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Mathias Fubah Alubafi and Molemo Ramphalile

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*Corresponding author: Mathias Fubah Alubafi, Human and Social Development Research Programme, Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa; Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Limpopo, Limpopo, South Africa
E-mails: malubafi@hsrc.ac.za, fubahalubafi@yahoo.co.uk

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The shifting iconography of drinking horns in the Western Grassfields, Cameroon

Mathias Fubah Alubafi^{1,2*} and Molemo Ramphalile¹

Abstract: This paper examines the shifting iconography and iconology of the buffalo and cow horn drinking cup in the western Grassfields of Cameroon. It highlights the extraordinary creativity of how cow horn drinking cups have provided young people who were previously denied the opportunity of using objects of status to associate with the new aesthetic practices. By examining the fascination in cow horn drinking cups decorated with Bruce Lee's facial image, this paper will show that successful youth who acquire such items have become the embodiments of a new iconography and iconology for the western Grassfields. More importantly, the study will demonstrate how these emerging youths, who are neither royals nor elites have reverse to their advantage the traditional iconography and iconology that was typical of the region and that was restricted to royals and elites.

Subjects: African Studies; Political Communication; Visual Communication; History of Art; Visual Culture; Visual Arts

Keywords: iconography; iconology; Cameroon Grassfields; buffalo; cow; Bruce Lee

1. Introduction

Since the publication of drinking horns in the Grassfields almost two decades ago (Knöpfler, 1997), there has been an explosion of historical and anthropological interest in the artistic and cultural heritage of the Cameroon Grassfields. While similar interests and publications existed before 1997



Mathias Fubah Alubafi

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mathias Fubah Alubafi's research interest and expertise is in traditional and contemporary African art, in particular involving transformation of the traditional art scene. His recent work focused on anti-hegemonic iconographies and was based on case studies conducted in the Cameroon Grassfields and South Africa. Mathias Fubah's interest also extends to social factors relating to HIV/AIDS and issues associated with alternative rural livelihoods. He is a reviewer for *African Studies Review*, *International Migration*, *SAHARA-J: Journal of Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS* and *Imbizo: International Journal of African Literary and Comparative Studies*, among others. He has recently completed a major project (in which he was the Principal Investigator) focusing on historical statues and monuments in South Africa.

Molemo Ramphalile is a researcher in the Human Social Development unit at the Human Sciences Research Council. His broad interests include Cultural Studies, Feminist Theory, and Critical Race Theories.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The changing nature of drinking horns in the western Grassfields of Cameroon provides an opportunity to understand the material culture of success and power in the region. This paper highlights the extraordinary creativity of how drinking vessels have provided young and previously disadvantaged men and women the opportunity of making their voice heard in the wider Grassfields community. The paper demonstrates that through the reinvention of traditional Grassfields symbols, such as the buffalo horn drinking cup that is now comparable to cow horn drinking cups decorated with the facial image of Bruce Lee, young men and women have created a new, attractive, and compelling idea of what it means to be a youth and an elite in present day Grassfields. Through their creativity, they have reverse to their advantage the traditional symbol of the buffalo horn drinking cup that was typical of the region's traditional elites and restricted from youth.

(Geary, 1981; Rowlands, 1985; Warnier, 1993a, 1993b) the focus was on exquisitely decorated buffalo horn drinking cups and plain or undecorated cow horn drinking cups. While some pointed out that the use of iconographic motifs on the former was deliberate and in line with the social stratification of the society in the region (Geary, 1981; Knöpfli, 1997), others, especially, the present day youth, questioned the persistence of such practices in an age in which the ability to afford allows both the youth and the royal elites the opportunity to own similar objects with similar aesthetics.

