to its content, i.e. the city and its citizens? Is it not better to discard the damaged vessel and replace it before the content is lost? If the vital piggy-bank is broken, is the group (the city, the lineage) not bound to scatter and dissolve?

CHAPTER NINE

UNBREAKABLE VITAL PIGGY-BANKS

The nine clans making up the city of Mankon do not share common ancestry. Each of them has its own founding fathers and elders, genealogically unrelated to the others. The libations performed by the monarch on the royal graves, the performative words he issues and the transformation of his bodily substances into 'real' ancestral substances concern the kingdom as a corporate group. They cannot substitute for the ancestral substances specific in each clan or lineage. Each descent group has its own dead elders, who are at the origin and at the source of the life and the life essence of the descent group, and of the reproduction of its members. As a result, each descent group must address its dead elders and receive their gifts. The life substances received from the dead monarchs cannot absolve the descent groups from appropriating their own life essence through offerings and performative speech addressed to their own founding fathers. Each descent group owns a 'vital piggy-bank' of its own, independent from that of the kingdom, yet included in the Mankon body politic by the substances coming from the monarch.

So much so that a constant tradition in all nine Mankon clans claims that, in the past, each clan head was a *fon*, a king in his own right. The foundation of the kingdom would date back to the days when eight of the nine clans decided to pool together the bags containing their power paraphernalia, medicines and double iron gongs and to entrust them all to the ninth one, elected as a monarch. This story has the status of a constitutional charter. Whatever his primacy, the king depends on the consent of the other eight clans who pooled together their bags without forsaking their respective dead elders and founding fathers. A clan head always remains a potential king.

Consequently, the Mankon governmentality of containers is somewhat more complex than it appeared so far. The body politic of the city/king includes and embodies the nine 'corporate groups' constituted by the clans. Each of them is a container in its own right. The king is the only clan head who has a double status as the 'father' of his own (royal) clan, and as the head of the kingdom and caretaker of the

corporate estate constituted by the consolidation of the nine genealogically unrelated clans. As a container in its own right, each clan is, or owns, a specific envelope and a series of material containers: ancestral graves and shrines, notables, bowl for the unctions (*azo'*), houses of noble architecture, camwood bags or boxes, drinking horns and carved chairs associated with a given title, etc. Each clan, in its turn, incorporates sub-groups that are genealogically related to each other. Consequently, the kingdom is made of a series of containers fitting into one another depending on their hierarchic level, like Russian dolls. However, each of them operates at its own level according to the same principles of containment, and transit of the contents into and out of the envelope, through its opening or 'mouth'. This general principle applies to the kingdom, to the three bodies of the king, to each clan, to each lineage and to each lineage segment. Lastly it applies to each notable or head of any descent group—whether it is a clan, a lineage or a lineage segment. The head of a lineage or clan is called *ta atse* ('father [of the] descent group') or *tatse.* The body of each notable is a vital piggy-bank, as is the king's body. In each case, the piggy-bank is inalienable. Only the contents of the containers can be alienated.

This general principle has implications that have not unfolded. Most importantly, the inalienable vital piggy-bank must remain intact and pass from one generation to the next. The corporate group endures through time, with its own corporate estate of containers and substances. It endures beyond the death of its 'father' or head, and in spite of it. As E.H. Kantorowicz (1957) said, following several medieval theologians and lawyers, the corporate body of the king endures whilst his 'natural' body dies. "The king is dead, long life to the king."

In the case of a material body, a container, this is a very pragmatic and practical affair. Of course, there is some amount of 'ritual' and 'symbolism' about it. But the death of the notable or king raises the same kind of practical question as the destruction of a pot or a plastic bucket. They have become useless as material containers. If you cannot mend a pot, which is the case of a dead notable, you want to change it, and you try and save the content in order to transfer it intact into the new container. As regards a Mankon notable, the practical and material problem is: what can you do to discard the old 'natural' body that is broken, to procure a new and serviceable one, and to transfer the load of ancestral substances from the old container to the new one?

The manufacture of a successor

I have witnessed three succession ceremonies. All three departed from the norm one way or another. This is not surprising given the historical circumstances between 1971 and 2002. For example, I attended a succession to three minor lineage titles in 1973. The titles had remained vacant for many years. The misfortunes experienced by the lineage induced the elders to consult the diviners. The latter said that the dead title-holders of the three vacant titles were displeased with the living because they had been left without successors. The elders looked around, and found it appropriate to 'catch' three young boys, between the ages of 6 and 10. The older ones who would have suited the purpose better had migrated to town. This choice was unusual, because the succession to a title goes along with the management of a corporate estate including marriage rights with a number of wives. However, the elders decided that the boys would do, because there was no corporate estate left. The three title holders had died a long time ago, their estates dissolved and there were no hamlets or raffia bushes left for the taking. There were three names and that was all. The boys were all that was needed to pick up the names and receive a drinking horn each. Consequently, the elders performed the whole ceremony and allowed me to take photographs (see photos 19 and 20).

However, it is easy to reconstruct the logic and the bodily conducts of a succession when the vacant title is important enough, when there is a corporate estate to manage, and when the candidate—man or woman—is an adult who fulfils all the conditions required from a successor.

Let us say that the vacant title is that of a lineage head (*tatse*) and that the succession takes place in the 1940s or 1950s, after the first violent onslaught of colonisation has been partially absorbed, and before the organisation of labour and the agrosystems have been deeply transformed by the demographic explosion of the 1960s and the urban migrations. Also, after some of the notables seem to have reverted to the practice of polygamy they had abandoned earlier in the century—though on a smaller scale than in pre-colonial times. Let us suppose that the said lineage head had eight wives—not a considerable number for a man of such rank—with about 20 children between one and 30 years old, a hamlet of a dozen houses and a corporate estate in farmland, raffia bushes, masquerades, etc. Let us call him *Anyɛ'*.

Anyε' dies. A close kin rubs the pebble of the dead elders on his forehead and returns it to the lineage shrine, in the house of the dead. The king sends a bag of camwood powder from the palace stores to be smeared on the corpse. The next day, the senior men of the lineage bury *Anyε'* in his hamlet. His kindred begins to assemble. The lineage notables sit in the meeting hall of the hamlet, drinking raffia wine and discussing the succession and the choice of a suitable successor. In principle, *Anyε'* has entrusted to some of them the name of the man he wishes to succeed him. Of course, this has been the subject of rumours and speculations. The notables enjoy a certain amount of freedom to confirm or to rectify the choice made by *Anyε'*. But this possibility is unusual and subject to controversies.

There are rules to be observed and until the 1960s, it seems that they prevailed. The first-born of a man cannot succeed him. Indeed, considering the logic of procreation by the virtue of ancestral substances, a man and his first son, born from his first wife procured by his father, are both considered to be born from their common and 'real' father. In addition to this, paradoxically, the first son and his father are considered as offspring of the same mother. The Mankon explain this by saying that both are very close to each other, so close that a father addresses his first son as *muma* (lit. 'son [of the same] mother'), that is, 'full sibling'. I could also comment by saying that the first wife of a man gives birth to her husband as a man while giving birth to her first born as a boy or a girl. As we shall see in chapter 10, in the neighbouring Bamileke kingdoms of the Dschang area, the genitor of a first born is considered as a 'stud' (a 'he-goat') who impregnated the woman, and not as a father. The real father is the genitor's father who provided both the wife and the ancestral reproductive substances. This confirms the rule that, in the absence of any initiation ritual, it is the first marriage of a man, followed by procreation which transforms him into an adult.

The first born being excluded from the succession, the successor can be elected among all the male classificatory sons of the dead elder, that is, not only those he begot as a genitor but also the sons of junior married men in the lineage to whom he dispensed the ancestral reproductive substances. Most of the time the successor to an important title is chosen among the junior married men who proved to be fertile by begetting at least one child. A 'father' seldom marries his sons following their rank. He takes great care in testing and observing his sons. Maternal grandfathers also play a role, by taking their favourite

grandsons to stay with them, sometimes for several years, away from the jealousies and witchcraft between half-siblings in the household of their father. The biographies of Grassfields businessmen (see Miaffo and Warnier, 1993; Warnier, 1993) tell of the tests and challenges they were submitted to in their childhood: carry messages, sell a fowl on the marketplace at a good price, tend the goats, do petty trading. The performances of each child were (and are) assessed year in and year out. The first wife to be provided by the father will go to the son who has shown his capacity to deal with other people successfully, to be enterprising and even slightly crafty, while being docile with his father and lineage elders. This son will be given a wife, obtained by his father against bridewealth payment, even if this son is no more than 25 or 30 years of age. As an alternative, this son can be sent as a retainer to the palace in his early teens, where he will build up a network of useful connections for his lineage, especially with the king and the palace notables. When discharged from service, he will be given a wife or a gun by the palace. As an alternative, such a promising son may be sent away to stay with his maternal grandfather for a few years, often in another kingdom where he will become fluent in the local language. He will be sheltered from witchcraft and, most of the time, will be initiated to regional trading between neighbouring cities.

Those are the different profiles that qualify a son to succeed. During the first funeral of the notable, in the days immediately following his death (the second funerals may take place within a couple of years), the sons, the allies, the classificatory half-siblings of the deceased congregate in his hamlet. As soon as the notables are informed that the elected successor has arrived, they launch the performance. Most of the time it is in the afternoon or the evening of the day when the notable was buried. When more time is needed for people to come from distant places, it is postponed to the third day after the death of the man. However, in the life of a Grassfielder, a funeral has first priority over all other considerations. Nowadays, the national radio of Cameroon devotes a lengthy daily programme to the announcements of funerals, stating where and when they will take place and the names of the persons to whom a particular announcement is addressed with first priority.

Before initiating the succession ceremony, the notables have recruited half a dozen strong junior men. They stand by, waiting for orders. When everything is ready and the successor-elect has arrived, one of the notables whispers the name of the elected son in the ears of the

gang of young men. These melt into the crowd and converge towards the successor elect by circuitous ways while keeping an eye on each other. They close on their prey.

Let us call the successor "*Fru*". The gang has to capture him forcibly. When they are close enough to him, they 'catch' (*ko'o*) him violently by his limbs and waist. This is the word that is used when 'catching' a fowl in the courtyard by running after it until one can secure a grip on it. Not unlike rugby players, they may even push him and have him fall on the ground where they put all their weight to keep him fast. A short struggle ensues, depending on the strength of the men and the willingness of *Fru* to have a good fight. He must fight his aggressors, in order to show that he has no desire for the succession and has not wished the death of his father. However, he is quickly exhausted and he submits. The young men put him on his feet and the defeated *Fru*, covered in dust and with torn clothes, is escorted to the hall where the lineage elders are waiting for him.

The succession ceremony begins with the physical capture and subjection of the body of the successor. In that case, it is appropriate to talk of a 'body', a passive material object which is secured and actively worked upon quite like a calabash or a pot. Following P. Parlebas (1999), one could criticise the use of this word. It is implicitly dualistic since it suggests a number of oppositions (body and mind, body and soul, physical and mental, organic and psychic, etc.).[1] Consequently, it may obscure the analysis instead of clarifying it. Furthermore, the word 'body' has somewhat passive and static connotations. Instead of talking of the 'body', Parlebas suggests to talk of motivity, which, right from the start, gives the ontological monism that is often looked for and seldom obtained. Besides, it implies movement, which, together with perception and emotions, as A. Berthoz (1997) would say, are the essential characteristics of all 'bodily' conducts. By contrast, in the case of *Fru*, it is indeed the materiality and the passiveness of his body which characterise the situation. It is the object of the capture and of specific 'techniques', that is, as Mauss (1936) defines them, of traditional and efficient actions on something (usually a material object or substance)—in the present case, the body of *Fru*. The broken down

[1] Yet, P.-Y. Gaudard (personal communication) is of the opinion that, from a psychoanalytical point of view, the word 'body' must be kept and used, since there is a 'body' only insofar as it is invested by a 'subject'. If this is the case, the suspicion of dualism is irrelevant.

body of the notable is dead. It has to be replaced by another, young and serviceable body.

Fru is dragged like a convict all the way into the meeting hall. He is pushed and pulled through the narrow door, across the threshold and the frame adorned with animal and ancestral figures, mouths open in a gesture of '*fama*', or spray, on him. The sliding door is shut behind him. There and then, he endures passively the technical actions he is submitted to. The room is dark, only lit by the hearth, at its centre. The walls are black and shiny with soot. The flames reflect on them. During the capture of *Fru*, the lineage elders have spread the flat and oval leaves of *tabɛrɛ* (*Piper umbellatum*) on the small wall of the dead elders' shrine. On top of the leaves, they have put *atatok* leaves (*Impatiens hians*), chopped and ground in a sort of mash, like raw spinach. They have prepared a calabash filled with a mixture of raffia wine and water, and a mix of palm oil and camwood powder in a bowl *azo'*. They have also procured a sacrificial animal: a cock for the succession to a male title, a hen for the succession to a female title, a goat in the case of a succession to high office (lineage or clan head).

The shrine is made of dry clay. It is a small semi-circular rounded wall, propped against the wall at the back of the meeting hall or in the house of the descent-group head. The inside of the wall is filled with clay at mid-height. The shrine shelters a flat stone called *atue bekfu* ('[the] head [of the] dead'), which could also be translated as 'the side of the dead'. On top of the flat stone rests the small smooth pebble that is rubbed on the forehead of each notable immediately following their death. It is called *mu ngo atu* ('[the]child stone head'), that is the 'small stone-head', a substitute for the skull of the dead, sometimes kept in other kingdoms, especially among the Bamileke. When the notable

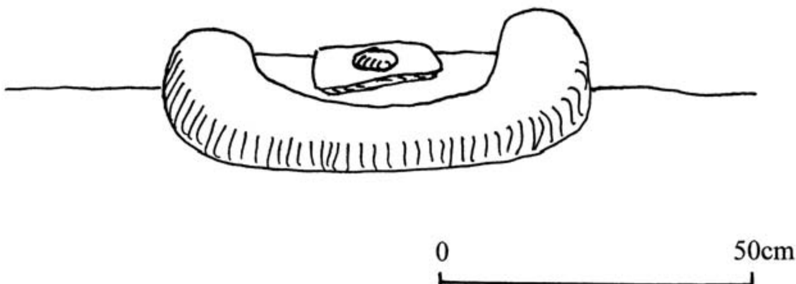

Fig. 2. The shrine of the dead elders.

moves his compound, he takes away the pebble and abandons the rest of the shrine on the spot.

In the case of a succession to a title of clan or lineage head, the camwood powder used to smear the corpse of the dead elder and the body of his successor is sent by the palace. This is a particularly important point. When a major descent group renews its vital piggy bank, royal camwood is used to work on the envelope which, when the process is completed, will contain the ancestral substances of the commoner descent group, genealogically unrelated to the royal clan. The royal camwood achieves the incorporation of the commoner descent group in the Mankon body politic.

The notables who perform the succession also keep in handy the carved wooden chair of the dead title holder, his drinking horn, his raffia bag, his knitted cap, a loin cloth, his smoking pipe if he is a smoker, his ivory or brass bracelets, his beaded necklace and other such things. The carved chair deserves a comment. The important containers like the mixing bowl *azo'* used for palm oil and camwood, the calabashes of raffia wine used by notables or by everybody on special occasions, the bowls used for the distribution of kola nuts, the clay pots used to mix raffia wine or to contain *atshu'* sauce, are each provided with a stand on which they rest. The elaborate nature of the stand is a measure of the status of the container on which it rests. The notable, as a container of the descent group substances, must be seated on a stand the aesthetics of which befit his status. It is usually carved in a single block of wood and adorned with geometrical patterns or zoomorphic designs such as spiders, bat heads, lizards, etc. A noble chair is called *alanga beukum* ('chair sg. [of] notables pl.'). The representations of noble game as caryatides for the chair, like the leopard or the otter are reserved to the king. Photo n° 21 (p. 248) shows a bowl-bearer (given its size—49 cm in height, it is most probably a camwood mixing bowl—*azo'*), that is, a bowl with a stand which is actually a king bearing the bowl, and seated on a leopard caryatid.

Let us go back to *Fru*, exhausted by the fighting, subjected to the elders, and standing by the shrine of the dead elders. The notables strip him naked from head to toe, while one of the notables addresses the dead elders by drawing on the *doxa* of such conventional speeches. He mentions the demise of the title holder, the misfortunes of the descent group, the 'dry skins', the 'brown chests' of its children, the shortage of food, the threats coming from their enemies. However, he insists on the fact that the notables speak 'with one mouth' and introduces

Anyɛ' redivivus in the person of *Fru*. He requests abundant crops, many children (boys and girls), the death of their enemies and a 'fresh skin' for all the children of the descent group. The master of ceremony tears apart the lower part of the beak of the cock (or hen for a female title) or slits the throat of the sacrificial goat. He lets the blood flow on the *atatok* mash, walks round the house to present the calabash of water to each and every person present in the house to put his hands on it, pours the mixture on the ground, in a line going from the hearth to the threshold. He throws what is left of the mixture outside the house, through the door, while cursing the enemies of the descent group. The speech uttered by the notable performs the transformation of *Fru* into *Anyɛ'*, and it loads *Fru*'s body with ancestral substances. It works both on the envelope and on the content. In the meantime, a couple of notables smear the skin of *Anyɛ'* (formerly *Fru*) with a mixture of oil and of camwood sent by the palace. They smear his neck, shoulders, chest and arms, front and back (see photo n° 19 p. 218). *Anyɛ'*s skin is now shining with a deep red hue.

Then they pass a loin-cloth between his legs and fasten it at the waist with a belt. They sit him on the carved chair of *Anyɛ'* and give him the paraphernalia of the title: bracelet, necklace, drinking horn, knitted cap, etc. The most important of these objects are the drinking horn which contains the raffia wine, the knitted skull cap which lines the envelope of *Anyɛ'*s head, and the carved chair on which he alone can sit. In the end, the notables put a large necklace of *ndor* vine (*Basella alba*) around his neck. It is made of several rows of fresh vines, newly harvested, with their leaves. The necklace hangs from his neck, on his chest and nearly down to the waist (see photo n° 20, p. 218). This vine grows in hydromorphic soils and is supposed to keep him 'fresh' and 'cool'.

In many cases, the orchestra of a lineage or clan masquerade plays in the meeting hall, or in a small enclosure built next to the hall. It has to be a fairly prestigious masquerade, like *Kwi'fo, Nkekom, Alub* or *Takumbeng*. It is said that the orchestra 'beats the head' of the successor, which suggests that the sound is so powerful that it hammers on the head of *Anyɛ'*, manufactures and shapes it. If *Fru* has not yet made the payments to be a member of the masquerade or masquerades called on that occasion, he will do so as soon as possible with goats and fowls taken from the stock of the household.

Once *Fru*'s body and person have been manufactured to be transformed into *Anyɛ'*, the orchestra stops playing. A notable opens the door of the meeting hall, crosses the threshold, waits until the crowd gets

Photo n° 19. A young naked successor being rubbed with oil and camwood by two notables of his lineage (1973).

Photo n° 20. Young successors, their skin shining with oil and camwood, with their drinking cups, caps and necklaces of *ndor*. The dead elders' shrine shows to the right, with *tabɛrɛ* leaves on it.

quiet, and announces: "*Anyɛ*' was gone, but he is back". The women shout their '*yu-yu*' and begin immediately to sing the songs for twins. The crowd congregates around *Anyɛ*', and begins to dance in the hall and the courtyard.

Usually, the succession ceremony takes place in the afternoon or in the evening. In Mankon, the night falls around 6:30 pm. The house or the hall does not have any window and the door is narrow. The wood fire burning at the centre of the single room reflects on the walls lined with raffia palm stems coated in glossy black coal tar and soot. The atmosphere is eerie. The funeral started the day before, and for eight days people will not sleep.[2] The orchestras will play all night long, to keep them awake. They manipulate the sounds of the tropical nights. They alternate human voices disguised by vibrating membranes kept in front of the mouth and the strident music made by nocturnal insects. Once in a while, the humans and the night wildlife remain silent. Then a musical instrument, a voice or an insect breaks the silence. The limits between the voices, the instruments, the household and the bush get blurred. The death of *Anyɛ*', the lack of sleep, the high stakes of the succession, the violent rivalries between the candidates supported by their close kin and often by their respective mothers and maternal grandfathers—all those circumstances have exacerbated the emotions of all the persons involved in the succession. The Mankon world is an enchanted world because it pulls together all these repertoires of dance, gestures, speeches, lights, sceneries, substances, performances and emotions.

The manufacture of a successor is a material and physical affair. It is a performance. In order to produce a successor, one needs more than the evaluation of the candidates' merits by external referees, a discussion and a poll, followed by the redaction of the minutes of the meeting approved by the authorised signatures. It needs working on the subjects by working on their body while uttering a performative speech to transform the material body of *Fru* into the 'real' and material body of *Anyɛ*'.

One may be tempted to emphasise the contrast I am suggesting between the succession through bodily and material practices in an African kingdom and the absence of equivalent performances in the

[2] In the 1990s, the Cameroon government negotiated with the Grassfields kings to reduce the duration of the funerals down to three days and three nights.

Western world. However, in a way, the contrast results from an illusion. In the Western world, many procedures of succession to political office imply campaigning by the candidates, with popular meetings, banquets, travelling, meeting people in the streets or marketplaces, and, consequently, certain security measures for the candidates or the winner, who is set apart, under the protection of trained bodyguards, a change in dress, and the use of official signs of recognition, and the practice of specific bodily techniques (shaking hands, meeting the crowd, photographs, press conferences, cocktail parties, mundane rituals and segregated housing). One could find the equivalent, yet far less flamboyant procedure, for the succession to academic, church or business management offices. Such bodily conducts propped on material culture provide the successor with new identifications and what Max Weber saw as charisma (linked to the office and not to the person) that transformed the subject and gave him new authority.

The manufacture of a successor concerns the two schemes of envelope and transformation. The skin of *Fru* and its embodied material extensions (clothing, drinking horn, house) are worked upon so as to give them a shiny, supple, healthy, waterproof surface, able to store and safe keep all the substances the dead elders pour into them. The subjectivity of *Fru/Anyɛ'* is transformed accordingly. Within a few hours, *Fru* goes through a psychic earthquake. Tisseron (1999: 152) underscores the fact that the psychic activity of a subject projects itself towards its periphery, on the screen provided by the skin and the embodied material culture. *Fru*'s identifications are redefined and projected on *Anyɛ'*'s skin. His contents are transformed. *Fru* has become the *ndzie nda* ('[the] eater [of the] house', sg.). This is what a successor is called: a 'house-eater'. *Anyɛ'* contains all the corporate estate, the rights in persons and things. The metaphor of eating is one of the few verbal expressions that show *Anyɛ'* as a container, storing in his body all the good substances provided by the dead elders who produce and reproduce the descent group. In the process, *Fru/Anyɛ'* is transformed into a 'vital piggy-bank'. *Anyɛ'* died, but the vital piggy-bank has been immediately replaced, with its envelope and opening, and its content safely stored in it.