My research on contemporary drinking horns in the Cameroon Grassfields tells a different story about the new drinking horn and aesthetics that have emerged, which seem to be a deliberate attempt to counter the buffalo horn drinking cup that had eluded the youth because of its association with royal elites. This new category of drinking horns, as well as the foreign iconographic motifs depicted on it and its users, most of whom are youth who have succeeded in their careers and now want to portray their status through such exquisite objects, have made them to look like the objects of choice. Here, youth refers to men and women, in roughly equal measure, ranging in age from about twenty to forty years. Most Grassfields, and Bambui youth are affiliated with self-help groups that function as credit associations, they collect money at each meeting to give to one of their members (Argenti, 1998; Fubah, 2014). The example of the new found aesthetic of the youth who were previously restricted from using objects reserved for royal elites is Bruce Lee's facial image on cow horn drinking cups, it sends a strong message to the royal elites about their much revered buffalo horn drinking cup.¹ As a matter of fact, the inventive and innovative introduction of Bruce Lee's facial image as a motif on cow horn drinking cups for the youth is a good illustration of the ambivalent nature of titles and titled objects in the western Grassfields. It demonstrates that in Africa and in Cameroon in particular, the iconography of the society is not static (Mbembe, 2015; Prashad, 2001; Sajjani, 2015); it did not just appear from nowhere (Kasfir, 2000). Rather, it has been "built through a process of bricolage upon the already existing structures and scenarios which the older, pre-colonial and colonial genres of African and Grassfields art were made" (Kasfir, 2000, p. 9).

The main argument emerging from this paper is that the overwhelming interests in cow horn drinking cups with Bruce Lee's facial image provides us with the opportunity to understand the socio-cultural transfigurations that the western Grassfields have been going through since the early 2000s. In other words, the new and foreign motif on local drinking cups allows us to comprehend the shifting nature of the iconography of success and power in Cameroon and the Grassfields. Across the Cameroon Grassfields nowadays, it is common practice to associate with youth who have succeeded in their careers and who now go after objects of status such as the exquisitely decorated drinking cups than with royal elites whose only asset is the buffalo horn drinking cup and its traditional restrictions. This practice can also be witnessed in the ability of the Grassfields youth, especially those who are emerging out of hardship and poverty to portray their success through the acquisition and display of distinctive items such as drinking cups and related objects and furniture. As Michael Rowlands (1996) notes, this practice of accumulating items has become one the most notable means of assessing the success or failure of youths in the Grassfields and sub-saharan Africa.

By examining the fascination in cow horn drinking cups decorated with Bruce Lee's facial image, this paper will show that those successful youth who acquire such items have become the embodiment of a new iconography for the western Grassfields. More importantly, the study will demonstrate how these emerging youths who are not royals elites have reversed to their advantage the traditional iconography that was typical of the region.

2. The Cameroon Grassfields and the traditional iconography of drinking horns²

The Cameroon Grassfields is the region that stretches from the expansive rainforests in the South and West of the country to the upper reaches of the Mbam River on the Nigerian border. The Grassfields is the highland which sits at approximately 1,000–3,000 m above sea level and belongs to the savannah belt which runs from the Atlantic right across the continent to the Indian Ocean. The border between the forest and the Grassfields does not only mark two geographically and climatically distinct areas but also separates two entirely different cultures. The forests are inhabited mostly by small

population groups who have—if at all—only weakly developed chiefdoms and are counted among the egalitarian and acephalous societies in academic literature (Koloss & Homberger, 2008). The Grassfields, on the other hand, are a land of monarchic systems. The various kingdoms of the Grassfields resemble each other in key areas—religious ideas, tools, weapons, clothes, houses, and settlements—but there are also significant differences (Argenti, 1998; Geary, 1981; Jindra, 2005; Koloss & Homberger, 2008, p. 13). The languages and dialects, for example, do not always allow for unambiguous communication between neighbours and, to this day, Pidgin English, English and French serve as *linguae francae* (Koloss & Homberger, 2008). Many of these kingdoms are renowned for their “masquerades as well as for their elaborate hierarchies headed by kings, who are known throughout the region by the Pidgin term, fon” (Argenti, 1998, p. 753) and in Bambui as “for” (Fubah, 2014).