As is the case of the performance at *Foba*'s (see chapter 2), in addition to the two schemes of envelope and transformation, the succession process mobilises the three media of symbolisation. These three media are as essential in the succession process as they are in a marriage ceremony, since the succession entails that, within a very short lapse

of time, the vital piggy-bank, threatened by the death of the elder, is not lost but rather consolidated, as in the moulding of a snake or a lobster, by the manufacture of a new, younger shell, without any loss in content. The aim is to keep the descent group intact, as a corporate group, with its corporate estate, with the household of its father. The three media are: the sensori-affective-motor medium (people move and act); the images (the succession provides icons of the return of *Anyɛ'* who is displayed with all his paraphernalia in front of the crowd who came to attend the funeral and the succession); and, lastly, the words (uttered in the meeting hall during the offerings to the dead elders, and before the crowd: "*Anyɛ'* was gone, but he is back"). Lastly, we can notice that, at the level of the descent group, we find the equivalent of the three bodies of the king: the physical body, the house of the notable, and the corporate descent group.

A positional succession

The kind of succession practiced in the Grassfields is a 'positional succession'. It means that a subject (*Fru*) takes the *position* of another one (*Anyɛ'*) and occupies his office. Jack Goody (ed., 1966) provided useful analyses of this kind of succession. It is an action which may be difficult to assimilate by the persons involved, especially in its Grassfields version, because it is almost subversive of the existing inter-subjective relationships, by a sudden redistribution of individual statuses. From one minute to the next, the full siblings and half siblings of the successor must address him as 'father' (*tita*, term of address). Until then, they had addressed him by his name (*Fru*) and, if they had been much younger than him, by the term *ngya* ('elder'), '*ngya Fru*' or 'elder *Fru*'. In the short lapse of time of the succession ceremony, the co-wives of *Fru*'s mother become the wives of her son, or rather, they have never ceased to be the wives of *Anyɛ'*, and remain the wives of *Anyɛ' alias Fru.* Before the ceremony, *Fru* called each of them 'mother' (*nimon*). After the ceremony, he has to get used to calling them 'wife' (*ngwe*). In the following days, one can bet that there are many a *lapsus* to be heard. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to witness such circumstances.

Those of *Fru*'s brothers eligible to the succession must abandon their hopes and quell their jealousy. They had to choose, as Hirschman (1970) suggested as regards the times of crises in organisations, between loyalty, voice, apathy and exit. In the past, each important succession confronted

a number of cadets with such choices. The exit and the voice options often led to migration to another kingdom on the Bamenda plateau, thus increasing what I called the 'floating population' (Warnier, 1975), or what R. Horton (1971) mentions as 'disjunctive migrations' at the origin of African chiefdoms and kingdoms.

The exit option was greatly facilitated under colonisation.[3] The latter opened up a number of spaces in which the cadets who had been barred from a succession, and did not see any future in staying in the kingdom, could escape: the Christian mission, the colonial administration that recruited labour, the market economy, the town, the plantation. Each of these options led to the adoption of a given material culture with the corresponding bodily repertoires and specific verbalisations and identifications. The mission requested a conversion, a monogamous marriage and the practice of the techniques of the body *cum* material culture diffused by Christianity: clothes, baptism, church attendance, singing hymns, and the apprenticeship of one of the trades introduced by the mission (one had to be a bricklayer, carpenter, clerk, nurse, catechist, etc.). It also required learning a European language and the elaborate verbal repertoires of Christianity. The plantation, the army, the government also brought the uniform, the barracks, the sick ward with its health practices so different from those of the herbalist. The town and market economy provided more freedom. But it was often the occasion to reconstruct the kingdom in town, with its closure, hierarchy and inequalities. It is not easy to change one's subjectivity.

The 'voice' option expressed itself through accusations and counter-accusations of witchcraft ending with the poison ordeal, which was performed yearly until 1901 and occasionally in subsequent years until 1919, or else, it expressed itself by means of fights with wooden sticks. The conflict which divided Mankon from 1920 to 1959 (locally known as the 'Dispute' which translates the Mankon word *filame*) over the succession to the throne is a good example of the 'voice' option caused by a disputed succession.

Following the loyalty option, one had to accept the new definition of hierarchic relationships in the descent group, to interiorise it, whilst

[3] There are many excellent works on the exit choice and the migrations in Cameroon that it is impossible to quote them all. For instance, Wirtz (1972), Gouellain (1975) and Mainet (1985) on urban migrations and the history of Douala; Kaptue (1986) and Konings (1993) on indentured and plantation labour; Van Slageren (1972) and Ngongo (1982) on the mission and the religious forces.

staying in the household and the kingdom setting, with their specific verbal, bodily and material repertoires. One also had to participate in all the activities and to keep working hard for the benefit of the group, in the hope that one's merits would be rewarded by a marriage and perhaps even a succession.

Apathy was the lot of those who had neither the possibility nor the will to make any other choice. The apathetic subjects exhibited signs of depression and even hypochondria: low level of activity and participation in the life of the group, poor health, dependency upon their entourage. Nowadays, they are quickly considered as 'delinquents' and even 'brigands'. Yet, people put up with them and are relatively patient, since they are still their parents.

Of course, it is impossible to give quantitative estimates of the frequency of each of these choices, and even less their evolution through time. In another publication (Warnier, 1993) I gave the statistics of rural-urban migrations and qualitative data on the mass conversion of cadets and women to Christianity from 1913 onwards. Migrations affected mostly 30 to 50 per cent of adult bachelors (see chapter 10). Conversion to Christianity concerned young men and women, but also some high-ranking notables as we shall also see in chapter 10.

To summarise, the successor-elect had to re-shape his identifications. The wives of the deceased, his own siblings and half-siblings had to do the same and to reorganise their verbal and bodily repertoires according to the new hierarchic positions of their kin. Lastly, the notables of the lineage, the clan, the matriline and of the palace had to treat the newcomer as a proper 'vital piggy-bank' in his own right. All of them were helped by the material and bodily repertoires, and the dramatic scenography of the succession ceremony.

This is how a vital piggy-bank is never broken to pieces, and is transmitted, without any loss of substance, from one transient bodily envelope to the next. As a result, there was nothing like 'inheritance' in the Grassfields. Inheritance is a recent development which appeared with the individual appropriation of land, buildings and furniture, at the expense of the corporate estates of the descent groups. In the geographical and sociological literature, especially concerning the Bamileke, it is frequent to find that type of misunderstanding. It is made by researchers who know little about kinship and social organisation. Actually, the owner of the corporate estate is not the head of the descent group but the descent group itself. The lineage or clan head is nothing more than a caretaker or a manager of the corporate estate on behalf of the

group. The corporate group never dies. It endures beyond the death of the caretaker. Therefore no-one ever 'inherits' any property. Let us make an analogy: when the president of a republic reaches the end of his mandate, dies or retires, the corporate estate of the republic is not divided up and distributed to the citizens. No-one 'inherits'. A new president is elected and *succeeds* to the presidency as a caretaker of the *res publica*. In the Grassfields, the logic of the succession is the same: the corporate group, the corporate estate are not divided up or broken to pieces. The logic of the king's three bodies applies at all levels of the hierarchy: the lineage and the household of its 'father' last beyond the death of the title holder and throughout the succession process. The vital piggy-bank of the descent group is not broken to pieces, it is unbreakable. Only its envelope, its 'skin', changes.

Lastly, it should be noticed that the strength—even the violence—applied on the body of *Fru* prevents him from the illusion that he would owe the succession to his own personal qualifications and merits. In other words, that he won it or deserved it. He is *Fru*. He succeeds to *Anyɛ'*. But, whilst he takes the title of *Anyɛ', he is not Anyɛ'*. As J. Lacan said: "A mad man who mistakes himself for a king is insane; a king who mistakes himself for a king is equally insane."[4] This could be glossed as follows: a king who entertains the fantasy that the office of king saturates his identity is insane because he forgets that he is a human being like anyone else. He identifies with his ideal. He has nothing left to be desired. In principle, the succession ritual preserves the successor against this kind of drift by stressing the gap between *Fru* as a subject, and his identifications with a container whose envelope and content are entrusted to him as a caretaker by the will of the dead elders, and not by his own will.

As Mankon wisdom says, "kingship is given with the hand", that is, no-one can appropriate it on his own. One must receive it *nolens volens*, from the hands of those who have authority to transmit it although they do not own it.

One should not forget that, although the notable is an unbreakable vital piggy-bank, the notable does not produce by himself the substances he contains. Only the dead elders possess the substances needed to fill the container. They must be placated. The notable (or the king) depends on them to obtain the substances he will store for the benefit

[4] I owe these comments and the quotation of Lacan to Zaki Strougo.

of the corporate group. Health, wealth, life, are not so many benefits that one can obtain by his own efforts to produce a future of progress, as obtains in the utopias of the Enlightenment. By contrast, for the Mankon king or notable, the source of life and health resides *in the past* and upstream, with the dead elders who were more knowledgeable and more powerful than their descendants, wealthier in children and goods, who owned the most potent and diverse magic, and who refused to transmit them for fear that their children, less wise than they were, misuse them.

The Grassfielders experience a permanent state of dependency towards the dead elders who give them out the vital substances they need. Indeed, the living own an unbreakable vital container. However, they consume and spend its content. It needs to be replenished by the dead elders when the occasion comes to settle a case, to perform a succession, and at least once a year, like a Catholic must attend mass at Easter. This is exactly what the pot-king does with his own ancestors before the dance, in order to have something to give out to the people. Lineages and clans do it once a year, at various times in the year but preferably during the dry season, between November and February, when men and women enjoy more leisure than during the rainy season.

This is the equivalent of going to the petrol station and refilling the tank. These actions consist of offerings, libations and the utterance of performative speech. They are known as 'throwing the head' of someone. We shall now see how a small group of people 'threw the head' of *Ngang Fɛn*, the founding father of a lineage segment in the lineage *Makwu Shwiri*. This will give us an opportunity to complement the analysis of the Mankon praxeology of containers.

"They throw the head of Ngang Fɛn*"*

Here is the genealogy of the actors involved in the performance of the offerings to *Ngang Fɛn*:

Ngwatom, *Ngwasa* and *Ngum Melu'* were *belim*, that is, classificatory half-siblings or members of a single lineage segment which had been founded by *Ngang Fɛn*. His name had become a title of nobility and had to be provided with a successor.

When one 'throws the head' of a dead elder, a representative of the matrigroup of this elder should always participate, since it is the

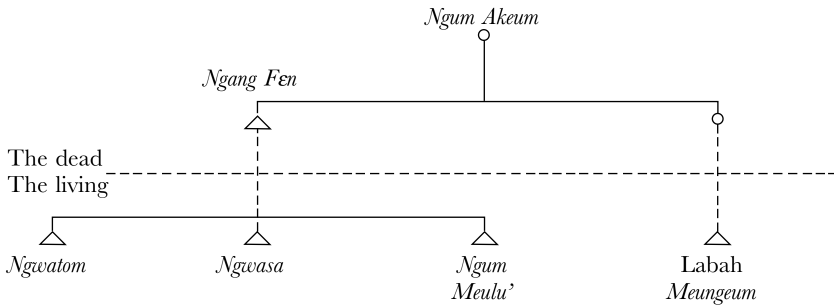

Fig. 3. The genealogy of *Ngang Fɛn*.

group who provided the woman who gave birth to the founding father. A man named *Labah* belonged to this matrigroup. He had been a retainer at the palace. At the time, he was my research assistant. He introduced me to *Ngwatom* and *Ngwasa* who had asked him to bring a fowl for the sacrifice. *Labah* transmitted the request to me. I provided the fowl and accompanied *Labah*. All the parties found an advantage in this agreement.

On March 4th 1973, I arrived at *Ngwatom*'s hamlet, together with *Labah*, by mid-afternoon. I had brought the fowl, several bottles of beer and a few gifts for the women of the household. Half a dozen men had gathered in the house of *Ngwatom* early in the afternoon, to discuss the affairs of the descent group while drinking raffia wine. The family had experienced a number of misfortunes. The men wanted to discuss them and settle their quarrels before addressing the elders 'with one mouth'. It took the whole afternoon; *Labah* and I were still sitting in the courtyard of the hamlet by 7 pm. The men at last called us in.

When we joined them in the house, they had already begun the offerings. One of them had reduced about one kilogram of *atatok* leaves (*Impatiens hians*) to a juicy mash by pounding them on a stone. I have not yet described this plant. It grows spontaneously in hydromorphic soil throughout the year. When pounded or chopped to pieces, it yields a juicy mash, like a mash of spinach. After that, it is seasoned by the men: they chew a few seeds of *alaketa* pepper and spit the mixture on the *atatok*. This is one more case of 'spraying' (*fama*) in which the children return a gift of saliva to the elders flavoured with chewed pepper, as food for them. *Ngwatom* covered the small wall of the ancestral shrine with large leaves of *tabɛrɛ* (*Piper umbellatum*) and spread the mixture of *atatok* and chewed pepper on top of the leaves. This is the favourite

food of the ancestors. I cannot propose any interpretation, neither of a structuralist kind (in terms of raw, wet, etc.) nor of a semiological kind. The only thing that is worth noticing is that the *atatok* grows on hydromorphic soils, and that the mixture of *atatok* and saliva is said to be 'cool' and 'fresh'. While *Ngwatom* was preparing the food for the dead elders, the other men were playing the music of *Alub*. All this had been done before *Labah* and I walked into the room. At that point, *Alub* stopped playing music, because we had not made the appropriate payments and were not allowed to see the instruments.

When we walked in, *Ngwatom* had just sacrificed the fowl by tearing apart the lower part of its beak. It has the effect of bleeding the fowl, while avoiding the use of an iron knife and the cutting through the flesh of the sacrificed animal. *Ngwatom* was holding the fowl with both hands above the shrine, spreading the blood on the *atatok* mash. He pulled a few feathers and put them on top of the *atatok* covered in blood. All the while, he was addressing the elders with his deep bass voice, echoed by *Ngwasa* and the other men:

> *Ngwatom* (pulling the feathers): "Is this not food?"
> *Men's chorus*: "It is food."
> *Ngwatom*: "Is this not the food of olden times?"
> *Men's chorus*: "It is the food of olden times."

The fowl was dead. *Ngwatom* put it down on the ground next to the shrine. He got up and took hold of a raffia bag hanging on a wooden peg stuck in the wall: the 'bag of the fathers'. One of the men presented *Ngwatom* with a calabash of a countenance of about 3 litres, filled with raffia wine and water. He called it *Mabu'*, which is the name of the palace masquerade that escorts the notables. Whilst addressing the dead elders, *Ngwatom* took some camwood powder in the bag and rubbed it on the belly of the calabash. He then put the bag on the ground, took the calabash from the hands of the man who was holding it, and poured part of its content in a continuous line from the door to the hearth at the centre of the room. *Ngwasa* joined him by the side of the hearth and took the calabash from his hands. *Ngwatom* then took a bunch of thin vines of *ndor* (*Basella alba*) he had prepared beforehand and had kept by the side of the shrine. He began to press them just above the *atatok* mash covered with blood and a few feathers, while *Ngwasa* poured some water on the hands of *Ngwatom* and the *ndor* vines. The gestures made by *Ngwatom* were those of someone washing a piece of cloth, and the verb used to designate these actions (*suge*) is the same. (For example:

ma suge ntsɛ'ɛ: 'I wash [a piece of] cloth'; and *a suge ndor*: 'he washes *ndor*'.) The water was dripping through the leaves and the vines, and from there onto the shrine. *Ngwatom* took care to flood it with water. When he finished, he put the bunch of *ndor* down on top of the *atatok*, on the shrine wall. A man left the room and called on the women who, so far, had been kept out of the performance. They came in and sat around the room, wherever they found an empty seat.

Ngwasa was still holding the calabash. He walked round the room and presented each and every person with the calabash for them to apply both hands on its belly. He stopped in front of each person, and went around at leisure. The door had remained closed, except at times when someone walked in or out of the room. *Ngwasa* pushed it wide open and threw outside what was left of the content of the calabash after he had poured part of it between the door and the hearth and on the *ndor* vines in order to 'wash' them. He threw it out 'against evil people'. *Ngwatom* had followed in his steps round the room holding the bag of camwood. He stopped in front of each participant, took some powder between his thumb and index, and rubbed it on the skin of each person either on the front, or on the forearm, following his whim. I did not see any obvious rationale in his choice. After that, a woman got up and sang a song about twins (*be lete awobe zing*). All the participants got up, answered the singer in chorus and began dancing slowly round the room, in a circle. With every turn, each subject crossed over the line of water that had been spilled by *Ngwasa* between the threshold and the hearth. Once the songs were over, a woman went round the room, as *Ngwasa* and *Ngwatom* had done, holding a banana leaf in each hand, with salt on top. They all helped themselves with both hands—each one on one of the two leaves, and brought the salt to their mouths. The men gave coins to the women, one in each hand, received in the same way by the women—a clear reference to the blessing of twin births.

In his discourse to the dead elders, *Ngwatom* alluded in dramatic terms to the misfortunes experienced by the group: ill-wishers roamed around the hamlets of the lineage with dreadful designs. These people possessed dangerous medicines. The dead elders had deprived their descendants of their support. Some of the members of the group suffered from hunger and malnutrition. The descent group experienced internal conflict, and one of his members was facing severe difficulties. There was not enough sharing and reciprocity between kin. One could see individualism and jealousy all around the place. At least one person suffered from ill health. Several people experienced chest and

abdominal pains. Some had been the victims of theft. Several members of the lineage, who had migrated to the Atlantic coast and had come back, brought along with them a number of bad things which spoiled and destroyed their Mankon homeland. To sum up, *Ngwatom* insisted on the protection needed by the group against outside intrusions, on sharing the good substances within the group, and on the necessity of brotherly solidarity and equity.

Ngwatom (as did *Su'* John at *Foba*'s—see chapter 2) enacted kinship relationships by bodily motions, material objects and speech. He touched, seized, tore apart, poured, smeared the skins with camwood. He moved around the shrine, the pebble of the elders, and he manipulated the leaves of *tabɛrɛ*, *atatok*, *ndor*, the fowl, the blood, the feathers, the water, the camwood, etc. In this case, I do not mention the objects for their sign-value in a system of communication or connotation (although indeed they constitute as many signs in such systems), but also for their praxic value in a system of physical agency on the subjects. The subjects move around, perceive, work on themselves and on others. This is how they engage in techniques of the self, and in processes by which they enact their identities as sons and daughters of *Ngang Fɛn*. All these actions have an effect on their subjectivities.

Motivity however does not appear only in the gestures accomplished by the subjects and in the associated material culture. It also makes its appearance in the discourse of *Ngwatom* and in the chorus of the men. These verbal expressions develop the scenario of a material world in motion. It would be tedious to give a complete transcription of *Ngwatom*'s discourse, translated into English, with appropriate comments. I will just stress the fact that the nominal and verbal forms used by *Ngwatom* make references to material things in motion. Some 59 of the 68 nouns in his recorded speech designate gestures or material objects.

The nouns referring to material objects rendered with the closest English equivalent are: animal, grass stem, parcel, bed, bag, cricket, country, calabash, camwood, door ('mouth'), food, plot (of cultivated land), fowl, ground, house, hoe, handle, medicine, money, etc. In that category, I include physical persons (boy, child, devil, husband, *Mabu'*, etc.) and parts of the body (foot, chest, head, hands, heart, etc.). The nine items that refer to more abstract things are the following: custom (tradition), discourse, present, past, selfishness, category/kind (of thing), etc. However, this categorisation of 'abstract' items is open to discussion since a word like *mbom*, here translated as 'custom', could be translated as (bodily) 'conduct' or 'behaviour'.

The verbs reinforce the general impression given by *Ngwatom*'s speech to show a number of subjects who move around in a material world whilst acting on other subjects. Motivity is directly concerned by 80 out of the 89 verbal forms present in the speech. For example, to break something, close, crawl, catch, pass through, direct, deliver (a child), destroy, dig, go in, eat, find, fall down, go, get up, lick, take, redress, smash (to pieces), turn, touch, throw, etc.

Ngwatom does not satisfy himself with moving around, interacting with the other subjects and manipulating the objects. His speech conjures up a world in motion. Here are, as an example, his first tape-recorded sentences, translated as literally as possible:

> Every one of us should be very careful, when moving around, not to put one's foot on bad medicines ('herbs') deposited on the ground. There are many of them. Yet we do not know where they are hidden. You (the dead elders) possess a perfect knowledge of those bad medicines. You begot us, and yet you do not bring us your support any longer. We ourselves know a number of medicines, but only those that can help the country and not those which allow one to aim at a person while saying: 'I will spoil this person with (medicinal) herbs'.

Then, *Ngwatom* carries on with his speech talking of malevolent persons, lying in hiding in their own house, and getting out to roam around the hamlets of the *Makwu Shwiri* lineage, and concealing bad medicines in various places. He does not explain under which form these persons move around. In other speeches, one can see them under the guise of animal transforms, or hailstorms, tornadoes, etc. Such transformations provide the rationale for the notables and the palace to set traps across the paths in order to catch and neutralize them, as do the palace retainers when they achieve the closure and protection of the city by means of the 'medicine of the king' (see chapter 5).

The other misfortunes to which the patrilineage of *Ngwatom* fell victim are described in concrete and material terms: there is not enough food. Why are the hearts of the members of the group 'in several pieces', which means that they are secretive and hide a number of things from each other and engage in conflicts? *Ngwatom* addresses the dead elders as if they were really present and listening to him (and indeed, for him, they are really present): "Father *Ngang Fɛn*, father *Anyɛ' Ntchifo*, father *Fru Su Tembungu*, this child is too dry. We take these *ndor* leaves to wash them all. Won't they be refreshed?"

The persecutory themes in *Ngwatom*'s speech emphasise the strength of the scheme of envelope in structuring space, the descent group, the

city and each subject. There are evil persons and things *outside* these various envelopes, they all threaten to break through the skins or envelopes and to intrude in the city/group/subject. Some have succeeded, and there is a certain amount of evil substances/things/intentions *within* the subjects or the group. The speech is fully consonant with the governmentality of containers.

Put all your eggs in the same basket…

In this chapter, I focused on the succession process and presented a section of the mechanical reproduction of inequalities and statutes from one generation to the next. The corporate estate of the group remains intact and undivided until the death of the physical body of the 'father'. When this takes place, the estate is neither divided up nor distributed among the offspring. It is kept intact and undivided to be re-invested as a whole and as quickly as possible in a young subject, selected for that purpose. The positional succession insures the continuity of the 'vital piggy-bank' from one generation to the next, without ever being broken and its content spilled out or distributed between the members of the group. The title holder is rejuvenated. He has shed his old slough, that of the deceased, and has acquired a new envelope by the capture of a young and lively body strong enough to take over. From now on, the latter has to assume the tasks of receiving, storing and giving out the ancestral substances in all his daily actions, when he gives out food, medicines, raffia wine; when giving out his semen, his breath and his speech; when making unctions of oil and camwood, and when addressing the dead elders during that sort of Easter liturgy constituted by the annual libations to the dead elders.

The whole contraption is physical and embodied. The narrative of the offerings made by *Ngwatom* (though not in the context of a succession) allowed me to illustrate the way the bodily conducts propped against material culture combined with speech to symbolise a world of good and evil persons and substances around the members of the group.

The mechanics of the transmission of the unbreakable vital piggy-bank from one generation to the next is one more illustration of the two faces or sides of the pot-king or the pot-notable: the side of the technologies of power and the side of the subjective identifications; the side of the governmentalities and the side of subjectivity. Taking popular wisdom backwards, Mark Twain had coined the following

maxim: "put all your eggs in the same basket, and *watch* that basket". This is exactly what the Mankon do: they put all their eggs in the notable's body, in his house and hamlet, and they *watch* it.

The subjects are the substance of the lineages, of the notables, of the city and king. This substance is contained in the bowels of the body politic, the 'intestines of the State', as Argenti says. The subjects are swallowed, eaten as a good substance, digested, or, if they spoil, expelled, the way excreta are expelled. But a single subject, provided he is engaged in an upwards trajectory in the kingdom's hierarchy, will be the container of whatever is smaller than him in the hierarchy, or the substance contained in the containers of higher orders. Thus, the subjects are identified as containers and content, or both. These identifications are constantly re-enacted in the performances, the bodily conducts based on procedural knowledge, on images and on verbalisations proposed by the houses, the doors, the closure of the city, the wooden carvings, etc. The successor, the 'house-eater', absorbs, digests and contains the corporate estate of the group constituted by the persons, the farmlands, the raffia bushes, the buildings and all the substances of the household.

The counterpart of Mark Twain's maxim is that the notable, as a vital piggy bank, is considered as the only *real*, and most fertile, father of the group. Accordingly, he has many wives whilst a significant number of men have none. The latter are barred from sex and trapped in life-bachelorhood. One could expect a rebellion on the part of the male cadets. Actually, it is the reverse: the cadets comply with this organisation and do not wish for an alternative.

CHAPTER TEN

DE-SEXUALISED BACHELORS

In Mankon, I collected genealogies concerning some 5,000 different persons. Analysing this database, I came to the conclusion that in about 1900, one in two men remained a bachelor for life, and most of these were also excluded from sex. The slave trade concerned mostly young men. As a result, the proportion of bachelors must have been reduced to a "mere" 30 per cent of the total adult male population residing in Mankon. This however was not a temporary situation for the men concerned. One in three adult males never married or had sex throughout his lifetime. In a village setting where there is little privacy, especially for junior men, it was extremely difficult to have extramarital affairs. The rumours concerning the young "wood carriers" of the kings' and notables' wives belong to the folklore of the white colonialists who were convinced that sex is an irrepressible drive, especially in Africans.

As far as Mankon is concerned, the fact that the bachelors were excluded from genital sex reveals their childlike status throughout their lifetime. Age was not predicated on the astronomical or objectified calendar, it was mostly a matter of status and seniority. The cadets were the junior members of the society even at an advanced age. They could not claim ownership on anything like tools, furniture, the product of their labour, let alone land and livestock. All this remained in the corporate estate of their descent group, and it was managed by the head of the group.

The social category of the bachelors is an enigma. Why did they comply? How could they do so when faced with the narcissism of the polygamous father (often a half-sibling of their own generation) without being plunged into depression, or rebellion? The enigma is all the more puzzling when it can be seen that, well into the 1970s and even beyond, all the Mankon, even bachelors and spinsters, said that they owed everything to their father: "he gave me everything, he clothes me, he feeds me and when the time comes, he will provide me with a wife". Those are the most common (and it seems sincere) comments, even when the speaker has been fed by his mother, when he purchases his own clothes with the money he earns as a petty trader or a taxi

driver, and gives out what is left of his earnings to his father. The cadets confess they have a debt to their father that they cannot repay because they owe their life to him. (I would comment that they owe everything to him as the arch-container of the ancestral substances that are the origin of all life and wealth.) In the 21st century, young migrants who work in African towns, or in Europe and the USA, deprive themselves in order to send part of their earnings to their 'father' who, more often than not, is not their genitor.

All the more so as one looks further back into the past. For example, the colonial administrators—British and French—who were unanimous in underlining the compliance of all the subjects to the basic tenets of the kingdom, even when they registered the protests voiced against 'abusive' kings. Tardits (1960) has summarised them for the Bamileke part of the Grassfields under French mandate.

More recently, a venomous pamphlet by Patrice Kayo (1984) entitled *An open letter to a Bamileke king*, took issue with the many misdeeds attributed to the king of the fictitious city of Todjom. Yet he did not challenge the very principle of kingship which, he said, went awry in the hands of the local elites. He does not contemplate any political alternative. His position exemplifies the compliance of those who would be most likely to renege on the kingdom: the academics, the intellectuals, the professionals. In actual fact, most of them do not renege.

The Gramscian question of the compliance or adhesion of those who, in my view, bore the burden of the hierarchy, leaves me bewildered. Most Marxist analyses search for the mechanisms of oppression and exploitation. They search the minds of the oppressed to find out signs of awareness and rebellion. They fail to understand consent and even support. In the case of the Mankon kingdom, if there was any dissent on the part of unmarried cadets it is hard to detect. Its expression, if any, is muted and diverted. Whereas their most vocal, frequent and no doubt sincere statements are in favour and in support of the king and notables "to whom they owe everything". The most accessible expressions of discontent can be found in the rivalry—even the hatred—experienced against one another by those who were in a position to expect a wife or the succession to a title. This rivalry concerned those whose age, performances, ambitions and social networks qualified for the competition. Such conflicts between agnates backfired on the mothers of the contenders who intrigued to support the claims of their offspring. This provided a fertile ground for witchcraft accusations and intra-familial violence. Here is an example given by Miaffo

(1977: 86) and taken from his own family. His maternal grandfather had married a woman from a foreign kingdom who turned out to be faultless: "she was a good mother, caring for all the children of the household. She was easy-going and polite with everybody". She was too good not to become an object of envy and jealousy, so people began to accuse her of consuming the life of her entourage through witchcraft. Her husband found some truth in those accusations. The maternal uncle of Miaffo, who informed him of the case, carried on with his story as follows:

> In order to protect themselves from the misdeeds of that woman, my father and his siblings spent their time beating the children of this vampire-woman to humiliate them. They did it when the men and women of the household had left the compound for the farms. Day after day, they abused the woman and accused her of being a devil. She never did the slightest harm within the household. Yet she made herself obnoxious in the neighbourhood. My father became sick and tired. He felt compelled to take her to a distant village and to marry her to a stranger.

This is just a case (ending up in a straightforward sale) of the kind of violence taking place at the bottom of the hierarchic scale. On this particular point, I disagree with Pradelles de Latour (1991: 228) who claims that such societies were "relatively free of manifestations of violence". Is this not a (structuralist?) idealisation of their history? What I wrote on the king's excreta, on the slave trade, the poison ordeal, the violence within the confines of the households, and (*infra*) the way sexual offences were punished, seem to invalidate this view. In recent works devoted to masquerades and the royal palaces, Nicolas Argenti (2004) argued convincingly that, in the 19th and 20th centuries, Grassfields kingdoms were based on a routine implementation of intimidation and violence. Compliance and adhesion, in my view, were obtained by the enchantment of kingship and the repression of marginal dissent; by unquestioned faith, by the punishment of the unbeliever, and by witch hunting.

Did the cadets, or some of them, ever protest? Did they ever become aware of forming a structural category of subjects pushed aside and to a dead-end? In that respect, one should proceed to a critical examination of the UPC 'rebellion' of the years 1950 to 1970. On the basis of a systematic reading of the French and Cameroonian daily press of the time, Dominique Malaquais (2002) challenged what had been published (particularly by Joseph in 1977) on the 'rebellion' of the Bamileke cadets at the time of independence, and on the violent

unrest it caused. Joseph contended that the young '*maquisards*' aimed at overthrowing the Bamileke hierarchies whose weight, aggravated by colonisation, had become unbearable at the bottom. He claimed that it is the cadets who burnt down the royal palaces and went after the notables, killing and mutilating them. The daily press of the time tells a different tale. It does not show any evidence in favour of the thesis of a popular uprising. This latter scenario seems to have been written as an afterthought in order to legitimise a violent mass repression conducted by the French and the Cameroonian armed forces in the context of the Cold War. It seems, D. Malaquais (2002: 326–337) wrote, that the women and the cadets kept quiet. They busied themselves to achieve the end of the many Bamileke kingdoms in order to prevent the penetration of more or less disruptive and violent outside forces, in particular the French army, the Cameroonian armed forces, the Special Branch of the police, and the leaders of independence movements who tried to gain local support. All this took place with a background of decolonisation, independence and nationalist movements, Cold War, subversive guerrilla techniques, and a merciless international scramble for the control of African colonies. In order to achieve their aim, women and cadets dug deep ditches across the roads and bush paths. In other words, far from destroying the kingdom, they achieved its protection. I would hypothesise that they also made use of medicines to achieve those ends.

The political and military archives are still classified at the time of writing, and historical research on that period is impaired. However, oral sources are there to be collected, and independent researchers such as Elvis Tangwa Sa'a[1] are beginning to work on them. They dovetail with the enquiries by Dominique Malaquais (2002) to reassess the role of the cadets. In the last decades of the 20th century, very few people—and certainly not the cadets—were willing to challenge the principles of kingship. Indeed, under colonisation, the tensions between the tip and the base of the Grassfields kingdoms were exacerbated because the kings and chiefs had become the agents of the colonial administration in tax collection and labour recruitment. However, whenever external threats materialised, there were very few institutions to resort to. The mission was one of them, but mission posts were still few and far between throughout the colonial period. The king and the notables

[1] Personal communication.

were the other major institution, and they were everywhere to be found, however unsatisfactory they may have been. Political unrest at the time of independence triggered the re-birth of the kingdoms instead of weakening them. Most kings allied with Ahmadu Ahidjo, the first president of Cameroon. They benefited from his support, in spite of the fact that the Cameroonian state tried to weaken their role and their status in the territorial administration of the Grassfields. The hegemonic alliance between the kings and President Ahidjo was a key factor in the 'return of the kings' during this period. By contrast, in the 1990s, the success of the Social Democratic Front and of his leader, John Fru Ndi, widened the gap between the cadets and the kings. John Fru Ndi did not have any title of nobility. A petty stationary and book trader in Bamenda, he represented the urban migrants who had escaped from the closure achieved by the pot-king. He addressed the crowds in Pidgin and did not identify with any of the local kingdoms. He was popular enough beyond the Grassfields to challenge President Paul Biya and his retinue of kings, including *Ngwa'fo* of Mankon whose palace was threatened a couple of times by angry mobs of people who had set on fire the compound of a notable on their way. Until the years 2000, the gates to the palace were not protected by any lock. Around 2000, the king had metallic doors and gates put on all the entrances to the palace, and he began to walk around with bunches of keys. Did gates and keys sound the knell of the pot-king and mark the first effective challenge by the cadets?

Consequently, one should re-assess the character of the rebellious '*Tapenta*' of 1910–1930. *Tapenta* is the pidginised version of 'interpreter' (of the white coloniser).[2] Equipped with khaki shorts and a beret that made him look like a uniformed employee, armed with one of the 3,000 breechloader rifles lost by the Germans in their calamitous campaigns around 1890–1900, the *tapenta* was followed by a swarm of youngsters. He claimed to act on behalf of the colonial administration. He terrorised the villagers in the early years of the 20th century, helped by the withdrawal of the Germans during the first World War and by the difficulties met by the French and British in building a new colonial administration. At first, I thought that they expressed the rebellion of the cadets (see Warnier, 1993: 206, and 1996). In the light of more recent work (especially by D. Malaquais) and of a more sophisticated analysis

[2] Personal communication with E.M. Chilver.

of my own data, I think an alternative and more plausible hypothesis could be put forward. In the context of the failure of the Germans to rule the Grassfields by proxy through a few selected kingdoms promoted to paramountcy (see Chilver, 1967), the *Tapenta* were most probably acting on behalf of certain kings to loot neighbouring kingdoms and bring the proceeds back to their patrons. The possession of a gun constitutes a strong argument in favour of that hypothesis because the kings and notables remained in control of guns and marriageable girls—until the 1950s, those two items, so to speak, being exchangeable for one another. If this were true, the *Tapenta* would be the direct successor of the pre-colonial *bigwe* who accomplished the same kind of tasks on behalf of the kings—except that the *tapenta* benefited from the 'improved' technology provided by the breechloader, the uniform, and the authority of the coloniser.

The question raised by M. De Certeau (1987), M. Foucault, K. Marx ("I exploit you and I make you enjoy it"), and of course Gramsci, are more relevant here than most questions raised with a modicum of wishful thinking by many Marxist thinkers concerning the industrial proletariat, its class-consciousness, its upheavals, and its strategies in a situation of class conflicts. Gramsci, Certeau and Foucault, a century after Marx, were more sceptical than him. They were witnesses to the fact that the subjects can be deceived into obedience and submission. The latter comply or oblige more often than could be expected at face value, considering the way they are repressed and exploited. What makes them comply? How can they become the accomplices of an non-egalitarian organisation? What amount of power do they themselves wield? What are the mechanisms that produce compliance, a 'general will', in brief, an hegemonic alliance? Why does 'it' work? The 'it' being what characterises a governmentality as against the actor's choices and strategies in the functionalist theories of power. One cannot explain the pregnant strength of the governmentality of containment without answering such questions.

Bachelors and 'he-goats'

Gender studies developed out of an awareness concerning the subjected condition of women that expose some of them to oppression and to all sorts of abuses. In Mankon, until the onset of colonisation, the condition of women does not seem to have been particularly harsh or debasing.

By marriage, they acquired a status, even if it was a subordinated one to that of their husbands. Maternity, in spite of the serious hazards and the burden it entailed, was rewarding and, in the vast majority of cases, won them the respect of men. Pregnancies were spaced out by breast-feeding and abstinence as long as the infant had not acquired enough autonomy to cross the high threshold of its mother's house on his own. Married women enjoyed considerable economic independence and practiced communal work to spread the workload among them as a social security against illness and other hazards and impediments. They participated freely to all the meetings and public performances. They patronised the marketplace of their kingdom. They were entitled to keeping their own crops, savings, house and furniture.

By contrast, this was by no means the case with the male cadets, reduced to bachelorhood, a low status, and no economic autonomy. They constituted the lowest social category, far behind married women.

As regards the male bachelors, what is most intriguing, for the 21st century Westerner, is their exclusion from the exercise of genital sexuality and the fact that it was, so to speak, a kind of physical and even mechanical phenomenon, or, to put it slightly differently, something that had to do with the physics of substances. In this case, as in so many others, the ethnographic experience goes against accepted wisdoms. It reveals, for the 19th century and through to the 1920s, the effectiveness of strict moral standards regarding sexuality, enforced by harsh punishment, but, more efficiently, by the fact that there was no initiation for boys. As a result, they did not internalise or appropriate their access to adult age and the exercise of sexuality.

Let us have a look at the more repressive side of the picture. The unmarried girls who had been caught with a lover were given a thorough beating, and, most of the time, were sold into slavery. In any case, they would not be in a position to make a decent marriage in or around Mankon. The man who was suspected to have had sexual intercourse with the girl would be caught by her agnates and the way he was punished was left to the appreciation of the girl's descent group. According to Mankon oral tradition, he was usually tied up to a tree, abused, beaten, and covered with thorny and itching plants until his own descent group redeemed him or abandoned him, to be sold in slavery. If he was a bachelor, he could forsake any prospect of marriage or succession to a title.

The adultery with a married woman was likened to a theft for consumption (a theft ending up in selling the stolen good was far more

severely punished). It was settled by compensation between the culprit and the husband of the unfaithful wife. Many beliefs, almost universally shared in Grassfields societies had it that conjugal infidelity caused more or less serious mishaps during pregnancy, delivery and the early years of the child. Miaffo (1977: 34–36) and I (Warnier, 1993: 89–111) have already described them. Such beliefs can be easily expressed or translated in terms of bodies and substances: the mixing of the semen of different men in the womb of a single woman is dangerous and impure for her, for the foetus and for the newborn. Fear has its effects. And such risks inspired fear.

I will return later to the question of sexuality which seems central to me and can be expressed as follows: how can a subject, empty of any (real or imaginary) reproductive substance, experience his sexuality? Or else: what are the forms assumed by the psychic drives of a subject that has not been shaped and produced as a subject fit for reproduction and the reproductive exercise of genital sex? Let us leave that question aside for the time being and return to the question of the status or condition of the cadets.

The Mankon language is fairly precise regarding the various categories of women: *mu mangye* ('female child') for a girl; *mangye neubweu* ('female with breasts') for an adult girl or woman; *ngwe* for a wife; *ma*, *nimye* or *nimon* (term of address) for a mother. It is less precise as regards their male counterparts. As already mentioned, a man moves gradually from the condition of a child to that of a container/father without any clearly identifiable transition, except for his first marriage, when he is anointed with oil and camwood, and for his second marriage and, possibly, succession to an office. However, one can distinguish the following terms: *mungwa* for a young boy; *mu mbangne* ('child male' sg.) for a boy or any unmarried man whatever his age; *ndom* for a husband (that is, not the genitor of the wife's children but the 'father' who paid the bridewealth for her and who provides the ancestral reproductive substances); *ta* for a 'father'; *takwe* for a male, not so young, bachelor.

If those words seem to differentiate clearly between different categories of men, their use is sometimes surprising. If, for example, a man of 30 to 35 years of age (let us call him *Fru*) is married to a woman procured by his 'father' (let us say *Tawa*), this woman will be considered as the 'wife' (*ngwe*) of *Tawa* and not of *Fru*, since *Tawa* is the one who procured the bridewealth and the ancestral reproductive substances (speech, breath, oil and camwood) for her marriage. Moreover, *Fru* is still a member of the corporate group constituted by the household of

Tawa. He does not have any autonomy. There is only one container and one content—that of *Tawa*. When addressing *Fru*, the children of the household will say '*tita*' ('father')—which is the term of address for any married man. However, when asked who is their 'father', all the children, including the children of *Fru*, will name *Tawa* (the 'father' of the whole household), and not *Fru* (their genitor). At times, depending on the context, the wife of *Fru* will mention either *Tawa* or *Fru* as her 'husband'. *Fru* again, depending on the context, will be mentioned either as *mu mbangne* ('child male'), or *ndom* ('husband'), and less likely as *ta* ('father'). It is only when he acquires a second wife and a modicum of economic and residential autonomy, and even more, perhaps, ritual autonomy, that he will appear as a real *ta* ('father').

During one of our meetings, Dieudonné Miaffo told me: "how many times did I hear an elder seated in front of his house call one of his daughters-in-law and tell her: "Bring me my raffia wine. Remember that your real husband is me. He (talking of his son, married to the woman) is only the stud (the 'he-goat')". The son, as a stud or a genitor, begot the children on behalf of the 'husband' and thanks to the ancestral substances given out by the latter.

In other words, if the different categories of men are clearly identifiable, their perimeters are blurred, except at the two ends of the continuum of statuses: the boy under the age of puberty (*mungwa*) and the household or descent group head (*ta*) enjoying the benefits of a full interiority. In-between, the statutory categories are blurred, and get fused into one another. The bachelors do not form a category that is recognised as such. They belong in a kind of social limbo. Any young man is seen as a potential husband. Or, at least, every man, whatever his status, will say: "any father is under the obligation of providing each of his sons with a wife". This is the *verbal* statement. But the statement never says *when* the man will be given a wife. Since there is no initiation ritual in Mankon, there are no age-grades and no means to assess when the marriage is overdue. In the past, given the *sex ratio*, which, according to all genealogical data, seems to have been normal, and given the high incidence of polygamy, only two out of three resident men *at most* ever had access to marriage. One out of two if one takes into account those who had been removed from the matrimonial market by being sold out on the slave market. The bachelor aged in the hope of a marriage always promised, always postponed, and which became more and more unlikely to ever happen as years passed. When the physical appearance of the man and his position in the chronological

landmarks of the kingdom turned him clearly into a grown-up man, people took to whispering the derogatory word of *takwe*, making his marriage all the more unlikely. If he did not have a wife, it was said, it is only because he escaped marriage and responsibilities. His failure (or that of his father) turned into a stigma and diverted against him the incapacity of his lineage to procure him a wife. In the 20th century, the word *takwe* became a term of abuse.

Back to celibacy and sexuality

Let me quote Julia, talking about the state of affairs that prevailed between young men and girls, in the 1930s, before her marriage, at a time when the ancient sexual morality still prevailed:

> We, the girls, we lived together with the boys. But the boys, what did they know (about sexuality)? The maidens, what did they know (about sexuality)? Nowadays (year 2002), as soon as a boy is weaned, he knows everything about women... Together with the boys we attended wedding ceremonies. We danced *Mbaya* all night long, until we fell exhausted. Then, we lay down wherever we could find enough space, often on the dirt floor of the houses (one against another). The boys would wear just their belt and their loincloth. At that time, the boys did not know anything.[3]

The witness accounts collected by Mike Rowlands, Clement Zuah, Dieudonné Miaffo, Francis Nyamnjoh, Adenumbi Zuah[4] give evidence of the abstinence of boys and girls until marriage, of the sexual incompetence of men in their thirties and forties having access to marriage and sex for the first time in their life, as long as the old morality prevailed, that is, in some rural areas, and for some social categories, until the end of the 1970s.

This is confirmed by a witness who was anything but prepared to admit it. M.D.W. Jeffreys was an anthropologist and a colonial administrator. He took office as Governor of the Bamenda Province during the Second World War. In a note published in the journal *Man* in 1942 entitled "Sexual inhibition in the Negro", he first mentioned the "nuptial sexual incompetence of the young adult European male" often mentioned in the specialised literature. It is usually attributed,

[3] Julia, born circa 1920. Personal communication, December 2002.
[4] Personal communication.

Jeffreys said, to the inhibitions caused by modern civilisation and the segregation of sexes. He was extremely surprised to find the same phenomenon in the Bamenda Province "among people living under more natural conditions". On visit in the kingdom of Nkot, in the northern Grassfields, he drew a sketch map of the palace and noticed a ring of stones around three standing monoliths. The king commented that it was where men suffering from impotence were medicated by sacrificing a fowl and washing their body. As a prerequisite, they undressed completely and stood stark naked. Once the medication had been performed, they had to leave immediately and to have intercourse with their wives. Jeffreys thought it was meant to cure the 'impotence of age'. Not at all, said the king, it concerned men who were still young, who had access to sexual activity for the first time, and who had proven to be incompetent. Unless they were medicated, said the king, their incompetence could last for months.