These hierarchies are generally centralized in the palace in the capital, and are divided into a tripartite system composed of the king, *kwifor* or a regulatory society of commoners, including servants, advisors and a judiciary body, and the society of royal eligibles (the king’s sons, and his predecessor sons) (Argenti, 1998). The regulatory society and the royal eligibles are both divided into ranks according to complex title systems which confer unequal decision-making powers (cf. Gramci, 1971), as well as a sartorial prerogative on the occupants of the royal household (Argenti, 1998). Of all the traditional regalia of the traditional elites or royals, the drinking cup is the most important (Fubah, 2014). There are two categories of drinking horns, including: the buffalo horn drinking cup, which is reserved for members of the royal family, most of whom are titled holders, and the cow horn drinking cup, used by all members of the society (Knöpfli, 1997). The production of drinking horns is also highly stratified. Essentially, the buffalo horn drinking cup is carved by special artists, whose work is recognized and appreciated by the *fon*, while the cow horn drinking cup is produced by all artists, regardless of their status. From a Marxist perspective, this ideology was used by the royal family or the dominant classes in the Grassfields and Bambui region to perpetuate class relations that benefitted, and continue to benefit them (Gramci, 1971; Marx, 1977). In the same vein, it is used by revolutionaries to undermine the power of the dominant class, and this is where the cow horn drinking cup decorated with the facial image of Bruce Lee comes in (Sajjani, 2015).

From this, it follows that the anti-hegemonic project is not about reducing the level of domination of the youth by the royal class, but rather working to destroy the traditional iconography by eliminating the relations of domination that exist between the royal class and the youth. It is always only a question of power, and of politics (Sajjani, 2015, p. 1). As used in this paper, the term iconography literarily means, “the study of images” (D’Alleva, 2005, p. 20). At its simplest level, the practice of iconography means identifying motifs and images in works of art, for example, a buffalo horn drinking cup decorated with the image of a buffalo or a human being shows that it is a royal object. Sometimes, iconography forms part of a particular element within an image, it can be a human figure who that is part of a larger crowd scene or a flower motif that is commonly used as decoration in a capital; at other times, iconography can focus on the image as a whole such as the last supper (D’Alleva, 2005). Iconography can also be used to refer to the symbols of a particular time period, for example, the iconography of the colonial period (Coombes, 2003; Mbembe, 2015; Scott, 1985), or the iconography of Bruce Lee in the 1970s (Prashad, 2001; Sajjani, 2015) or HipHop culture in New York City in the 1970s (Sajjani, 2015).

At the Bamenda Art Institutions Conference of December 2015 at the Mankon Palace Museum, some of the discussions were about the question of the iconography of objects across the western Grassfields.³ During these discussions, many of the participants agreed that it was not important for the younger generation to continue to see the artistic and cultural scene with the same eyes as royal elites do. Many argued that the iconography of title objects such as the buffalo horn drinking cup, for example, was fast changing and there is a need to capture and talk about the shift. Indeed, right from the beginning of the deliberations, there was disagreement between the royal elites and the youth on what constitute the iconography of the region in terms of drinking vessels. To most of the participants, the buffalo horn drinking cup that has been used by those from the royal family across the region for decades seemed to be the ideal instrument of power and control of the local population.⁴ One of the important things to note about the buffalo horn drinking cup, and the cow horn

drinking cup used by royals is that it is, one of the most precious heirlooms handed down from one generation to another across the region (Knöpfli, 1997). This, in a way, embodies the Grassfields population's perception of the iconography of the buffalo horn as one of the main objects that can make or mar the unity of the family and kingdom (Fubah, 2014).

This traditionalist ideology of the iconography of the buffalo horn drinking cup created the impression that it was only through the use of such objects that royal elites could live up to the expectations of their societal status and therefore command respect from the population. It was an important aspect of the cultural practices of the kingdoms of the Grassfields.