Jeffreys then concluded: "It seems that the Negro is here dealing with an erotic neurosis supposed to be the perquisite of the sex-repressed European." This, for Jeffreys, is the opposite of what he would have expected. It should be mentioned that, in the Grassfields, the exercise of any function has to be approved and triggered by the authority. A bachelor cannot accredit himself on his own account to have access to genital sex. A Mankon saying states that 'the kingdom is given out with the hand', that is, one cannot seize it on his own, it has to be handed out to the successor by others. This is equally relevant for sex.

The wedding protocol was not meant to encourage emotional involvement. Most marriages had been negotiated by the descent groups concerned and there was no room for courting. It was often the case that bride and groom hardly knew each other, especially when they belonged to different neighbouring kingdoms. Upon leaving her compound of origin, the bride received an unction of palm oil and camwood by her father and her maternal grandfather. After dusk, her friends and agnates escorted her all the way to the compound of her groom. Somewhere along the way, the two parties met and faced each other. The wife-takers attempted to attract the girl and to seize her. The wife-givers faced the other party and tried to keep the bride with them. At last, all of them arrived at the hamlet of the groom. Sometimes, the bride had to wait until then to learn about the true identity of the 'stud' with whom she was to stay, since it was the 'father' of the latter who had negotiated the alliance and was her true 'husband'. The rest of the night was spent singing and dancing. When everybody was

tired and wanted to rest, the bride and the groom stayed with their respective kin. The next day, the women of the groom's hamlet seized the bride, shaved her head (and her pubis?), gave her a bath, rubbed her body with palm oil and camwood and sprayed their saliva on her skin. Subsequently, the bride and the groom, anointed and shining with oil and camwood, were exhibited in the courtyard, seated on two stools, their back turned towards the wall of the main house, a couple of metres away from each other, motionless and looking downwards. They were shiny bodies to be displayed for the benefit of the crowd. The newlywed couple received visits from parents and well-wishers. Each incoming group seized the bride, took her away, gave her a bath and renewed the palm oil and camwood unction as well as the spray of saliva.

Once in a while, the wedding-party pushed the couple into dancing *ndenge*. Bride and groom danced side by side, holding each other's shoulders and with great restraint, while the group of musicians sang and played the harp (*nilong*):

> The father gives an unction (he 'rubs' *azo'*),
> he sleeps while dancing;
> you give a piece of cloth.
> You receive a piece of cloth.
> The groom makes an unction;
> He sleeps while dancing.
> I say; now the cloth is there.
> I make an unction;
> I sleep while dancing.
> You give a piece of cloth, etc.

Julia who married following this protocol said that, from that moment onwards, husband and wife will be a piece of cloth or a blanket for each other. They will keep warm by staying together. The song *ndenge* is said to be a 'love song' by Julius *Awasom* and Donatus, the curators of the Mankon Museum—the only 'love song' of the Mankon repertoire. Its lyrics are to be taken as the epitome of the erotic and love literature of the Grassfields!

If the newlyweds did not have previous experience, it was not unusual that several duennas of the groom's compound escort the couple to his house, enter the house with them, close the door behind them and take into their hands the initiation of those young people who 'knew nothing' about sex. The main goal was perhaps not the pleasure or the intimacy of the subjects, but successful intercourse, resulting hopefully

in a pregnancy. One should abstain from formulating a value judgment from the point of view of *ars erotica* of different civilisations or in view of the contemporary Western habits of privacy. In the human species, sexual habits and practices are extremely diversified. During a wedding night in Mankon, one can see a means by which the social group validated the exercise of sex to which the couple had access for the first time after a protracted period of repression. It was complete reversal from an internalised taboo to an external encouragement and legitimisation. In that sense, it is quite plausible that this procedure may have helped them to some extent. Whatever the case, the principle "the kingdom is given out with the hand" applies and can be transformed into "sex is given out with the hand". You cannot appropriate it on your own. Just as in the case of a title of nobility, the first marriage required a sudden and deep-reaching reshaping of the subject's identity. In line with my professional and natural curiosity, I would have liked to know more about the techniques of the body and the work done by the duennas "with the hand". However, the modest Mankon kept me out of confidence, with a burst of laughter. Yet, it is suggested that there was a traditional know-how or an erotic culture transmitted among married women in a society where open manifestations of eroticism are absent.

If the work of the duennas did not produce the expected results, the newlywed couple was left to their devices. Most probably, the bride (or the groom) would talk to her close family who would look for a way to help them. "Nature," said Julia, "would do the rest."

A de-sexualised image of the body

Those facts deserve analysis: why bachelors did not rebel? To what extent did they put up with their fate and comply with the constitution of the kingdom? Can we consider that their withdrawal from genital sex had something pathological about it? Did they compensate in homosexual practices?

My first interpretation is in line with F. Dolto's (1984) regarding the 'unconscious image of the body'. She subsequently revised and, to some extent, abandoned the distinction she made at first between the 'bodily schema' and the 'unconscious image of the body'. This distinction, however crude it may be, has the advantage of phrasing out an interesting hypothesis. F. Dolto borrowed the expression of 'bodily schema' from

Paul Schilder (1923, 1935). However, she restricted it, so to speak, to 'pure' sensori-motor conducts, that is, to anatomy and neuro-physiology; whereas the 'unconscious image of the body' would designate the fantasy of the body as it resides in the unconscious as repressed. This distinction raises a difficulty and, at the same time, it has an advantage. A difficulty because sensori-motor conducts cannot be dissociated from the drives and the emotions of the subject. An advantage because, as we shall see, it opens up a number of questions regarding the exercise of genital sex which can remain a possibility on the side of the bodily schema and be impaired on the side of the unconscious image of the body. Let us say that the 'bodily schema' belongs with the biological body (if there is any such thing). If intact, if there is no handicap and no clinical impediment to be seen, the medical doctor is in a position to say that the 'bodily schema' is in working order. However, F. Dolto said, it is liable to be impaired by what happens with the 'unconscious image of the body' which belongs with the Freudian unconscious as repressed. The sensori-motor potential may have escaped symbolisation, in which case the subject will suffer from a psychic handicap impairing the body.

This is exemplified by young Leon (pseudonym) as described by F. Dolto (1984: 288–328). Leon, eight years old, experiences great difficulties in moving about. He props himself up against the walls and furniture. Once seated, his chest falls upon the table if he is not helped to sit upright. Yet the clinical examination does not reveal any neuromuscular handicap. The 'bodily schema' of Leon is intact.

The analytical cure undertaken by F. Dolto begins with clay moulding. At first, what Leon moulds is shapeless. By and by, the clay moulding takes shape as Leon and his mother comment on their life stories. Leon's parents were poor migrant workers. They worked in a clothes manufacturing workshop at the end of the 1930s. Leon spent his early childhood in the workshop where he was fastened on a chair with a belt to prevent him from disturbing the workers. He was caught between protesting violently or repressing his drive to move around and satisfy his curiosity. In the end, he repressed his motivity and constructed an 'unconscious image of the body' in the shape of a mix of a child and a static chair—a 'child-chair', in which motivity had not been symbolised. The analytical cure restored Leon's motivity by giving a material and verbal expression to this repressed body image.

One of the possible ways of describing the condition of the cadets and their temporary exclusion from genital sex would be to say that

they had an 'unconscious image of the body' in which genital sex had been poorly symbolised, if at all. As a legitimate sensori-affective-motor conduct, it had been repressed. It was not easily accessible, as was Leon's potential for moving around as any child would. Could it be considered as a pathological condition? In some cases, perhaps. In that case, it could have been repressed beyond easy recovery and could have caused mental disorders. However, in the majority of cases, it belonged to what we would call the 'personality'. Berthe Elise Lolo, a psychoanalyst and a psychiatrist who worked for many years at the Douala central hospital once commented on my description of the cadets: "Now I understand why they do not have sexual organs." On another occasion, she mentioned that delirious melancholy was frequent with the Grassfielders who were also known for a high percentage of suicides by hanging (although M.D.W. Jeffreys (1944) thought that this was lower in the Grassfields than in the surrounding lowland forest areas). The statistics at the time were too unreliable to allow any definite conclusion.

It must be remembered that in Mankon the exercise of genital sex was not disconnected from reproduction which was dependent on the capacity of a subject to possess and withhold ancestral substances in his own body. A cadet could not symbolise his own body as a receptacle of ancestral substances and consequently as capable of reproducing and having sex. Only gradually could he symbolise and recover his potency, by a kind of 'ritual' cure. He started by being the 'stud' of the father, benefiting from the potency of the latter by proxy. He was appointed to perform by those who had the substance and authority to do so. Later on, when he acquired a second wife and a hamlet of his own, he was allowed to fully symbolise a sexualised unconscious image of the body.

No doubt, these words are rather inadequate and subject to criticism. F. Dolto herself underscored the fact that one cannot separate the 'bodily schema' and the 'unconscious image of the body'. There is no such thing as a 'body' unless it is invested by the psyche and the drives of the subject. Yet, in my opinion, the distinction is far from being useless, because it helps to understand why and how unmarried cadets could compromise with inequality, and comply. It was not by brutal external social control. They had fully internalised their condition. The control was built-in. The unconscious as repressed was the warden in charge of discipline.

Photo n° 21. Bafou bowl bearer (height: 49cm). Winizki collection. Courtesy of E. Winizki.

In Mankon and in the Grassfields at large, being a container and being allowed to have sex was one and the same thing. The Bafou artist who carved the 'Bowl bearer' of the Winizki collection (photo n° 21) was not mistaken about that. The man is seated on a leopard, which means he is a king. The bowl (a container which, given its size, was most probably used to mix oil and camwood) does not rest upon his thighs. It is embodied into the man by occupying the space of the thighs, genitals and lower belly. This exemplifies all the difference between a king and a cadet. The difference does not pertain only to rank or hierarchy. It also pertains to the way they have symbolised their body as an unconscious image of the body in gear with appropriate sensori-motor repertoires.

The scholars who have studied the Grassfields all agree on the fact that a girl is turned into a woman when she bears her first child, and a boy into a man when he begets a child. Both are prepared for that by working on their skin and their psyche at the same time.

In order to check the hypothetical component of those remarks, one would need clinical experience or make specific enquiries in the field. In Cameroon, psychiatric hospitals do not have the means to conduct research in public health and epidemiology about psychic disorders (in 2005, there were less than 10 psychiatrists for 16 million people).[5] The experience of Dr Berthe Lolo while conducting research for her 2006 thesis in psychoanalytical anthropology constitutes an important landmark to go further along those lines in the future. My first hypothesis (regarding the unconscious image of the body) calls for a second one: repression is conducive to sublimation. For example, Leon channelled his drives towards his hands which were not tied as was his body. By identifying with the manual skills of the tailor and the workers in the workshop, he developed a taste for similar kinds of activities. A piano teacher who lived in the same apartment building as his parents volunteered to give him lessons. It turned out that Leon had the hands of a virtuoso.

[5] In Bamenda, in 2002, I called several times in a psychiatric 'traditional' clinic in order to collect potentially useful observations on bodily practices, the skin, and psychic disorders. However, I did not succeed in establishing a sufficient degree of trust and friendship with the practitioners. The fact that the patients were occasionally beaten, and that many of them were permanently chained by the legs in groups of two or three, was not conducive to establishing confidence despite the fact that I took great care not to make the slightest critical comment on the practice.

Sublimation in art and other practices

Freud considered arts and intellectual pursuits as privileged activities of sublimation, although he did not elaborate much on this notion. Until the colonial conquest that unsettled Grassfields societies, these were immersed in artistic practice. Singing, dancing, playing music were daily practices. The architectural setting and all the furniture were the object of sophisticated aesthetic care. Builders, carvers, weavers, potters turned out houses, door frames, masks, utensils that became famous the world over (see for example T. Northern, 1984, and P. Harter, 1985). As regards music, it was a daily practice, as a hobby or training for marriage and birth ceremonies, libations for the dead elders, funerals, the 'dance of the king', etc. In the years 1970–2002, I met a number of impressive musicians, the most impressive of whom was *Ngwatom* of the *Makwu Shwiri* lineage.

Boys and girls played music from the most tender age. There was no formal training as there was no need for it. The children learned by listening, by imitation, and by being integrated into a group of musicians. In the 21st century, the practice is impaired by formal schooling, and has to be encouraged by the few adults who feel concerned about transmitting their skills and repertoires. There are many masquerades and they are proficient and very active at funerals. They are also quite popular and thus subsidised by the public. However, the transmission is skewed in their favour, and large sectors of the repertoire of a more esoteric or domestic nature is disappearing fast.

In the past, boys learned the different musical instruments (xylophone, drums, slit-gong, flute, etc.) by joining lineage masquerades (*mekom*, sg.), and, most importantly, the warrior lodges (*mandzong*). When they graduated to manhood, after a first, and above all, a second marriage, they were in a position to make payments to join the more prestigious masquerades like *Alub, Takumbeng, Nkekom,* and to learn the use of musical instruments like the harp *nilong* in the case of *Alub*, or the voice-disguiser in the case of *Takumbeng*).

European languages offer a number of words—art, craft, work, activity, labour—which do not fit with the vocabulary nor with the lived experience of the Mankon who tend to include them under the verb *fa'a*. I would translate it by 'doing' or 'performing'. Performance offered vast areas of sublimation and emotional gratifications to the cadets. I am fully conscious of the fact that this statement should be substantiated by ethnographic descriptions of several activities: the daily

visit to the raffia bush in order to collect raffia wine, playing music, craft activities, trading expeditions to the regional marketplaces, riotous meetings at the *mandzong* houses, etc. (See Warnier, 2004 for such descriptions.) All those activities were performed in smaller or larger groups of kin and friends, at leisure, with enough time to have a good yarn, a good laugh, and good drinking. Until the middle of the 20th century, the cadets did not know loneliness, boredom or stress, the plagues of industrial societies.

Do I idealise their condition? Daily life was hard, but, genital sex apart, more or less identical throughout the social hierarchy as far as comfort, food, health and distractions were concerned. Indeed, the threat of being sold in slavery was ever present, and witchcraft undermined family relationships. However, friendship between men was highly valued. It was, and still is, a reliable resource that prevents one from feeling lonely at night, when a friend (*tanka*) shares one's room and bed.

Finally, if their status was fragile, the bachelors had a place of their own and had many activities, some of which provided lots of gratifications, like trading in distant marketplaces, attending *mandzong* meetings, dancing and playing music. Thus many of them were in a position to live well into middle age and beyond without rebelling. We do not have figures, and this is a serious shortcoming in my analysis. However, Ch.-H. Pradelles de Latour and B.E. Lolo[6] who have direct knowledge of the Grassfields and who do not partake in the illusions of popular wisdom as regards sexuality, share my impression that the majority of the cadets were by and large reconciled with their condition. Their desires were not saturated. Their identifications, the repression of their drives, the sublimation of the latter in all kinds of activities did not raise many questions, and procured them tangible gratifications. When I was sufficiently acquainted with *Tse Ndi* to ask him questions about the protracted chastity of the palace retainers, he was taken aback. He did not have anything to say, except that retainers caught in having a private conversation with a woman were ignominiously expelled from the palace by their comrades. *Tse Ndi* approved and thought there was nothing strange or difficult about that. Born around 1890, he had spent a long time as a retainer of *Ngwa'fo II* and *Nde' Fru* at the palace. He was discharged at the end of the 1920s. He had reached his forties

[6] Personal communication between 1990 and 2006.

when he received his first wife and had for the first time genital sex. He once mentioned the fact that having sex is a loss of substance and that if a man wants to have many children, he should abstain from sex until marriage, and hoard his semen for a long time before spending it. If the majority of the bachelors could put up with their fate, it was paid at a high price, however, by the minority of them who could not be satisfied with it.

Most Western audiences to whom I presented these data were reluctant to accept them at face value. They would only admit what I said provided I accepted the hypothesis of compensations in male homosexuality, masturbation, extra-marital liaisons with widows or the frustrated wives of ageing or ill polygamists. Although the existence of homosexuality is slowly being recognised in contemporary Cameroon, it is considered as being akin to sorcery and is still severely repressed. Yet, small numbers of homosexuals make an unobtrusive come-out in some places. (In Yaoundé, the capital town of Cameroon, there are a few bars and meeting places. Provided their patrons belong to the middle class or wield positions of relative power, they may benefit from some amount of tolerance and protection on the part of the police and the authorities.) This requires that they have been able to recognise their own inclinations, in spite of the censorship internalised by them. It was nearly impossible in the past. All available information shows that any attempt at providing or accepting sexual gratifications between male subjects was so horrendous that it was immediately and drastically repressed. If one is to believe what I have been told, masturbation—practiced in many societies including contemporary Western countries—was a matter of scandal, and repressed as such. In the end, I trust what elderly informants have told me since 1971: no genital sex, whether homosexual or heterosexual, no masturbation for the male cadets. But they were not deprived of coetaneous contacts and company. There was no fuss to be made about it, it was embodied and internalised. I dwelled at length on the question of sex because it is an indicator of exceptional value for the economy of ancestral substances embodied by the pot-king.

From the 1960s onwards, women's studies drew scholarly attention to the subordinated condition of women in polygamous households. Later on, 'women's studies' broadened their scope to include 'gender' as an object of study, and to consider that the male and female conditions were correlated. In the end, they came to the conclusion that 'male studies' deserved specific attention. The comparative study of Sherry

Ortner (1981) on male bachelors illustrated this important innovation around the 1980s. It showed that the case of the Grassfields cadets is far from being unusual.

One can find equivalent situations in polygamous and non-egalitarian societies throughout the world. Sherry Ortner, an American feminist anthropologist, compared the ways such societies dealt with the genital sexuality of men who were often numerous, and, so to speak, in surplus and useless. The various solutions, says Ortner, belong to two broad categories: *removal* and *diversion.* As regards diversion, one may quote the way certain Polynesian societies or the societies of the Cameroonian forest area allow young men to have extra-marital sex with married women while subordinating them to the polygamous notable. The Grassfields choice is that of 'removal' by sale into slavery, years of service as a retainer in the palace, and the withdrawal from the matrimonial and sexual 'marketplace' through the mechanisms described above. However, if one is to broaden the question beyond sexuality, only 'diversion' in sublimation and various activities is likely to integrate the bachelors to the city in the long term.

The notables and the moral crisis in the 1920s and 1930s

The price that the subjects paid for the governmentality of closure and containment was considerable: women were submitted to polygamy, one of two men was neutered, many people sold out at the slave market, and a number of others were eliminated by the poison ordeal. A flat interpretation of the hierarchical organisation would qualify the notables as 'dominant' people who would benefit from the 'system'. Yet the notables complained about the number of their spouses and children, about the burden imposed on them by their responsibilities and about the constant and pressing demands on them.

If one asks them why they marry so many wives and have so many children, their reply is the following: "if we men did not take so many wives, most women would not have a husband". The vernacular, *emic*, reading of the situation implies that the *sex ratio* is heavily skewed in favour of women. Yet, the *sex ratio*, as assessed by demographers, is normal in the 21st century, and genealogies show that is was normal in the past too: some 105 women for 100 men. But the vernacular computation is not predicated on a census or on the dates of birth of the subjects. If I remark to a polygamous 'father' that his son whom

we shall call *Mukandzo* is growing a beard, that he even has a few white hairs, and that he is still a bachelor, the reply (as sincere and ready-made as in the case of polygamy) is: "but he is still a child", or "he is a delinquent", a *takwe*. In other words, this man, whom the demographer perceives according to criteria of age (computed in calendar years) and sex, is perceived in the Grassfields according to criteria of age (computed according to status) and of quality of coetaneous and statutory envelope or 'skin'. According to such criteria, about 30 per cent of the male subjects above 25 years of age are not 'men'. Consequently, strictly speaking, all the 'men' are actually married, and there is not a single 'man' who does not have a wife.

Around 1995, I began to be puzzled by the condition of the notables practicing high polygamy, in relationship with the condition of the cadets. Reading through the anthropological literature about sexuality in comparative perspectives (S.B. Ortner and H. Whitehead, eds, 1981; S.G. Frayser, 1985; P. Caplan, 1987), the *Annual Review of Anthropology* and searching for the keywords 'sexuality' and 'polygamy' in several databases, convinced me that the sexuality of male polygamists did not rouse any scientific interest. Pending more thorough investigations, I can say that, whereas the sexuality and emotional life of women in polygamy has been a focus of research in women's studies, no anthropologist or sexologist seems to have investigated the experience of male polygamists and their sexuality, especially polygamists with more than 20 wives. The commonsensical wisdom that I accepted until the 1990s, was that the polygamist is a fully satisfied man thanks to his many partners, and to the recruitment of young newcomers into his harem, who would kindle his libido dulled by age and satiety. The commonsensical wisdom could also portray him as a domestic tyrant submitting his women to emotional blackmail and his whims. No doubt, my age and a psychoanalytical experience drew my attention to the many traps and conundrums of the sexual drive, pleasure and sex, in such a way that I began to hear the dissatisfactions and even the complaints of the polygamists—the kings and notables I have known since the 1970s.

Furthermore, my attention was drawn by the conversion of many polygamists to Christianity in the 1920s. They mostly dismissed all their wives except one. In Mankon, it was the case of *Avwontom*, of the *Maso'* clan, of *Awa' Aku*, of the *Makwu Shwiri* lineage, and of many others. The conversion of women and cadets can be easily accounted for: given their subordinated condition, it gave them a foothold in the

alternative spaces opened up by the Christian mission, the town or the development of a market economy, including the labour market; these three spaces being tightly interconnected.

But what could induce male polygamists to ruin all at once the social and moral economy of their households as well as what looks like the source of considerable emotional and sexual gratification? The missionaries themselves deplored the unintended effects of their conversion to Christianity: broken down families, forsaken women, conflicts over bridewealth reimbursement, etc. Such was the case with the missionaries of the Evangelical church. Van Slageren (1972: 169) recounted that in 1923 in Bangangte, four notables converted to Christianity and to monogamy. They dismissed all their wives except one, and 'distributed' them to poor unmarried Christians and to the Mission catechists. (By the way, one can recognise here the pattern of the *ta nkap* marriage system whereby a wife-giver gives out a wife to a man of lower condition without bridewealth payment and claims a matrimonial right on the daughters born from the union, to be married according to the same system. It is a means to built up a social network.) However, in some cases, Van Slageren wrote, women abandoned or given out without any proper alliance negotiation, began to stay with other men as concubines or were soon perceived as prostitutes. As early as 1926, the conference of the Evangelical Church felt concerned about the phenomenon, devoting part of its annual report to this question. Considering this phenomenon, well documented but hardly analysed, we can make the following observations:

Firstly, I know of no king who would have forsaken polygamy and strictly adhered to any of the Christian denominations. When they were practicing and monogamous Christians before succeeding their fathers, they reneged at the time they assumed office. Before his accession to the Mankon throne in 1959, *Ngwa'fo III* was an agricultural engineer, a civil servant at the Ministry of Agriculture and a monogamous member of the Presbyterian Church. He was, and still is, a keen supporter of technical and economic development and modernisation. As soon as he was forced to succeed his father, he ceased to attend the Presbyterian Church and took over his father's harem (around 60 wives in 1959, according to my estimates). He negotiated a special status for his first wife and her children who all attended higher education institutions and became successful. He kept making new marriage alliances, in small numbers, so as to slowly diminish the number of his wives. In

2002, he had about 30 wives. He told me on several occasions that his successor would be well advised to have only five, but certainly no less because the royal office is inconceivable without the practice of polygamy. So monogamy does not befit the vast reproductive capacity of the pot-king.

Ngwa'fo III is no exception. All the kings of the Grassfields stayed out of a movement of conversion in a society which, until the 21st century, could not afford to do without its kingdoms insofar as they structured both the local and the national political spaces. By contrast, polygamy does not seem to have been a fundamental stake with the notables, and from the 1920s, one could be a Christian, practice monogamy, and yet have a high-ranking title.

Secondly, the National Archives of Cameroon at Buea and several testimonies in and around Mankon show the lack of restraint of certain kings who put themselves at risk by becoming infatuated with young beauties they wanted to possess at any cost while neglecting their wives. The fact is frequent enough to raise a question: how can a man who is supposed to be more than satisfied want more of it and something new, unless he is under the illusion that he could boost a libido which is at pains to keep up? 'Always more' and complaining seem to be frequents symptoms of too much satisfaction and of a lack of want.

Thirdly, polygamists mostly complain about the repeated and pressing demands addressed to them. They deplore having no leeway, and spending most of their time and energy giving out again and again. In such kinds of pleas, I learned to detect over-gratification. The notable is not wanting in anything, his drives are saturated. (I have learned to understand this plea not only from the polygamous notables in Mankon, but, also in France, with the unhappy privileged.) There is no space for want, expectation, desire, and therefore pleasure. Such is the burden of being a notable.

Fourthly, speaking of sexuality, there does not seem to be any serious study concerning the lived experience of polygamists, so one can but hypothesise that they were not in a permanent state of ultimate pleasure and satisfaction; not the majority of them at least. The emphasis on procreation and its political significance in the case of the king, the emphasis on performance, the difficulty of constructing any privileged and eroticised relationship with a partner, the spacing out of the encounters with each wife, the rivalries and intrigues around the ageing notable or monarch, the frustrations of the wives, were likely to turn the exercise of sexuality into a chore. All the same, the kings

and notables keep saying that sex is not primarily meant for pleasure.[7] Indeed I do not think that sex in Mankon conformed to a logic of pleasure—not for the cadets who were excluded from it, not for the wives who were subordinated to procreation, and not for the notables who were subjected to its law. Sex conformed to a *political* logic of closure and hierarchical construction. The burden placed on notables and the repression of pleasure were the price paid to reproduce the governmentality of the pot-king. Sexuality cannot be transposed from one social context to another. Westerners, including some anthropologists, find it difficult to admit this.

Fifthly, in 2002 in Mankon, I asked elderly people of both sexes why should polygamists convert and adopt the 'one man one woman' which still today puzzles the Mankon people above 50 years of age (including the people living in monogamous marriage for religions reasons). One of the most frequent answers concerned love: the notables, it is said, saw the 'white man' and the Presbyterian or Baptist pastor hand in hand with their respective wives. White people talked about love between men and women. I owe this piece of information to Julia, Joseph *Avwontom*, Clement *Zua'*, Ambrose and Theresia *Ngu*, Peter *Ade Atso'o.* The old *Avwontom* of *Maso'*, whom I met in the 1970s, was born before 1890. He had been a palace retainer, and had succeeded to a title of the lineage *Maso' beAla'a Takinge*. He owned a house of noble architecture and had married several wives. (I have the names of three of them on the partial genealogy I collected in 1971. In actual fact, he had many more.) He had converted to Christianity around the turn of the 1930s to live the rest of his life with one of his wives, *Ngum Mamben*, with whom he shared a true and reciprocal love relationship. In the 1970s, the aged couple displayed a striking complicity. *Avwontom* appreciated the ethnographic enquiry that tickled his inquisitive mind. Intrigued by the relationship between *Avwontom* and *Ngum* who participated in most of our encounters, I asked them if they could pose for a series of photographic portraits. They accepted willingly (see photo n° 22). In 2003, one of those portraits was still on display in the house of their son, Peter *Avwontom.*

[7] 'Nonsense,' one of my colleagues said (actually, he was less polite). I suggested he tried a couple of months with "only" ten wives. Having occasional affairs is a different thing altogether.

Photo n° 22. *Avwontom* and his wife *Ngum Mamben* (1972).

It may well be that the case of *Avwontom* and *Ngum* is an exceptional one. A number of notables may have tried to emulate them without much success. *Awa' Aku* had 21 wives and repudiated them all except one when he converted. I did not meet this woman, who had died before I first came to Mankon. However, the oral tradition in the family of *Awa' Aku* with whom I maintain an enduring friendship did not give me the impression that the monogamous attempt made by the patriarch had been very successful. One should remember that, in African patrilineal societies, the standard relationship between husband and wife is structurally tense, as against the relationship between a woman and her brother. Lévi-Strauss has formalised this kind of structure as part of the 'kinship atom'. One does not reform that kind of structure by decree. However, the conclusion one may draw from those facts is that the burden of polygamy was weighty enough for the notables to see in the European monogamous couple a desirable model. One should conduct much more thorough research than I was able to do—especially in the field and in the missionary archives—to clarify this point and to ascertain how the disbanding of the polygamous household could accommodate the economic constraints and the dynamics of intra and inter-lineage relationships.

The conversion of the notables, initiated in the 1920s, partakes in a number of changes which draw the contours of a crisis of subjectivity, of a change in the moral economy of the kingdom that lasted some 40 years, corresponding more or less with the reign of *Nde' Fru* in Mankon (1920–1959). It is contemporary with the development of labour migrations to coastal plantations (especially those of the Cameroon Development Corporation—CDC; see Konings, 1993), or to the towns of Douala and Kalabar, the discovery by the migrants of new lifestyles, new patterns of consumption, a freedom that was out of reach in the kingdom, and a return home with some savings and emblematic objects such as a gun or a gramophone.

Later on, these changes were accelerated by the development of the town of Bamenda, the capital of the North-Western Province of Cameroon—partly built on Mankon land—around the main street called Commercial Avenue, with its bars, night clubs, shops, central market and cinema. The individual tragedies which took place in the wake of the conversion of the notables concerned above all the women. They are still remembered ("yes, there were many women who had no husband"). However, they are the object of denial of responsibility on the part of the Christians ("no, these women were not left derelict by the conversion of the notables"). Lastly, the growing commoditisation of vast domains of daily life, the beginnings of mass consumption in the 1950s, constitute the last pieces of the scenery in which a new character made its entry, that of the *takwe*, the dedicated bachelor.

The subjectivity crisis of the 1920–1960 period and the takwe

Going back to Mankon in 2002, I had intended to collect information on polygamy, sexuality and bachelorhood. In the course of a conversation with *Adenumbi Zua'*, my research assistant, I heard the Mankon word *takwe*, meaning 'bachelor'. I had never heard it before or at least I had never paid any attention to it. "It is a term of abuse," said *Adenumbi*, "you should not use it in public." This was enough to induce me to do quite the opposite. In the following days, I submitted my discovery to several elderly people: Peter *Ade*, Margaret *Ate, Awindo.* Their reactions were always the same: some discomfort, roaring laughter, salacious innuendos and a lot of contempt towards the *takwe*. I wanted to know more and to list the features of what *Adenumbi* and I came to mention as '*takwe*-ism'. At first glance, if a man above 30 years of age, has

steady work, a good character, is successful with women, and is still unmarried, it means that he shuns responsibilities. He does not want to assume the care of children and he wants to remain a bachelor and to take advantage of it. A woman can say to him: "would you be at least able to raise a child?" This is extremely offensive.[8]

I would have thought the reverse: when one is useless, jobless, and undesirable to women, then one is a despicable *takwe*. But this does not take into account the peculiar regime of male sexuality in Mankon. Actually, the *takwe* is a womaniser. He engages in a permanent quest for sex and food. If he happens to hear the pounding of an *atshu'* mortar, he takes it as a call and he walks towards it until he arrives at the house where the woman is pounding the national Mankon dish. He spends his money purchasing good clothing. But more often, he tries to be fed and maintained by the women he seduces, going from one to the next. He is characterised by his sexual appetite, and in many cases, he is handsome. The confirmed *takwe* is often a good musician, especially at drumming. Many women wish to have the visit of a *takwe*, with no illusion about any enduring relationship, since, from the onset of monogamy, many women have no husband and no child. They are willing to give food and sexual favours, and to have children out of wedlock, that they will bring up on their own. Actually, the number of unmarried women is largely due to the conversion of the notables, to forced labour migrations with high death rates among men at the beginning of colonisation, and to migration to the towns.

The women, it is said, receive the visit of the *takwe* in their house. They try to hide from their neighbours. They get ready to go to the farm in the morning. They walk together with other people, then come back by circuitous paths. By the time they reach their house, everyone has deserted the neighbourhood. The woman and her *takwe* spend a couple of hours together behind closed doors. After that, the woman returns to her farm. In the evening, she joins a group of people and returns home with them.

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[8] B.E. Lolo (2006), a Cameroonian psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, mentioned the specific symptoms of the Grassfields (and generally speaking, the Cameroonian) man. These symptoms can be summarised in the sentence: "give me a child and I will marry you afterwards". This he fails to do when the woman has a child. And he tries again with another woman. This has to do with an endless quest for the impossible recognition of his manhood since the collapse of the relevant social procedures.

In the vernacular description of the *takwe*, he is seen as the anti-hero. He is in every detail the opposite of the notable. He has not succeeded to any title. He refuses marriage, procreation, the care of children, social responsibilities, the ascetic accumulation and dispensation of vital substances and money. In addition, he wants to enjoy himself and have the time of his life. The sexual practice of the notable is utilitarian; that of the *takwe* hedonistic and flamboyant. He is despised by everybody. *Awindo* gave a couple of names, but refused to sketch the corresponding biographies.

The character of the *takwe*, as described here, seems to have made his appearance in the 1920s. Before that, an odd bachelor, more clever than the others, could have illicit affairs with the derelict widows or wives of ageing or sick notables. The latter did so at their own risk, they did not boast about it nor did they turn their behaviour into a lifestyle. The husband, it is said, cast a blind eye and tried to seal the affair in secrecy to avoid making a fool of himself. However, such cases seem to have been few.

When the polygamous notables took advantage of their conversion to dismiss their wives, they created the proper conditions for the invention of the *takwe*. The latter took advantage of their lowly status as unmarried cadets. Instead of being trapped in it, they turned it into a privilege, into a lifestyle that escaped the social norms. They dissociated the exercise of sexuality from responsible reproduction. It is the *takwe* who became the most effective challenger to the pot-king. The scorn addressed to them, the innuendos of serious and responsible people, the silence surrounding their identity stigmatised them as the atheists of the sacred kingship.

Were they as numerous as my informants were willing to say? They did not give me many names. Besides, as I already said, the sexual mores seem to have carried on well into the 1960s and 1970s. The *takwe* epitomise a scandal, a deep crisis of subjectivity, of which one can find many other symptoms, like the controversies around the transmission or lack of transmission of the esoteric knowledge and know-how, together with the power-objects of the diviners, magicians and 'traditional' doctors from one generation to the next.

The historical context of the 1920s onwards was of deep, subjective crisis marked by the conversion of many notables, the dismissal of their harems, the appearance of the *takwe*, the changing habits of divorced wives, the appearance of new consumer behaviour and the introduction of European commodities outside the kings' and notables' control. The

majority of young men who had not migrated still complied with the old morality until the 1970s. Unless they migrated to the towns, the access of young men to genital sex still remained subjectively and objectively difficult in the village setting of many Grassfields kingdoms.

The politics of sex

The data on which the present chapter is based are not all reliable. A lot of research remains to be done in colonial and missionary archives. Evangelical, Presbyterian and Catholic missionaries addressed the questions I am raising in this chapter, as Van Slageren (1972) showed. They were aware of the responsibility of the churches in the crisis. Their point of view would be most important in order to complement, and perhaps qualify, the results of my ethnographic enquiry. One should also enquire about the possible return of polygamy in the 1950s and 1960s, when there was a growing disenchantment with Christianity. The missionaries had said that Jesus had won over the forces of evil, and yet witchcraft seemed to be more widespread than at the time when the poison ordeal was practiced. Nowadays, it is noticeable that Grassfields businessmen who achieve success take titles of nobility in their kingdom, and can marry up to 10 wives. Victor Fotso, the wealthiest of them all, had 11 wives in the 1990s.

However, the picture is now clear enough to justify a number of questions, of hypotheses and of provisional conclusions. The exercise of genital sex seems to be an essential component of the governmentality of containers. It is a valuable indicator of the technologies of power—all the more interesting since it concerns the body and psychic drives. It has a political dimension. What strikes a 21st century Westerner most is that the Mankon ask too much from some of them—the notables—while putting others—the cadets—out of business in many respects. Somehow the latter are useless and in surplus. The axiological neutrality of the sociologist should prevent him from passing any value judgment. However, the fact that the Westerner may perceive the Mankon situation as problematic raises a sociological question.

The 'choice' made by the Mankon kingdom (not a self-conscious articulated choice) is predicated on the logic of the pot-king and the vital piggy-bank: the king and notables are the only subjects who contain life essence and ancestral reproductive substances. The number of

their wives is a good indicator of the reproductive capacity they were credited with. The king had some 150 spouses in the 19th century. He could be compared to the queen of a beehive, unique, and subordinated to the reproduction of the body politic.

The exercise of genital sex, in the extreme case represented by the Mankon kingdom, is a technique of the body, a technique of the self and a technology of power. It is a domain of identification and subjection of all the king's subjects. It is the point of application of the actions of the subjects on themselves and on the actions of others. This governmentality of male and female reproductive containers is impressed on every subject in a compulsory manner. It assumes the necessity of something real. It concerns bodily and material things shaped by an imaginary construction that turns them into something *real* for the subjects—something so real and natural that it is impossible to criticise, deconstruct and challenge. Here lies the secret of the compliance of the bachelors, the women and even the notables to the politics of sex and reproduction.

In the past, a critical mind may have questioned the 'reality' of the pot-king, suspected a trick and rebelled, taking the risk of being pushed out as a slave, or as a witch, together with the other excreta of the kingdom. However, by and large, the compliance I witnessed in the 1970s was extensive and there was no known alternative. The colonial administration, whether German, British or French (all three colonial powers were present in the Grassfields) was impressed by the vitality of the Grassfields kingdoms and the loyalty of the subjects. This implies that the cadets were excluded from reproduction. They were effectively and symbolically neutralised. Should one say 'castrated'? Certainly not since their status could be reverted. It was not a pathological condition either, except in a few cases. Chastity, meritorious work, sublimation in arts and aesthetic activities were not imposed from the outside by cynical and dominating notables. They were internalised by men who never doubted they could have access, some day in the future, to the full interiority of a container. They had no means to objectify the failure of the kingdom to achieve these ends. The failure, it was thought, was contingent, and it was theirs. Only a sociological analysis, conducted from the outside, is in a position to unveil the trick. Consequently, the cadets could not rebel against their fathers or against the king. They competed against one another within the descent group. 'It' worked ('it' being the best indicator of 'governmentality' and not a conscious

plot by the dominant, enforced by sheer violence—although there was indeed a fair amount of violence built into the governmentality of containers).

The consular and missionary sources of the mid-19th century bear witness to the presence of many Grassfields slaves in the households of the Kalabar, Bimbia and Douala '*Kings*' along the Atlantic coast of the Bight of Benin. These slaves, and the peoples they came from, were known as *Mburikum, Mbrikum, Mbudikum*, etc. In a letter addressed to the British Consul Hutchinson in 1856, Rev. Anderson, quoted by Hutchinson (1861: 322), stated that they were "more liked in old Kalabar than many brought from other countries. They are peaceable, honest, energetic". The same appreciation can be read in Goldie's dictionary of Efik language (1862: 320): "The slaves from this region [the Grassfields] are much esteemed."[9] This is another indication that their dispositions were internalised into an ethos.

Anyone familiar with the work of Michel Foucault will not be surprised to find sexuality at the heart of the 'techniques of the self' and of power relationships, unless one considers that his analysis applies only to the Western world. Already in 1980 (p. 505) Cl. Tardits criticised J. Goody (1974) for whom "the reasons behind polygamy are sexual and reproductive rather than economic and productive", for having neglected the political reasons. Goody seems to take sexuality as an anthropological universal, something that belongs more with the side of nature than of the social/political relationships. In the Grassfields, sexuality was not functionally connected with the maximisation of sexual satisfaction of every subject—man or woman—by a culture of love or an *ars erotica*, but to the moral economy of ancestral substances. The reasons behind polygamy were *political* and reproductive.

In that respect, one should notice that the egalitarian societies of the forest area of Cameroon, like the Beti, Bulu and Manguissa, give public and explicit expression to genital sex, especially in dancing. In those societies, dancing suggests and sometimes mimics explicitly a sexual encounter. Dances are performed publicly, even in the presence and with the participation of children. Genital sex today and in the past is encouraged among unmarried youth—boys and girls alike. By contrast, in the Grassfields, the strict sexual mores and the fact that

[9] I collected all such documents in a book concerning the Bamenda plateau (Warnier, 1985a: 173–177).

the cadets were barred from genital sex excluded any public display of anything that could recall a sexual encounter. The most spectacular dances in the Grassfields are performed by the masquerades who mimic the behaviour of the animals in the bush. Other dances, in the households, at the palace, and during funerals, are extremely restrained and, in my opinion, somewhat monotonous.

It was precisely in the domain of sexuality that M. Foucault came to elaborate on the notions of 'care for oneself', 'techniques of the self' and 'subjectivity'. Returning, at the end of his life, to his methodological choices, he made it clear (1994, *D&E, IV*: 634) that the first and most important one was "a systematic scepticism regarding each and every anthropological universal":

> Refusing a universal like 'madness', 'delinquency' or 'sexuality' does not mean that what those notions designate does not exist or that they are mere chimeras, invented for the needs of some dubious cause; yet it is much more than the recognition that their content changes with time and circumstances; it means questioning the conditions that allow one to recognise, according to the rules of telling the true from the false, that a subject is mentally sick, or to induce a subject to recognise the most essential part of himself in the shape of his sexual drive.

Foucault added: "it means going back to the study of the real practices by which the subject is constituted in the immanency of a domain of knowledge".

In 19th century Mankon, what does it mean to 'know one's truth' or 'the most essential part of oneself', if not in one's attitude towards sexuality? Even if the Mankon did not give verbal expression to such truths, these were nevertheless part of their cognition and knowledge about themselves.

In 2002, Mankon sexual practices had changed radically, at least amongst the 15–45 year olds, to the scandal of the older generations. The rate of HIV was estimated at 12 per cent of the total adult population and it was twice as high among the younger generation. The number of deaths from AIDS I witnessed during a four-month stay in Mankon in 2002 was significant. In the light of the ancient modes of subjectivation, I am led to question the political dimension of this reversal. The young—boys and girls—are escaping the grip of the pot-king. The *takwe* were the first to do so in the years 1920–1960, causing scandal. The *takwe* wanted to have children, as studs, without taking responsibility for them and they were the first step in the disconnection between sexuality and reproduction. At the beginning of

the 21st century, this is general practice among Grassfields young men: "Give me a child," they say to the women they court. "I will marry you afterwards." But in 2002, I was also struck by the fact that the girls themselves wished to become pregnant so as to ascertain their own reproductive power independently from whatever ancestral substances they could receive from their 'fathers' at the time of marriage. A few of them did become pregnant and were pleased with it. Abortion was out of question.

The shift cannot be dated precisely, and I assume it varied with different places, families and individuals. However, I think that the 1980s and 1990s were crucial in that respect. Analysing the factors of this change (Christianity, labour migrations, rural-urban migrations, education, post-colonial dynamics, the political and economic crisis from 1986 onwards) would extend beyond the scope of the present study. Let us say that after having broken the vital piggy-banks, the coloniser and its successors of the post-colony did not have much to offer instead. The younger generations paid the price for the damage. The post-colonial state does not enjoy much credibility at village level. At the beginning of the 21st century, the Grassfields kings offer the alternative of a re-invention of the kingdoms as cog-wheels of the State in a national and global space. In the political context of the post-colony, the power of the pot-king does not rest any longer on his monopolistic access to ancestral substances, but on having access to state resources and on a local politics of heritage based on the annual festival, a palace museum, and on the articulation between local development and cultural associations. *Ngwa'fo*, in that respect, assumes a strong leadership through the Mankon Cultural Development Association (MACUDA), supported by the national and globalised Mankon elites. AIDS constitutes one of the major threats to Mankon development. In their public speeches and through local NGOs, *Ngwa'fo* and the older generations do not miss an opportunity to stigmatise the demise of the ancient sexual morality and the plague brought by '*Kfuru Mandzo*'s disease'.[10]

[10] *Kfuru Mandzo* ('*Mandzo* the chewer' of the cannibal) is remembered in Mankon for having cooked and eaten his mother. AIDS consumes the flesh of the sick person and reduces it to skin and bones. This is the reason why, in the vernacular, AIDS is called '*Kfufu Mandzo*'s disease'.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THEORETICAL QUESTIONS IN BODILY/ MATERIAL CULTURES

Just like the production of dreams, the Mankon kingdom's organisation rests on materials shaped in appropriate forms. It possesses the coherence of the poetic images underlined by the philosopher Gaston Bachelard. The king spraying raffia wine on his subjects discloses and displays the basic principles of kingship. The spraying *condenses* the royal dispensations. It *displaces* the flamboyant sexuality of the monarch towards a more neutral and veiled gesture. It *figures* out the principles of accumulation/dispensation of ancestral bodily substances. This gesture is a material and bodily poem that draws on the basic resources of dreaming as they appear in the *Traumdeutung* of S. Freud (1900): condensation, displacement, figuration.

Such a dream mobilises all the resources provided by art, poetry and aesthetics: matters, metaphors, metonymy, rhythm, measure, style. S. Freud (1900) himself considered that poetry is akin to 'artificial dreaming'. When breaking the wings of the fowl, *Tumasang* provides a *metaphor* of the fate deserved by the foreigner, assimilated within the limits of the city, who takes without giving. The body of the king is a concrete *metonymy* of the palace and of the city. The life of the kingdom is in tune with the weekly and yearly *rhythm* of the offerings to the dead monarchs. The substances bestowed by them are *measured* by the bodily capacity of the human containers and by their embodied material extensions. The speeches, the buildings, the sculptures, the statues, the vessels of all kinds are artistic productions making use of all available *stylistic* resources offered by traditions and innovations.

The kingdom is a masterpiece of art that triggers all kinds of aesthetic emotions. It echoes in the psyche of its subjects in many different ways. Like all powerful aesthetic and dream productions, it can trigger emotional responses with subjects belonging to other cultures and societies. I experienced it repeatedly when finding its unmistakeable impacts in my own night dreams. In fact, I have no doubt about the fact that my dreams have played an important heuristic role in the 'invention' of the 'pot-king'—the role of a research engine—along several years of

psychoanalytical exploration. My dreams and their interpretation helped me to overcome the limitations of a classical approach to fieldwork, somewhat subservient to the standard tradition of social and political anthropology. Once more, as Devereux said, it appears that the subjectivity of the researcher is a tool, perhaps the tool *par excellence*, provided it is worked upon to reach a more enlightened objectivity.

Indeed, this book allows me to distance myself from the pot-king who absorbed me in the early 1970s, albeit with my consent. Having produced an interpretation of that dream, I am in a position to get away from it. To some extent, I may pass through the gates of the city at my leisure. I may enter and exit as it suits me.

Like all constitutions, the constitution of the kingdom is written down, although not written on paper, but on the cognitive 'hard disk' of its subjects, their bodily conducts, perceptions, emotions and in the material culture geared to their bodily culture: containers, houses, the city, and their contents. Although it is written down, this text belongs mostly with the cognitive unconscious as mapped, amongst others, by P. Buser (2005). It escapes rationalisation and verbal expression because it is written with invisible ink in the bodily motions and emotions of the subjects. It escapes an enquiry by means of interviews and verbal comments. Yet verbalisations are essential to its functioning in the form of performative speech transforming the raw material of bodies, containers and substances into an ancestral order. It partakes into the spontaneous and irresistible nature of the dream. It forces itself on the dreamer and on the citizens who forget about it in their conscious thoughts. *It* governs. And, like a dream, the acting constitution derives from the drives of the *'Id'*. There is indeed a gap between *ego* and the hidden universe of the cognitive and Freudian embodied unconscious. *Pace* D. Le Breton, the Mankon subject—who belongs to something like the epitome of a 'traditional' society—is to some extent cut off from his body although the deleterious effects of Cartesian dualism were unlikely to have reached such remote corners of Africa until very recently.

There lies the trick of power: like the masquerades of the palace, it proceeds under the cover of its masks. It hides itself behind a chattering of words that betrays nothing of its secrets written in the flesh. It tries and reduces to silence those who expose its crudest physical tricks. One should not confuse 'power' with the 'monarch' or the 'state'. The hidden power, it is the power of the governmentality inscribed into the subjectivities of the citizens.

Even in the privileged position he occupies, the king does not benefit from an analysis of the situation that would be more adequate or limpid than that of any of his subjects. He is not the conscious organiser of a system of exploitation. He may indeed take advantage of his position in a quite self-conscious and deliberate way. But he is fit to do so, precisely because his position is the product of a powerful dream. He himself is the object of the dream. He is more constructed than any of his subjects. All citizens, including the king, contribute to the working of the kingdom when they act on each other's actions, when they rub, pour, close down, contain, etc. The billions of actions they perform apply mostly in the domain where all of them act upon themselves: on the 'skin', the body, the sensori-motor conducts.

There is no need to be an expert in constitutional law to grasp the basic principles of such an organisation. It is enough to be born in one of the Grassfields communities. Any subject embodies the cognitive and praxeological code right from birth. The first lessons are given daily by massaging the skin and holding the baby. The simplicity of the code is dazzling: a container, opening, content and a number of appropriate motions and emotions. A five year-old child is usually fully conversant with the constitutional code. Which Western democratic country can claim better results in terms of efficiency? At the same time, the performances based on this code show an astounding complexity since they uphold in a great variety of domains such as bodily care, the exercise of sexuality, the agricultural and architectural techniques, the functioning of the palace and of the descent groups, the management of health and disease, the funeral and religious practices.

All this amounts to a technology of power since it organises *efficacious* actions on the subjects. It is efficacious insofar as it obtains tangible results with a minimum of energetic expenditure since it is embodied. It does not lend itself easily to critique and dissent, because it belongs largely with the cognitive (sensori-motor) and Freudian unconscious propped against material culture mediated by automatic pilots of sorts.

By contrast, it should be stressed that the construction and maintenance of skins, envelopes, barriers, enclosures, ditches, medicines, etc. are constantly exposed to failure. They must be performed again and again. The introduction of newcomers, foreign wives, regional and world market goods, the globalised bodily cultures, the cultural *metissages*, even before the onset of colonisation bring constantly to the test the procedures of closure and of the production of locality. The centrifugal forces of competition between co-wives, cadets or notables, the accusations

of witchcraft, the conflicts over succession, the fights with wooden clubs, the cases of bad death and of suicides tear apart the envelopes, spill out the contents and dissipate the substances. For as many people entering the kingdom and being assimilated within its limits, there is a similar number leaving, perhaps even a greater number if the king fails to unify his flock. There is something tragic about the labour accomplished by the king, it is the work of Sisyphus, always doomed to fail. This is the 'burden' of sacred kingship mentioned by Frazer—and at what cost: the subjection of the monarch and the notables to the labour of accumulation, dispensation and confinement; polygamy and the cost of excluding the bachelors from sex and reproduction, so highly valued; the cost of expelling the excreta of the body politics submitted to the labour of digesting all that comes from the outside. This weighty structure did not give much leeway for individual trajectories. Yet, it goes against contemporary sociology which would have us believe that individualism is an invention of modernity. Individuality and individualism were powerful drives, and the fierceness of the competitions over marriage and succession were proofs of this drive. Perhaps artists such as *fon Yu*, the sculptor-king of the Kom, medicine men and diviners such as *Aye'e Mafa* and *Awasom Tembu'* in Mankon, thinkers such as the old *Avwontom* and his beloved wife *Ngum*, sharp "mothers" whose truculence, irony and numerous progeny commanded respect, such as *Maafo Ngwa'fo, Nimon Ne* and Julia, of the lineage *Ala' Akuma*, were able to carve enough space for themselves to stay away from this tragic and costly labour, to get something out of it, and burst into laughter in the space/envelope they had shaped for themselves.

Far from an Orientalist view of African societies, one should assess the achievements and costs of such kingdoms that developed at the periphery of the Afro-asiatic world system around 1700, parhaps even earlier, and that experienced a partial collapse and a re-invention at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st.

It is in this governmentality of containers, hardly conscious and poorly verbalised, that one can find the foundations of Mankon political life, that cannot be reduced to such foundations. It goes without saying, but it is safer to state it very clearly: the king, the notables, the citizens analysed what happened to them, discussed the historical events and took decisions. However, this political activity—conscious and verbalised—conformed to the hidden governmentality of containers.

It is worth mentioning as an example that around 1820 or 1830, following the Chamba raids on the Grassfields, the Mankon took refuge

with the neighbouring kingdom of Bafut. At the death of *Ngwa'fo I,* in about 1840, the Bafut king sent a bag of camwood powder from his own stores to anoint the corpse before burial. However, should the Mankon accept the bag of camwood from the Bafut palace, they would validate their incorporation and the demise of their kingdom. The Mankon notables gathered and discussed whether or not to use Bafut camwood to smear the corpse of their monarch. By doing so, they would surrender their sovereignty; but refusing it would trigger a fratricidal war with iron weapons since the Mankon would have placed themselves symbolically outside the Bafut envelope. This war would have released torrents of pollution given the relations of intermarriage between the two peoples. During the deliberations, the notables, it is said, found a stratagem: they would accept the bag and use the camwood powder it contained to smear a banana tree trunk they ceremoniously buried in Bafut land. Meanwhile, in some remote building of the Mankon palace, they smeared the very body of their monarch with Mankon camwood and carried it at pitch dark to the royal graveyard at *Ala'a Nkyi*. With the Chamba threat reduced, they decided to leave Bafut land and to establish a provisional palace a few kilometres away in a place called *Fum Dju'*. In the following years, they built a new palace at *Ndju' Mankunge* ('the compound of Mankon') on the right bank of the Mezam river, while digging a trench that would provide the city with an envelope or a limit. I have not had the Bafut version of the story.

Those events exemplify two things: Firstly, there are political and historical choices made by actors in a conscious, verbalised, deliberate way and these choices can be dated. Secondly, such choices cannot be made and are impossible to analyse lest one has cracked the constitutional code that is written on the body of the king and of his subjects, that is, in the bodily and material cultures of the kingdom.

The dream (or 'imaginary') governmentality of containers itself is a historical construct. The ingredients of the dream change with time depending on historical events. The slave trade and the trade in luxury goods with the Atlantic coast developed from 1750 onwards. The local communities in the Grassfields were more and more involved in the trade. The difference between inside and outside became blurred when local groups were more and more open to the outside and exposed to penetration. It became more difficult to imagine the limits and the content of the community. The Grassfields constitutionalist was urged to produce local moorings for people and things. He dreamt of more closure. 'It' dreamt. 'It' dug a ditch around the city, 'it' being a drive

that was felt more or less by the king and the whole population in a conflictual and ambiguous way. 'It' brought more and more substance into the three bodies of the king while emptying those of the cadets. *Ngwa'fo I*, who reigned at the beginning of the 19th century, founded three new lineages within the royal clan. He seems to have brought polygamy to unusual levels, which indicates that the processes of closure, concentration of ancestral substance in the king's body, of high polygamy can be dated to the second half of the 18th century, together with a spectacular development of the slave and luxury trades with the Atlantic coast (see Warnier, 1985).

The body, the state

Some people may object that this kind of paradigm does not have any relevance as regards Western societies, since their basic characteristic is the 'modernity' and the rationality inaugurated by the Enlightenment. In their view, Foucault's approach in terms of governmentality is relevant in the case of an African kingdom as it operates along the lines of material culture, sensori-motor culture, imaginary (that is, dreaming) and religious practice and belief producing a 'reality' that can be analysed. On the other hand, Western political organisations are the product of a deliberate and conscious purpose. Constitutionalists debate about them. Explicit procedures are devised in order to give expression to the different political orientations, to arbitrate between them and make choices through elections and polls. The rules of the game, the substance of the debates, the decisions and results of the votes are put down in writing. The fundamental law has a logic of its own that is verbalised and rationally articulated on the basic premises of the sovereignty of the people, human rights, and democratic representation. It institutionalises political debates and agency.

The remaining questions then are the following: does the paradigm I have tried to construct and to test with the analysis of the Mankon kingdom have wider relevance? Could it apply to modern Western societies? Are bodily/material cultures as relevant in contemporary Europe in shaping subjectivities and mediating given governmentalities as they are in Mankon?

First of all, I wish once more to disqualify the evolutionist argument I have sketched concerning the way the non-verbalised Mankon constitution would be written on bodily and material cultures whereas

modern constitutions would be verbalised and written on paper. No doubt, to move from Africa to Europe and maintain a minimum of geographical consistency, the Versailles of Louis XIV was a poem and a dream cast into stone, woods, fountains and lakes. However, the Enlightenment would have dissipated such costly *rêveries* and the 17th century would belong in the past. In modern times, one could possibly agree that the Nazi dream or the communist dissolution of the state and abolition of capitalist exploitation were fantasies, irrational constructions, certainly nightmares grounded in specific bodily and material cultures amounting to specific technologies of power. However, by contrast, politics—in modern times—would be more or less submitted to some kind of *logos*, or explicit, conscious and rational discourse. Auguste Comte conceived three successive stages in the history of humanity: the religious, the metaphysical and the positive. No doubt, the sacred ancestry of the pot-king would assign him to the religious stage if the evolutionary scheme had not been disqualified time and again. Claiming that the governmentality of Mankon is based on a bodily and material culture and *not* on verbalisations and choices of action, and that, *vice versa*, Western societies in modern times operate along the lines of verbalised constitutions and public debate and *not* on bodily and material cultures reproduces the evolutionist and Orientalist bias I disclaim. In my view, what is good for Africans is good enough for Europeans. In Western societies, too, power addresses the *logos and* the body, the verbalised knowledge, *and* the non-verbalised, procedural, knowledge. At the end of the 20th century, the so-called 'post-modern' thought raised a similar critique: in the mundane liturgies of the urban tribes, it claims to recognise the return of a romantic tradition repressed by the Enlightenment. The 'post-modern' thought is all too keen to delegate the boring economic and political management of contemporary societies to the rationality inherited from the Enlightenment. It seeks 'the body' at the margins of the serious concerns of modernity, that is, in feasts, sports, the techniques of the body implemented by hedonistic self-development techniques. The post-modern approach disqualifies some of the claims and illusions of 'modernity', and just for that reason, it is not entirely devoid of merits.

However, I wish to go one step further by claiming that top-ranking executives in the City of London, and at the Bombay stock-exchange have a bodily culture of their own, which is as important in their respective governmentalities as is the material and bodily cultures of the pot-king and his subjects. In this book, I have tried to disqualify

once more the great divide between the Oriental 'they' and the Western 'we'. The paradigm I have tried to elaborate rejects the functionalism of current approaches in political sociology or anthropology. It rejects most explanations in terms of causality, except perhaps on one point: that of the closure of the kingdom and the production of a hierarchy as a response of the local communities to the intensification of long-distance trade and what R. Horton called 'disjunctive migrations' of groups of people settling in what Igor Kopytoff (1987) saw as the 'African frontier'.

In a nutshell, this paradigm rejects a culturalist approach insofar as it does not seek in 'culture'—should it be material or bodily—the key factor to the analysis of a given governmentality. What comes first is a historical moment in power relationships, that assumes the shape of available material and bodily repertoires. It rejects any utilitarian approach, because aesthetics, emotions and passions are part of any bodily and material cultures. Last but not least, it disclaims the subject/object dichotomy that pervades most sociological analyses despite the attempts made by A. Leroi-Gourhan (1943, 1945, 1964) and B. Latour (1991) among others to overcome it.

What I have tried to do was to take over the tradition which, from Weber to Foucault and Bourdieu analyses *practice* and agency, not as stages in an evolutionary scheme but as historical configurations. In the Mankon case, I have tried to demonstrate that the practices of human beings who can be seen in the flesh include bodily cultures, bodily techniques, and consequently, the material culture on which they are propped. This is a specific feature of the human species and it results from a few million years of bipedal locomotion.

Why did I choose to argue the case of an African kingdom instead of historical configurations more akin to our experience of 21st century Western societies that would have been of more immediate interest and concern? Mostly because I am an anthropologist and Mankon is the society I have studied for more than 35 years. Its analysis produced the paradigm I developed in this book and that applies first and foremost to African sacred kingship. Moreover, as an anthropologist, I am convinced that the cultural detour helps us see things that we would not otherwise notice because they are too close and familiar to us. I could have taken the colonial moment, its techniques of the body and its material universes to which the colonisers and the colonised were equally subjected. Post-colonial studies have demonstrated that this episode of modern history is still with us. I could have contributed to

studying what Bayart (2004) called the 'global techniques of the body', propped against the globalisation of commodity exchange and their many local domestications. Yet it is the pot-king who came to the fore since it is so paradigmatic of sacred kingship all over the world, and to some extent of European (profane) kingship and, consequently, of the state, with their concern regarding borders, limits, closure, discipline and the production of locality for persons and things.[1]

The question of the state is a promising lead going from the Mankon kingdom to more contemporary forms of political organisations. It may help bridge the gap between Mankon and contemporary Western societies. Concerning the state, I agree with the argument developed by Bayart (2004) regarding the relationship between the state and transnational exchanges. The circulation of persons and commodities do not develop between closed states and *after* these have been founded. States are a response to the circulation at large of persons and commodities. They produce a necessary closure in order to assign to locality the unmoored elements circulating freely, intruding into the local communities and disrupting them. The invention of the pot-king and his three bodies was a technological innovation in response to the intensification of regional and long-distance exchanges, akin to the invention of the Leviathan.

Similarly, the circulation at large of things and people, and the processes of closure in response to them, produce different types of subjects depending on historical circumstances and on the particular shape assumed by the state. Max Weber thought that it was a new type of human being, a new style in the conduct of one's own life that disrupted the squaring of European economies at the origins of capitalism. The historian D. Roche (1997) stressed the expansion of consumption in 17th and 18th century Europe and the related emergence of a new subjectivity. Is it really necessary to underline the way secular asceticism and consumer hedonism are embodied in specific material and bodily cultures? Under the term 'ethos', Weber delineated the contours of new social practices, rationalised and expressed in verbalised discourses, yet embodied in specific life conducts, types of human beings, specific personalities, repertoires of consumption, and what De Certeau called the 'invention of daily life'. At the end of his

[1] Let us remember the cases of salt and grains and the problems of transportation, the proliferation of gates and toll barriers and the squaring of political incorporated space until the end of the 18th century.

life, Foucault shared the same concern and addressed it as a philosopher-historian aiming at thinking the historicity of various forms of human and political experience.

Under the diversity of the vocabulary, one can find the same concern from Weber to Foucault. For the latter, contemplating the historicity of the various forms of experience could help understanding their effects of subjectivity and of subjection, and the diversity of the patterns of government of self and others. If any power is addressed to the body and if, *vice versa*, we can say that any subject is inscribed by his body in the magnetic field of power, then one can conceive the microphysics of power embodied in sensori-motor conducts, material contraptions, infra-conscious procedural knowledge, identifications and imaginary productions. Modern societies are no exception to the embodied condition that submits people to governmentalities. The Mankon kingdom is not located on the other side of the great anthropological divide between 'they' and 'we' that comes from evolutionist thought. The kingdom is paradigmatic. It compels us to perceive a number of processes that pertain to our Western societies and that we do not see because they fall victim to what I call the 'Magritte effect' (see chapter 1).

The critique of the Orientalist and evolutionist paradigm has methodological implications that should be stressed. The basic data collected and processed by contemporary sociologists and anthropologists are made of verbalisations collected by interviews and questionnaires. The social and cultural analyses give only part of the picture. What could be called the verbalisation fetishism is like a smokescreen hiding part of the social reality: that of the hidden, hardly conscious, governmentalities. This bias feeds the evolutionist paradigm: by putting a premium on verbalised data, sociological enquiry creates the illusion that Western societies operate in a rational/verbalised manner, as against an African kingdom which would work on the basis of bodily/material cultures.

The basic tenets of the human condition can be found in quite different historical contexts; that is, the social practices mediated by sensori-motor and material cultures, and by verbalised knowledge. The body of 'traditional' Africans is not different from the body of 'modern' Europeans. Consequently, upstream of a Weberian sociology of practices, one has to take into account the paradigm I have been trying to construct. Bourdieu and De Certeau have done a great deal to bring bodily hexis, and embodied habitus into the field of sociology and anthropology. However, the notions of habitus or bodily techniques often collapse with their representations and the verbal comments that

can be made by 'informants' and sociologists alike. In my opinion, the only wedge that can block such a collapse is the *materiality* of the body and of the object. Most sociological paradigms overvalue conscious thought, verbalised choices, opinions, and, in the end, the subject of the *cogito* instead of the processes of subjectivity of a human being that is split between 'I' and the drives derived from the body and its belonging to a material universe. Material objects and material culture have gained a high degree of legitimacy in the social sciences as *signs* in systems of communication or connotation, not as vile *matter.* Current sociology and anthropology are wanting in theoretical resources that would take materiality into account. I have tried to construct a paradigm that would compensate for this relative blindness.

Returning to the paradigm I have tried to develop, it puts me in agreement with a number of similar attempts, and in disagreement with others. I will now return to the various themes I explored in the introduction to this book to discuss them in light of the monograph of the pot-king. Inevitably, I will have to repeat some of the arguments mentioned in the introduction while trying to avoid any possible redundancy by bringing into the debate the new elements and insights acquired in the different chapters.

Agreement

Compared to other related animal species, especially the great apes, the human species has two specific characteristics: the linguistic and the praxic functions based on discursive and procedural types of knowledge. The first one is geared to the linguistic sign. The second one is geared to bodily and material cultures. Primatologists have indeed observed the distant promises of language and of motor and material cultures among non-human primates. However, what has been observed cannot match the levels of competence of humans. It simply explains how bipedal locomotion, cortical development and other related aspects of human evolution have resulted in a species that is exceptionally competent in language, material culture and manual/bodily skills. The development of linguistics constitutes the success story in the human and social sciences since the end of the 19th century. By contrast, in the field of anthropology, there is nothing comparable as regards material and bodily cultures. I have tried to look for adequate tools in order to meet the challenge; the following is a reminder:

The first conceptual tool provided by the anthropological tradition is the notion of 'techniques of the body'—an expression coined by Marcel Mauss (1936). However, the Maussian notion of 'the body' is too crude to do justice to the intuitions of the founding father of French ethnology. It is taken as the flesh. The notion of 'bodily schema' and of 'image of the body', elaborated by P. Schilder (1923, 1935) on the basis of the work of H. Head and G. Holmes (1911), introduced a number of essential dimensions: the fact that there is no human body unless there is a coordination of the organs, acquired by apprenticeship, by a constant exercise of motivity and perception. Furthermore, there is no human body unless there is a psychic investment and representation of one's own bodily self by the subject. (This is, in fact, what Schilder called the 'image of the body'.) A third basic concept in the work of Schilder was that there is no motivity without perception and *vice versa*. This is why one should speak of 'sensory-motivity' rather than 'the body', which, in some ways, may be misleading.

The next conceptual tool, from a chronological point of view, was provided by the phenomenological tradition from Husserl onwards. The seminal study by M. Merleau-Ponty (1945) was a good landmark since it was informed by Schilder's work. It was all the more noteworthy that it became a starting point in the development of a phenomenological anthropology of the body both in English (see, for example, M. Faetherstone *et al.*, 1991, Th. Csordas, ed. 1994) and in French (see D. Le Breton 1990, 1999, 2001). However I am far from convinced by the phenomenological paradigm they constructed. It seems to me that one of the basic questions raised by M. Merleau-Ponty (and others such as J.-P. Sartres, Levinas, etc.) was the philosophical question of meaning. After the 'death of God', announced by Dostoyevski and Nietzsche, the basic philosophical question is to understand how meaning comes to the world. The answer, in a nutshell, is that it comes out of the 'being-to-the-world' of a given subject through its bodily experience, and out of inter-subjective agency and communication. As a result, phenomenological anthropology inherits from this concern with the *meaning* of lived experience, especially when this experience becomes conscious by being verbalised. Consequently, phenomenological anthropology has not produced any ethnographic agenda to describe and analyse bodily conducts, but rather to describe the verbalised lived experience of the subject regarding its body.

In the works of M. Featherstone and D. Le Breton, the concern with the lived experience of the subject drew the analysis towards rep-

resentations, communication, connotations, the body as a sign and as something one can talk about and become conscious of. This in itself is not a problem, and there is no doubt that it is useful to explore the way people comment on their body. However, it takes into account only part of the picture—the *representation* of the body—while leaving out the body in the flesh. It takes the picture of the smoking pipe (which "is not a pipe") and forgets about the pipe. A body in the flesh may smell good or bad. The representation of that same body does not have any smell. In other words, the limitations of the phenomenological tradition in anthropology is that it does not produce an ethnographic agenda of the sensori-motor conducts of the subject. Wherever Th. Csordas and D. Le Breton wrote 'the body', one should actually read 'the representation of the body', or 'the verbalisations about the lived experience of the body'. In my view, 'this is not a body', just as Magritte can write under the picture of the smoking pipe 'this is not a pipe'. Writing an ethnography of the Mankon, I tried to avoid the 'representations' of kingship. Instead, I described the gestures, the objects and the substances partaking in the technologies of power.

Accordingly, I determined to leave aside the phenomenological tradition and look for descriptive and analytical tools that would procure a systematic ethnography of sensori-motor conducts propped on material culture and, by the same token, an epistemology of such an approach. I found some in human ethology and, even more so, in the 'praxeology' of P. Parlebas (1999). His purpose is to analyse bodily practices in games and sports. One could object to the use of such methodological tools in the anthropological study of an African kingdom and to its integration in a more encompassing paradigm. But their use is legitimated by the fact that their object consists mostly of the bodily conducts themselves and, only to a limited extent, of the representations of the body. I do not think I twisted their use, but I had to adjust them to somewhat unusual objects.

To begin with, although material culture can be found in games and sports, P. Parlebas did not include it among the parameters of his model. (He took into account three parameters: with or without *partners*; with or without *opponents*; with or without *uncertainty*.) Given the fact that material culture is embodied in sensori-motor conducts, there is indeed no reason to consider it as a specific parameter defining the internal logic of games and sports. However, material culture and equipment are essential to the performance of most sports and games. It has to be taken into consideration if one is to conceptualise them. Parlebas has

indeed tended to take it more and more into account as a component of the environment (that is, as part of the *external* logic of the game) and as a dimension of the uncertainty parameter. For example, the ball of the football game is the material condition of the uncertainty that is essential to the game (along with the presence of partners and opponents whose moves are to some extent unpredictable), whereas the pole of the pole jumper (which is embodied by the jumper and controlled by him) reduces the amount of uncertainty in a sport without a partner or opponent and without any essential uncertainty. As far as I am concerned, I consider that material culture belongs with the subject who plays the game or engages in sport insofar as his bodily culture is propped against the material culture that is embodied. This is the first adjustment I brought to the praxeology of Parlebas.

The second one concerns the way I referred to it when analysing an African kingdom. In so doing, I turned it into an analytical and descriptive tool in political anthropology. No doubt, political concerns are not foreign to P. Parlebas (2000) who considered that the sportification process puts a premium on the competitive dimension of games and sport (with winners and losers) and on their 'spectacularisation' with the assistance of the mass media. This tendency is historically documented and it is consistent with the development of a market economy in which the individuals compete against one another. Accordingly, the diversity of ancient internal logics of games and sports (the paradoxical logic of the 'three camps' game or the games with a turn over in the roles of the players without any winner or loser, as in the game of 'cat and mouse') are eliminated although they are much more in accordance with a democratic society since they promote solidarity instead of competition and the elimination of the losers.

P. Parlebas then did not rule out any political dimension in his praxeology. However, it was not part of his agenda. If political power addresses bodily conducts, then it is useful to go beyond praxeology. The Foucauldian notions of governmentality, techniques of the self, discipline and the like complement the tool box necessary to analyse the pot-king and his subjects. Consequently, let us now turn to M. Foucault and to his notions that I have used in analysing the Mankon case and that are open to debate. The notion of 'subjectivation', useful as it is in political analysis, raises a problem when I try to work with psychologists. For them, 'subjectivation' is used when talking of the ontogenesis of the subject. It is a basic and fundamental process that is never entirely

complete but continues throughout the lifetime of the subject. They would distinguish between 'subjectivation' and 'identifications' (whereas Foucault tended to merge the two). Different identifications can succeed each other with the same subject. Then, whereas M. Foucault considered that 'subjectivation' necessarily involved the fact of being subjected to sovereignty, psychologists are not concerned with the latter. Consequently, the Foucauldian notion of 'subjectivation' breaks down into three concepts (subjectivation 'proper', identifications, and subjection). This does not facilitate the interdisciplinary dialogue. I stressed the identifications of the subjects to their skin as a container and to their house. I mentioned the subjection achieved by the technologies of power based on the specific governmentality of containment.

The embodiment of materiality is implied in those three different dimensions of 'subjectivation'. All three are relevant to anthropological analysis, whatever the society under consideration and whatever the historical context, whether African, Asian or European, whether 'traditional' or 'modern'. I have not found a convenient way to lift the ambiguity over the use of the word and the notion of 'subjectivation', and for the time being, I will leave it at that, however unsatisfactory it may be.

There is another debate concerning the analysis of the historical patterns of bodily and material cultures. It concerns the relevant scale of observation of such phenomena. The proper scale is not the individual self, especially in contemporary Western societies in which individuals are assigned the goal of 'being or becoming oneself' thanks to 'self development' techniques. Foucault (2001: 241, 515) was scornful of the 'Californian cult of the self'. He stressed its vacuity, and felt concerned about the misunderstandings surrounding what he said about the 'techniques of the self' in which he saw something quite foreign to 'self-development'. The scale of analysis in which I have tried to frame my research is neither the macro-sociological scale of vast populations nor the middle-range scale of social categories.

There is a third, intermediate, scale of observation, which allows the ethnographic description of bodily practices. It is called for by the Foucauldian agenda without having been part of the research program of Foucault himself. It maps the recurrent and *institutionalised* patterns of identification and actions on other peoples' actions. It comes from the sociology of Max Weber. Because the kingdom is an institution of average dimension, with a coded and efficient governmentality

of containers, diversified depending on the respective statuses of the subjects, it lends itself easily to a praxeological analysis. This analysis can be extrapolated to other kingdoms with similar governmentalities, and, beyond their particular case, this paradigm of analysis can be extended to the study of Western institutionalised processes (for example the 'pastoral' governmentality as described by Foucault, the 'global techniques of the body' described by Bayart, the institutions of learning, health, etc.).

... and distinctions in the question of the unconscious

The theoretical positions I have summarised so far depart significantly from the majority of the sociological studies (some 600 references dated circa 1975–1987) on 'the body' vetted by J.-M. Berthelot (1985). The theoretical choice which I made following Mauss, Schilder, Parlebas and the cognitive sciences, consists of developing an empirical and ethnographic study of bodily cultures. It takes me away from all the semiological (e.g. J. Baudrillard) or phenomenological approaches (e.g. M. Featherstone, Th. Csordas and D. Le Breton) on a point central to my endeavours. It concerns the question of *meaning, consciousness* or *awareness.* The gist of my argument concerning the pot-king is the fact that bodily and material cultures belong with a governmentality of containers operating at an *infra-conscious* level. Consequently, I wish to repeat some of the points of the first chapter in the light of the ethnography of the pot-king. I intend to focus on several theoretical approches that will help me problematize the question of the cognitive and praxic unconscious. I apologize to the reader for what may sound repetitive and redundant. It should be stressed that semiology and phenomenology may be valuable in their own right, within their own epistemological perimeter and with the aim of addressing their own questions. Indeed, the body has a sign value in a system of communication or connotation. The body is the site of a lived experience that is meaningful for the subject. But the object I have studied is a different one. I have not tried to answer the question 'what does *it mean* for a subject to be spat upon by the king?'; but 'what does *it do* to the subject?' What is the effect of such an action on the identity, the subjection, the inclusion or the exclusion of the subject? It is a question of political technology, not of meaning, although this gesture does *have* a meaning. In my experience, when becoming acquainted with the

praxeological approach to material culture, most people read it through their semiological glasses, and, as a result, misread it and miss the basic question of what motor and material cultures achieve concerning the subject, at an infra-conscious and uncritical level where the distinction between subject and object is irrelevant.

The theoretical choice which includes 'material culture' in the analysis of the sensori-affectivo-motor conducts of the Mankon subject, or else, in the bodily cultures, following P. Schilder, D. Winnicott, S. Tisseron, D. Roche, Conein *et al.* (1993) and a few others departs from all the anthropological and sociological approaches of the body or the objects as two separate entities that could be usefully analysed independently from each another. I consider J.-Cl. Kaufmann (1992, 1997, 2001) as the exception that confirms the rule since he combined a sociology of the family with the consideration of the domestic material culture.

The subject/object dichotomy ought to be rejected, most scholars agree on that. However, in my view, the only way to do so is to show that in the human species there is no sensori-motor conduct or no bodily culture that is not propped against incorporated material culture in an *essential* way, and to such an extent that the conducts could not take place at all in the absence of the objects that are embodied in agency, as so many extensions of the bodily schema and of the image of the body. I stressed the way the gestures of the king embody his drinking horn, the raffia wine mixed up with his saliva, and the motor interaction between the monarch and the subjects. Similarly the objects are an essential part of our contemporary motor cultures. A driver may mimic the act of driving a car in the absence of a car, and an electrician may mimic his work in the absence of a ladder, screw-driver and wires. Terrorists may mimic their deadly action in the absence of a real time-bomb. But their mimicry does match the real gesture. They are mere games. They may convey a meaning, yet, they have no real impact on things and subjects. Real motor conducts need the embodied car, the screw-driver and the bomb in a essential way, and they make a difference in the way they act on the subject. Similarly, in the case of domestic action analysed by Kaufmann, real motor conducts need real washing-machines, laundry, vacuum cleaners and the like. As regards the act of forming a couple, the purchase of a common washing-machine and the action of doing the laundry of the newly formed couple have more impact on the subjectivities of the partners than a formal marriage which most of the time follows, if it happens at all. This point is

made clear in varions ways by the timely *Handbook of Material Culture*, under the direction of Chris Tilley *et al.* (2006).

In that context, let me return to the work of B. Blandin (2002) mentioned in the introduction. He presented the welcome project of a sociology 'with the objects'. However, his starting point (pp. 14 and 15) was a definition of the object as exterior to the subject. He therefore endorsed the dichotomy subject/object, at least as a starting point. His definition was borrowed from psychoanalytical theory. From a praxeological point of view, this is objectionable. So that the subject does not become psychologically confused, it has to make a psychic distinction between self and other, subject and object. From a praxeological point of view, however, this is not the case. If the bicycle remains a foreign object to the rider, something exterior to his bodily schema, if it fails to be embodied, the subject will never be able to ride. He has to come to the point when there is a dynamic fusion producing a subject-riding-a-bicycle, a subject-bicycle. Similarly, I stressed the way a Mankon subject identifies with his house, its threshold, its door/mouth. Contrary to Blandin, I think that what characterises the subject-object in agency is the constant shift between grasping and letting go, embodiment and disembodiment, taking and leaving in turn. This sensori-motor competence of the human subject allows it to diversify its practices and identifications in potentially unlimited ways and to go beyond its bodily limits. A cat can walk, run and jump. I can walk, snorkel in the sea, sail, ride a bicycle, drive a car, jump with a parachute, etc. Every time I discard a means of locomotion and take another, I will have to shift to a different cognitive software, provided I have charged all of them on my neuro-motor hard disk by apprenticeship. A human being is like the central unit of a computer on which one can adjust scores of different peripheral equipment. Therefore, in agency, one cannot define the object by its radical otherness and exteriority as does Blandin.

Indeed, from the 1940s to the 1980s, the cognitive sciences drew a strong equivalence between the brain and a computer. This computational cognitivism has been discredited mostly because the human psyche does not operate exclusively through billions of plus or minus binary choices and because emotions play a crucial role in facilitating or inhibiting action. Yet the computer metaphor is useful to illustrate what takes place between the subject and the embodied, interiorised, material object. If I want to add a printer to my computer, I must plug-in the wires. But this is not enough; I have to load a printer pilot into the computer that will recognise the printer and insure the cooperation

between the central unit and the printer. If I wish to ride a bicycle, I will have to establish a grip between my body and the bicycle. But this is not enough; I will have to load the bicycle pilot in the central unit of my sensori-motor conducts. I will do it by apprenticeship; that is I will learn, load, the sensori-motor algorithms that will insure the cooperation of the body and the bicycle as a unit. In that respect again, I stressed the way the Mankon learned all kinds of sensori-motor algorithms in the ways of eating, dancing, playing music, construing acoustic and material envelopes, etc.

There is still a lot to be done in order to develop the paradigm that lies behind my analysis of the pot-king. The purpose of the present book was to validate it on a full-scale ethnography, rather than develop it in a theoretical manner; the latter has been the focus of other publications mentioned in the introduction. To sum up, if an analysis of 'the body' does not take into account sensori-motivity, embodied material culture and an ethnography of practices, such an analysis does not concern the human body proper, but its partial representations.

We will now return to the theses developed by Le Breton (1990, 1999), mentioned in the introduction, and which constitute striking examples of the shortcomings underlined here. They can be summarised in a few sentences: the inheritance of Gnostic philosophy with its disdain for the body, the anatomical explorations of the Renaissance, Cartesian dualism and the style of life in contemporary modern societies reduce human beings to instrumental bodies (1990: 252). "The modern definition of the body implies that humans are cut off from the cosmos, cut off from each other, and cut off from themselves. The body is what is left over after those three withdrawals" (*ibid.*, p. 47, transl. JPW). 'The body' therefore, is an invention of the Western world (p. 39) which, by the same token, represses it in silence and oblivion (p. 126). On the contrary, in the holistic traditional societies (pp. 25–40), there is no gap or hiatus between the subject and his body because it is not individualised. It constitutes a knot of relationships with the group and the cosmos. Le Breton called for a 'liberation of the body' which is achieved when any concern with one's own body has disappeared (p. 144), that is, when the Western subject, instead of being permanently concerned with its alienated body (Le Breton, 1999) will coincide again with it, and will cease to repress it in silence and oblivion.

I would not have summarised these theses if they did not meet with considerable success at least in France, as do their equivalent in other countries, in the wake of the pessimism of the Frankfurt school, the

New Age movement of the 1960s, and post-modern thought. But there are two basic objections to them concerning the question of consciousness. The first one comes from a standard fieldwork ethnography of bodily practices around the world, including what is left of the more 'traditional' societies. As regards the Mankon, I stressed the fact that their bodily and material cultures were not the object of verbal commentaries that would make them self-conscious activities. They belong to a motor and cognitive unconscious. This is the essence of embodied governmentalities: they do not allow any critical and conscious access to bodily conducts. In that sense, the Mankon are 'cut off' from their bodies and from the material culture that is taken for granted; so is it in contemporary Western societies.

Le Breton deplores that the Western subject is 'oblivious of his body' when he engages in his activities, that is, he is *unconscious*, unaware, of his bodily motions and emotions:

> In the course of daily life, the body vanishes. Infinitely present since it is the essential bearer, the flesh of the being-to-the-world of the human being, it is at the same time infinitely absent from its consciousness. At that point, it reaches its ideal status in our Western societies in which its place is a place of silence, of mutedness, of unobtrusiveness, even of ritualised obliteration. Thus Georges Canguilhem [a French philosopher] can define healthiness as 'being unconscious of one's body'. And René Leriche [another philosopher] can say that it is 'life with the silence of the organs'. Those often quoted formulas illustrate like a slip of the tongue to what extent the obliteration of the body is a social necessity. (Le Breton, 1990: 126, transl. JPW)

Following Parlebas and the cognitive sciences, I am convinced that Canguilhem and Leriche were right, against Le Breton, and this is my second objection to his theses. He confused two things: on the one hand, the phenomenological reduction to the body as it can be accomplished by a philosophy of the subject, as did Merleau-Ponty (1945), and on the other, the analysis of sensori-motor conducts of the man in the street or in the 'traditional' African kingdom. The first one achieves a conscious verbalised knowledge of his belonging to the world through his body. This exercise may be salutary for intellectuals who are all too prone to overvalue ideas and speech, and do not confront the constraints of manual work. The second one shows to what extent procedural incorporated knowledge operates in a infra-conscious way and *must remain infra-conscious in all societies* lest the subject is overwhelmed and paralysed by the mental burden of having to be 'conscious' of what it does to command each and every bone and muscle.

As an example, my mother-tongue is French. From birth (and perhaps even before) I acquired the procedural knowledge of forming the sounds and building sentences. I loaded the software on my sensori-motor central unit. When speaking, I activate 250 muscles of the breathing and speech apparatuses: the diaphragm, the chest, the larynx, the vocal chords, the tongue, the lips, the jaw. I am thoroughly 'unconscious' of the way I command these muscles except very few of them, like those of the tongue and lips. Or rather, I am aware of the result of my will to move them, but I am not aware of the muscles themselves and the way they move. Actually, I do not need to command each one of them in a specific way, the software does it for me. Fortunately, this is the way it works because if I had to command every one of the 250 of them in a 'conscious' way, there would be no psychic energy or attention left to concentrate on the verbalised knowledge of the message I want to convey. Human sensori-motivity has to operate in an automatic, infra-conscious way by means of an automatic pilot.

Cognitive unconscious, motor unconscious, praxic unconscious

Until the cognitive sciences devised research protocols and theories validating the fact that a considerable part of our knowledge (of sensori experiences, matters, space, motivity, emotions, etc.) is infra-conscious and yet constitutes real and vital knowledge, it was hard to separate *knowledge* and *consciousness*. These were merged, yet they are quite different things. It is now generally recognised that there is a cognitive unconscious of procedural knowledge and that conscious knowledge is mostly so by being verbalised. Pierre Buser (2005) summarised what is known about the cognitive unconscious and tried to articulate it with the Freudian unconscious (as repressed) and what he called the 'Darwinian unconscious' inherited from mammalian, primate, and human evolutions. This point is absolutely crucial to my analysis of the pot-king and to my argument that the paradigm I developed may and must be shifted towards the analysis of contemporary Western societies. It is crucial because it shows that human beings, whether Africans or Europeans, whether in the past or in the present, operate on the basis of mostly unconscious procedural knowledge that is incorporated in the technologies of power.

With reference to the work of Jean Piaget, to the cognitive sciences and to psychoanalysis, P. Parlebas (1999: 171–176) used the term 'motor unconscious', referring to:

> The content and the organisation of the motor conducts of an acting person considered under two different perspectives:
> – a descriptive perspective. It expresses the fact that only a very small part of the operations triggered by motor conducts (perception, motivation, neuro-muscular mobilisation and regulation…) can be brought to consciousness;
> – a dynamic perspective. It underlines the fact that the motor conducts of an acting person are often triggered by a number of drives unknown to him/her, repressed, carrying in a conflictual way a latent meaning hidden behind the manifest or apparent one.

The domain of the cognitive or motor unconscious constitutes a vast area of investigation concerning 'attention', 'watchfulness', 'consciousness' and the various functions I refer to as 'automatic pilot'. I will not go any further into such an exploration; suffice it to give one example: driving a car efficiently is facilitated or impaired by the complex balance the driver establishes between those elements. If I want to retain an efficient level of watchfulness in order to decode all the uncertainties of sudden slowdowns, motorbikes slaloming among the cars, the trajectories of other vehicles, pouring rain, etc., I must delegate part of the action of driving to my sensori-motor (infra-conscious) learned algorithms. If I drive the car I am used to, those sensori-motor algorithms will operate at a very low level of consciousness. They will help me shift gears, accelerate, slow down and turn the wheel, without paying much attention to the perceptions and gestures needed to do so. When reaching the end of the trip, I will not remember my gestures. I will remember higher-level events that retained my attention, like a sudden and potentially dangerous slowdown and the way I pulled the break, or a sudden and violent downpour of rain. If I drive a somewhat different car from the one I am used to driving, I will have to devote much more conscious watchfulness to the gear stick, the pedals, the mass of the car, the power of the engine, the various commands of the car (e.g. fumbling for the wipers in case it rains), etc. As a result, my watchfulness devoted to the uncertainties of a higher level will diminish and this will increase the risk of an accident. Handicapped people who suffer from some degree of apraxia, or the beginners who take driving lessons, have to think hard about their gestures. They are slow and tend to become exceedingly tired after a short while. A fine-grain analysis of the cognitive and motor unconscious would be needed to fully understand the way bodily and material cultures operate.

I will not carry on along those lines because what I have written is enough to understand that the motor *cum* material culture of the

pot-king and his kingdom operate largely in an *infra-conscious manner.* A governmentality is not a verbalised conscious political organisation, and political analysis must reach such depths in order to produce an adequate model of African sacred kingship or of the 'biopolitics' of Western modern societies. This explains why and how the subjects can be subjected and subjectified without having any clear awareness of it. The sensori-motor and material cultures reach deep into their subjectivities, beyond most verbalised knowledge.

Returning to Le Breton, the 'becoming aware' of every bodily motion advocated by him is not in conformity with an empirically grounded anthropology of motor conducts. It is predicated on a humanistic and ideological *a priori* inherited from the Cartesian *cogito*, re-interpreted by the phenomenology of the mid-20th century, the 'New Age' movement and an Orientalist idealisation of the 'traditional' societies. It feeds into the cultural trends which assign to Western subjects the depressing goal of 'becoming oneself' analysed by A. Ehrenberg (1998). In the end, imbued by philosophy more than anthropology, it rests on the notion of a self-conscious, unified human subject, transparent to himself and full of his deeds and accomplishments. This is precisely the approach to the subject that was disqualified by Foucault, mentioned in chapter 1. It is now incompatible with what we know of the human psyche as a cognitive and emotional apparatus. As a result, the phenomenological tradition has to be re-assessed, and a number of philosophers like Jean-Luc Petit (1997), S. Gallhager (2000) and B. Andrieu (2004) are doing it now.

If I dwelled on my disagreement with Le Breton and with phenomenological anthropology, it was to make my position as distinct as possible from them. I agree with Blandin and Le Breton on the fact that the material objects and the body deserve more attention (I would say, a more sophisticated attention) on the part of anthropologists and sociologists. To conclude this discussion, besides the Freudian, the cognitive, the Darwinian and the motor unconscious, I would like to add to the list a 'praxic unconscious' that would concern material objects. The 'oblivion' and the obliteration of material culture in daily life and in anthropological studies must be correlated with the cognitive and motor unconscious.

We become aware of things around us when they betray us; when the battery of our car is dead, when our computer breaks down, when we lose our keys. We curse the object which ruins the smooth and silent logistics of our daily life of intelligent and speaking subjects. Until

then, we had not noticed that this particular object, like thousands of others, was embodied in our subjectivity thanks to our infra-conscious procedural knowledge. Of course, I know I have a computer and I use it, but I do not pay much attention to all the implications of such a situation. It has been embodied to such an extent that it is self evident and unproblematic. Its breakdown hurts like a wound and leaves an open scar in my bodily schema. At times, we are lucid enough to notice our dependency upon, or even addiction to, thousands of silent things around us. It happens for example when we go on vacations and decide what we want to put in our luggage and what to do in order to leave the rest safely. The way material culture fades away from our awareness and comes back unexpectedly is essential to our human condition. If we had to 'become conscious' or aware of all the elements of material culture embodied in our motor conducts, we would be condemned to be "frozen on the spot by the breadth of such a requirement" as Parlebas said regarding the motor unconscious.

The following is an illustration: to serve breakfast for two people in the morning and tidy up, I counted 300 different gestures (opening the cabinet, taking, carrying, pouring coffee, toasting the bread, etc.), 20 trips from the cooker to the table and back, and 45 different objects. The action lasted some 20 minutes.

This 'praxic unconscious' which is nothing more than the cognitive unconscious applied to our bodily and material cultures, allows us to introduce a distance between our subjectivity and the material world. It is highly economical in terms of psychic energy. It maintains our illusion of mastery and security. It convinces us that our self stops at the limits of our skin, that the objects lie out there, objectively, waiting for us to use them as mere instruments. It safeguards our ego, or at least our fantasy of it. It preserves us from making the annoying discovery that our ego is not the master in its own house, that we do not belong entirely to ourselves, that we are not where we think we are, that Prometheus in us is caught in an illusion, that Time and Necessity occupy his subjectivity thanks to the Trojan horse of the material culture.

It may very well be that such an unconscious denial of the grip exercised on us by material and bodily cultures is over-determined by factors of social class or ideology. Norbert Elias underscored the fact that the aristocratic way of life rested heavily on the mastery of a certain material culture that was naturalised, idealised, considered as 'refined' and spiritual. It was considered as an epiphany of the eternal beauty more than anything lowly and material. Since Aristotle and Antiquity,

crafts and materiality were delegated to servile or low-ranking labour. Moreover, it is quite likely that Gnostic philosophy, rightly criticised by Le Breton (1999: 7–8), has been responsible for the obliteration of bodily and material cultures amongst thinkers and clerics, particularly through the dualistic religions that stormed over Western Europe between the 8th and the 13th centuries and were eradicated by the sword, the crusaders and the 'holy' Inquisition. Only recently have historians, like Julien Ries (1988), undertaken the task of unravelling the complex descent of the Gnostic philosophy through the Albigians to the Reformation and beyond. One must remember that the God of Evil of Mani was associated with the body, materiality, hell, the woman and this world, whereas his God of all Good was allied with the immortal and immaterial soul, spiritual beings, paradise, man (as against woman) and the other world. The Christian tradition rebelled *against* this dualism in a storm of extreme violence, while assimilating some of the practices and some of the arguments of its opponents, as did the mendicant orders in an attempt to outmatch the Cathar Perfects in the 13th century.

An overview of the historical factors contributing to the obliteration of objects in human consciousness and thought should also take into consideration the history of material culture studies. They were in the forefront of 19th century anthropology, as an indicator of the stages of social evolution, or at least of its *lower stages*, because the higher ones were thought to be characterised by intellectual and artistic 'civilisation'. Then, material culture studies were put aside in favour of an interest for social structures and collective *representations*, religion and kinship. Material culture studies experienced the same fate as social evolutionism, with which they were intimately linked. Ethnographic collections stored in the basements of European museums collected dust. Curators met with endless practical, financial and theoretical difficulties. The museum object, except in art and archaeology, that is, the ethnographic object, acquired a solid reputation of boredom and scientific sterility.

The price that was paid for the cognitive and praxic unconscious coupled with the aristocratic, ideological and scientific traditions in Europe, was a nearly-complete disappearance of material and bodily cultures from the scope of anthropology and even more of sociology; the exception which confirms the rule being archaeology. This obliteration is equally manifest in the epistemology of the social sciences. In Europe, material culture studies disappeared almost entirely from the anthropological agenda until the teaching and research program

at University College London, the foundation of the *Journal of Material Culture* in 1996, and, to a lesser extent, a few other universities.

All those reasons for the unobtrusiveness of material culture in our lives may be true. But more fundamentally, I would put the blame, if one has to assign any blame, on the cognitive and the praxic unconscious more than on particular historical circumstances. It is precisely because they are so *essentially* obliterated and unobtrusive that material and bodily cultures are pushed into academic oblivion and are so effective in reaching deep into the subjectivity of people. Indeed, the pot-king, his subjects, the hunters, the 'Green movement', and the consumers in contemporary Western societies alike move in highly complex and sophisticated material cultures without any adequate 'awareness', 'consciousness' or critical point of view. The governmentality of containers was the only one that the Mankon people knew until the mid-20th century. The materiality of their man-made environment saturated their perception and bodily conducts. It was (it is) self-evident, muted and quasi-naturalised. The anthropologist is able to reveal this type of logic only thanks to a protracted experience and a long, circuitous analysis. He must draw on all available theoretical resources and on the comparative method to suggest that other governmentalities are conceivable, propped against other embodied yet obliterated material cultures. In so doing, he de-mystifies the pot-king and his world, as he could de-mystify hunting practices and salvation by jogging, or by an organic diet.

Such is the trick played by the power of subjection. This is where it goes into hiding: in the infra-conscious and non-verbalised zones of our conducts. One cannot say that power is tricky; 'it' is tricky because the subjects fail to match the trick.

Extending the domain of the purpose

To summarise, the bodily *cum* material culture paradigm is relevant in the case of all human societies—whether Western, industrial and modern, or else, African, Asian or other 'traditional' societies. The basic conditions of human sensori-motivity or cognition do not make the difference between them, the changing historical conditions of their exercise do.

As regards contemporary societies, one of their many characteristics seems to ruin any attempt to generalise the patterns of subjectiv-

ity to all members of an institution, or to a majority of them. Like B. Lahire (1998), most historians and sociologists consider that Western societies are so pluralistic as to prevent any generalisation in terms of lifestyle or ethos. No doubt, the cultural diversity of the Mankon and the conflicts or even wars for subjectivity were part of Mankon political life. Their intensity increased in the last 50 years. But the governmentality of containers provided a praxeological principle and a material culture which contained, managed or interpreted the conflicts. Unlike the Mankon, it would seem that contemporary Western societies, let alone the 'global village', are so pluralistic from political, ideological, cultural and praxeological points of view that it seems impossible to find common principles of praxeological organisation comparative to the logics of containment that prevailed in Mankon. There is also a question of dimensions: at the beginning of the 20th century, the Mankon numbered some 6,000 to 8,000 people—perhaps ten times more at the turn of the 21st century, whereas the population of contemporary states numbers in hundreds of millions people.

I would like to lift this last difficulty. In my opinion, as D. Desjeux (2004) said, it all depends on the scale of observation. Viewed from inside, at close range, Western societies can be said to be pluralistic. By contrast, if one follows the ethnologist or the comparative historian on his more or less exotic wanderings, the scale of observation is different. What does one see in terms of internal diversity in a non-Western country? One can see that, to some extent, there is proportionately just as much, or perhaps more, diversity within the Mankon kingdom than in contemporary France. You can also see that those two states belong to quite different historical regimes and implement quite different types of governmentalities. Moreover, you can see that, within each of them, the basic tenets of the respective governmentalities are quite homogeneous. The Mankon system of envelopes, containers and openings is strikingly different from the 'bio power' characteristic of modern Europe. This difference can be put to the test by transferring a French intellectual into a Mankon context or a Mankon notable into French society. Following my first contact in 1971, it took me 15 years before I understood the way I had been included within the limits of the kingdom as an assimilated stranger (*ankyeni*), and even more to embody the material and bodily cultures of containment. Similarly, one cannot substitute a Javanese *Priyayi* for a Nigerian *Alhaji*, an American top-ranking executive for a Grassfields notable. As Braudel said, if we were to meet Voltaire at Volnay, we would be quite capable of having

a decent conversation with him; however, if we were to spend a few days in his house, to eat at his table, to adopt all his material culture and bodily practices, we would be entirely destabilised and brought close to a nervous breakdown.

In line with the above, Bayart (2004) invited his readers to a global tour of several regimes of subjectivity. I will quote two of them. The imperial moment of the colony was a "cruel and tremendous 'subjectivation' laboratory" (p. 204), producing many "modes and styles of life". And it addressed the body as E.M. Collingham (2001: 36) stressed: "The British experience of India was intensely physical". Clothing, food, domestic labour, housing and the procurement of consumer goods were daily and essential concerns in the colony. The relationship to labour, servants, their specific techniques of the body, their sexuality and their material universes turned the colony into a unique experience and the laboratory of many *metissages* and original innovations like the boy scouts, that diffused all the way to the metropole and then around the world (pp. 197–250).

The 'global techniques of the body' constitute the second example (pp. 317–404). Indeed, the habits and lifestyles produced by the globalisation of cultural and commodity fluxes are appropriated and adjusted according to the many different local trajectories of subjection. Against the pessimism of the Frankfurt school and of commonsensical chit-chat "who pity Humanity, and even more the peoples, because they were deprived of their history, against every likelihood" (p. 134), the adoption of consumer behaviour is unanimous, globalised, and quite efficient in the production of different lifestyles. Baudrillard's generalisations do not rest on much empirical fieldwork. The consumer is active, and consumption produces certain types of men and women while at the same time subjecting them.

Let us now change the scale of observation from the global to the local and return to France. In the restricted domain of leisure practices in the countryside or in a 'natural' environment, where happiness belongs, different lifestyles can be found, illustrating different material identifications and their projection on the screen of party politics. I am alluding to the opposition between hunters and conservationists, already mentioned, which is so characteristic, yet marginal, in the French contemporary political landscape. As mentioned in chapter 1, the political sociologist Christophe Traïni (2003: 29) analysed the revolt of the hunters that fed an anti-European party from 1989 onwards under CPNT (see chapter 1). I should mention the fact that CPNT

presented a candidate for the 2007 Presidential elections in France. Traïni underscored the fact that CPNT recruited its members from across the political spectrum, from the extreme left to the extreme right. It was therefore 'pluralistic'.

Despite their many subjective differences (in social class, political orientation, generations), the hunters identify with each other and make an alliance against their opponents who consider them as some sort of alcoholic brutes who have no place in a civilised world. Their group identification does not come from anything other than their *practice* which implies a sensori-affective-motor investment in a hunting territory mediated by material equipments succinctly listed by Traïni (p. 20).

I do not wish to criticise this outstanding piece of sociological analysis of the electoral behaviour of 'the Poachers of the Republic' (*les Braconniers de la République*). However, I wish to question the nature of the data on which the analysis is constructed, because it will allow me to introduce important comments of a methodological order. We shall see that this question is central to the debate. The sources listed (pp. 207–210) mention nine *interviews* with CPNT militants and 67 *written* documents, that is exclusively *verbalised* sources. Data produced by the observation of the *bodily/material culture* of the hunters are not even mentioned, let alone taken into account in the analysis. There is one indirect exception by means of the verbalised comments made by the hunters or their most vocal opponents, that is through the prism of the vernacular *representations* and interpretations. Yet such comments (e.g. pp. 9–20) make explicit references to the unique emotional experience constituted by the *physical* involvement in hunting, which, like all emotional and physical experiences, is notoriously hostile to verbal expression. The reference made to N. Elias (pp. 52–58) however, could be such as to attract the attention of the author on practices and behaviour, instead of the conventional speeches made by the hunters. The descriptions they attempt are inadequate and wanting in nuance and details. Besides, they speak less of their practice than of the representations of hunting (in favour or against it, with the spectacular passions and distortions in the two opposing camps). Each of the two parties claim a privileged relationship to the 'natural' environment. Once more, all this develops within the scope of the 'Magritte effect'.

Traïni's research is not devoted to the study of hunting, but to the electoral behaviour of the hunters. The CPNT vote of the citizens who belong to the right or to the left of the political spectrum cannot be explained by the institutionalisation of an ideology. The relevant

question, therefore, is to understand how their practice can identify the hunters in such a powerful way that it disqualifies the usual ideological and political identifications and unleashes such violent passions on all sides—in favour or against it. It seems to me that some understanding of the practices is required to sustain a comprehensive analysis of the electoral behaviour of the hunters. The hunter will identify with his gun, cartridges, horn, boots and territory, while the member of the Bird Watching Society will identify with his binoculars, the repertoire of bird species, the recording of bird's songs, the maps and the most diversified environments. The two parties belong to two different material, aesthetic and emotional universes. Both, however, depend on the same provision system and queue next to each other at the cashier of the same store, like Decathlon. This is a ridiculously simple sketch of different material and bodily cultural universes which possess their own sacred places, specialised journals, cults, high priests, with all the scents and sounds echoing in their incorporated memories as did the famous small 'madeleines' of Marcel Proust.

The question I am raising is whether or not a Weberian comprehensive socio-anthropology can do without an adequate methodology, taking into consideration the sensori-affective-motor dimensions of social practice. A century of Grassfields ethnography mostly based on *interviews* (with a few exceptions like Ankermann's study of Grassfields material culture and ethnographic collections), have not produced a single bit of knowledge that would relate to the pot-king, that is, to the political yet hardly verbalised *modus operandi* of Grassfields sacred kingship. The same critique could be addressed to the anthropologists who focused on African sacred kingship, like Luc de Heusch, and who worked exclusively through the verbalisations and representations shared by the informants, even when they concerned the bodily practices of the king or those around him. *Mutatis mutandis*, I doubt that the enquiry conducted by most sociologists on the basis of interviews and written documents could produce an adequate analysis of the divide between the hunters and the conservationists. The limitations of the enquiry do not come directly from a theoretical inadequacy, but from the category of data used to construct the sociological object. It is not so much a theoretical question than a question of *methodology* that has far-reaching *theoretical* implications. Let us say that European social sciences are definitely logocentric in their theories and methods of investigation.

We could follow the steps of Weber, Elias, Bourdieu and others, and pay attention to the motor and material cultures in our own con-

temporary Western societies. Where should we then look in order to find the appropriate sensori-affective-motor conducts and the material culture that amount to a constitution, unwritten on paper, yet written on the bodies and the objects? How does 'it' govern? The diversity of practices and material universes seems to defeat any attempt made in such a direction. The respective identifications and bodily techniques of the hunter, the bird watcher, etc. diverge to a great extent. One could also explore the ways such identifications may be compounded by any subject in 'pluralistic' contemporary societies. A business firm can rent a number of huts in the Somme valley for its executives. The latter may practice mountain-biking in the forest. Multiplying and compounding the diversity of bodily practices will be the rule rather than the exception. In the 1970s sociology of the 'lifestyles', which assumed the internal consistency of patterns of consumption according to social categories, but failed to establish sufficient regularities in such patterns, provided a clear demonstration of the 'plurality' of the society and of each subject.

Yet, there is definitely a common feature to all those lifestyles that differentiates them from an African kingdom in two important and related ways. They aim at fostering the biological life of the subjects, and, in order to do so, they depend on industrial provision systems. All the subjects can have access to a diversity and quantity of material goods unprecedented in human history. The subjects do not have equal access to those goods. However, the subjects more or less barred from consumption, because they are unemployed or have a very low income, share in the same rules of the game. They may fall back on lower levels of vital practices, and, in spite of the pessimistic perceptions of their fate, are adept at inventing various alternative techniques of the self within a range of practices that are widely shared.

Since the fall of the Berlin wall and the development of mass consumption in China, the adoption of those practices is unanimous and globalised. They are directly in gear with the bodily life of the subject. In that respect, they hinge on religion. R. Debray (2003: 17–18) considered that "for the individual who knows he is mortal and for the group who knows it can dissolve", religion provides the expectation of a life surplus. In my opinion, consumption gives matter for politics, but it also gives matter for religion and for dreaming. Consumption practices concern the life of the subject. They adjust to the body. They involve material objects and substances. They are accompanied by performative

words which transform the bodies and the material substances into realistic fantasies, into dreams and identifications concerning life, its origins and its transmission.

As regards the type of governmentality subsuming all the different lifestyles in a pluralistic modern society, M. Foucault is right, and R. Debray conforms with his views: modern politics developed into bio-politics. Its goal is to promote the life of the subjects, and it applies to each individual subject and to the whole flock precisely where the subjects take themselves as the object of their own actions. It is a power which aims at increasing and improving the subjects' lives and may, in exceptional cases, allow death, as against the power of sovereignty, the concern of which was to inflict death and let people live and care alone for their lives. However, promoting the life of the subjects is an ambiguous undertaking, because it implies that whatever or whoever threatens or is believed to threaten the biological well-being of the people ought to be destroyed. Millions of cows, sheep, fowls or turkeys must be slaughtered when the mad cow disease or the avian flue roams around. But the threat may be conceived of as a human one, and it may concern an 'inferior' race that has to be eradicated on a massive scale, in which case 'biopolitics' assumes the form of a genocide.

This type of power manifests itself in many different ways in the provision systems of material goods, their use, their consumption, in the domains of food, housing, health, procreation, hedonistic consumption, leisure. The most recent manifestation of this governmentality is its refraction of the socio-cultural kaleidoscope produced by the globalisation of commodity and media fluxes. The material and bodily cultures can diversify to such an extent that the same principles of biopolitics can pervade the plurality of practices depending on their local trajectories. This is why at present the bio-politics of the pot-king fade away from a governmentality of containers. The pot is being smashed into pieces by an uncontrolled access to world cultural and commodity resources. The envelope of the city/king is being torn apart. It is spilling its content and it is flooded with unmoored persons and goods from all over the world, calling for more closure, more intake of globalised ressources and more spreading of ancestral, unifying substances, and for a reinvention of the kingdom and of an African modernity.

In the history of humanity, material things have never been so abundant and overwhelming than in the 21st century, thanks to industrial production. They constitute a challenge to anthropological thought. The paradigm I attempted to test with the pot-king aims at analysing

the body *cum* material culture in its political/subjective dimensions. This is a *detour* through Africa. Its ultimate goal is to construct a potentially universal paradigm for the study of the 'types of subjects', of the 'life conducts', combining the two basic functions of the human species—the linguistic one and the praxic one—and two basic kinds of knowledge—the verbalised one and the procedural one.

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THE MANKON LANGUAGE AND ITS TRANSCRIPTION

The Mankon language belongs to the Bantu family. It has noun classes and concords, and phonological tones. J. Leroy worked on its complex morphology and syntax in 1977 and 2007. The phonology of consonants differs, depending on their position, whether root initial or intervocalic and final. This yields two different phonological charts of the consonants (J. Leroy, 2007: 32, 36). Consequently, the phonological consonants may present disconcerting realisations and it is impossible to device an orthography that would conform strictly to the phonology. The Mankon Language Committee (MALACO) has acknowledged the difficulty and produced an alphabet with the assistance of professional linguists. The alphabet is a compromise between the *emic* structure and their *etic* realisations. It is used in the Committee's publications, such as the Mankon diary. I tried to conform to this, except for a few letters such as the nasalized consonant which I have written [ng] pronounced like in the German '*Ordnung*'. Like MALACO, I have not transcribed the tones. My ambition was limited: I have tried to transcribe some vocabulary without any risk of ambiguity, yet with no scientific pretence. The glottal stop is rendered by [‘].

MANKON GLOSSARY

Aban adi: bag of evil
Abweng: danse, festival
Alaketa: pepper
Ali'ti: parade
Alub: musical group and repertoire
Alub ala'a: "*Alub* [of the] country"
Ankyeni: assimilated stranger (and "locust")
Atatok: plant *Impatiens hians*
Atse: clan, lineage
Atshul: ailment consisting in a loss of substance (Bum language)
Atsum: "lake", dwelling house of the king
Atueu beukfu: "head [of the] dead"
Azo': unction bowl
Azume: "thing", i.e. skin or body of the king
Beulim: half siblings
Beutso Tsiteuwareu: "they remove [the] flag" last day of the king's dance
Bigwe: secret agent (pl.)
Dzieu: to swallow, to eat
Eshi'e: cache-sexe
Fama: to spray
Filameu: fight with wooden clubs
Fa'a: to make, to do, to work
Fo: king
Kwi'fo: authority, ruling body at the palace
Kwok: an unruly mask, in the Bafut-We area
Ma: "mother"
Maafo: "mother [of the] king"
Ma ala'a: plant *Sporobolus africanus*
Mabu': masquerade, escort
Ma byèn (see *Ma ala'a*)
Mandzong: warriors' lodge
Mangye: female, woman
Mangye nto': "woman [of the] palace": king's spouse
Manto': "child [of the] palace", prince, princess
Mbom: custom, behaviour
Meukam: bunch of ebony tablets
Meukom: masquerade, musical group
Meulu'u: raffia wine
Meusongong: warriors' lodge at the palace
Miyɛ: ritual performed to address the king directly
Muma: "child [of the] mother", i.e. full sibling
Mu mangye: "female child", girl
Mu mbangneu: "male child", boy
Mungwa: young boy
Nda: house, household
Nda ala'a: "house [of the] country"
Nda beukum: "house [of the] notables"

Nda Meusongong: "house [of] *Meusongong*"
Nda Minang: "house [of the mask] *Minang*"
Nda mon: "house [of the] child"
Nda ngang: "house of medicines"
Nda ngu: "house [of the poison] ordeal"
Ndenge: marriage dance
Ndifo: "elder [of the] king" (palace title)
Ndimon: "elder [of the] child", baby sitter
Ndom: "husband"
Ndong: drinking cup, calabash
Ndop: expensive indigo dyed cloth
Ndor: plant (*Basella alba*)
Ndzieu nda: "eater [of] house", successor
Neushwim: shrine at the palace
Ngang fo: "medicine [of the] king"
Ngobeu: skin, surface, envelope
Ngu: ordeal poison (*Erythrophlaeum guineense*)
Ngwe: wife
Ngwon: "person"
Ngwon nikwab: "person [of] divination", diviner
Ngya: elder
Nkum: "notable"
Nimon (ou neumon, ou nimie): mother, term of address
Nkeukom: musical group and repertoire
Nta' ngu: "hill [of] *ngu*", i.e. hill of the poison ordeal
Nto': palace, royal clan
Nto' meulu': "palace [of the] wine"
Ntsenda: palace servant or retainer
Ntse'e: cloth
Ntsu: mouth, door, orifice, gate
Ntsu nto': "gate of the palace"
Nyɛ: skin, body
Samneu: day of the Mankon week
Sang: courtyard
Sugeu: to wash
Ta: father
Tabɛrɛ: plant (*Piper umbellatum*)
Takingeu: public executioner
Taking mbang: "*Takingeu* [of the] club"
Takumbeng: musical group and repertoire
Takwe: bachelor
Tama: "father [of the] mother"
Tatse: "father [of the] descent group"—clan or lineage
Tita: father, term of address
Zingka'neu: day of the Mankon week

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