To enhance this traditionalist ideology, the buffalo horn drinking cup's iconographies were highly valued in comparison to those that were considered foreign. But, even in cases where foreign iconographies existed, as was the case in the Bamum Kingdom, where King Njoya Ibrahim became obsessed with the German military uniform, for example, the iconographies were still associated with the royal elites rather than with the youth and commoners (Argenti, 1998; Geary, 1996; Rowlands, 1996). It was believed that exposing youth to foreign ideas would make them to disrespect elders. Growing up in the Bambui Kingdom, the author who was a youth at the time got socialized into the belief that traditional values were unchanging and that anything the youth did which was contrary to traditional norms was punishable by the ancestors and the gods of the land.⁵ As a matter of fact, the youth and most commoners were subjected to a form of traditional education that created a somewhat convincing apologue about the iconography of royal objects such as the buffalo horn drinking cup, and that stressed the significance of these objects and their aesthetics to the well-being of the society. In doing this, the goal was to ensure that social stratification across the Grassfields and Bambui was promoted and preserved at all cost (Alpers, 1988; Benjamin, 1985; Gramci, 1971; Marx, 1977). In other words, traditional teaching in the Grassfields which was modelled in line with the iconography of royal elites was aimed, above all at making untitled men and women remain loyal to the traditional leadership (Argenti, 2007; Gramci, 1971; Marx, 1977).

To this end, youth and commoners were trained to understand that modern education did not constitute the fastest way to social recognition in society. Rather, *kwifor* was the most appropriate instrument for gaining status. Moreover, it was not only easy to recruit youth as members of *kwifor*, but those who were members were made to enjoy a considerable amount of prestige and power, and it was a source of pride for a family to have one of their sons join (Nkwi, 1996). The enhance prestige, Nkwi (1996) notes, was reflected during one's life time as well as in death ceremonies. Because of this, the palace art treasury that housed the different masks lodges in Grassfields kingdoms had sufficient curators since working in the palace was the ideal thing to do at the time.

In most, if not all the kingdoms of the western Grassfields, artistic and cultural heritage resources were presented as the gateway into the iconography the region (Sajnani, 2015). This was the case with palaces which were not only the cultural capitals of the kingdoms, but were also the political and economic centres. The palace, in the broader sense of the word meant everything to the population, including royals and non-royals. Within the palace, as well as in the cycles of the royal elites, the buffalo horn drinking cup served not only as an ancestral object, but it was also, and until present day a means of communication with the ancestors (cf. Fubah, 2014; Kopytoff, 1997; Warnier, 1993a, 1993b). Indeed, the horn played a central role and it was this role that prompted Paul Gebauer (1979) to observe that a Grassfields royal's drinking cup is always among the few items in his carry-all bag.

The celebration of the traditional iconography of Grassfields kingdoms such as that of the Bambui Kingdom, found expression in *mandele* in Bambui or *Abinefor* in Bafut, or the annual dance that brought together the population, including those living in the village and those from the cities and abroad. During such ceremonies, kings and other royal elites were lavishly dressed in their traditional attires and some of the most distinctive treasures of the kingdom were brought out and displayed for public entertainment (Figure 1).⁶ The local ideology about the traditional iconography in the Bambui Kingdom not only made the royal elites the centre of attraction, but also, the objects

Figure 1. Bambui royal elites performing during the *mandele* or annual dance. Bambui, 2010.

Source: Photo by Mathias Fubah.



they used and controlled such as the buffalo horn drinking cup. The outcome of this fascination with traditional iconography was that some parents in the royal elites turned a blind eye to any career that their children wanted to pursue, especially if it had nothing to do with the royal status quo. For instance, some parents in Bambui actually discouraged their children from joining the priesthood profession in spite of the fact that Bambui had, and still has a seminary that was keen to recruit and train locals. As a matter of fact, some children who served as mass servants or assisted the priest during religious sermons ran into serious problems with their parents because parents wanted them to continue practicing tradition in order to take over the throne when they are no more.

To enforce their control and in their determination to have their children follow the traditional ideology of the region and kingdom, one of the parents, Pa Agang used what Michel Foucault calls *dispositif* (1979) to suppress his children. For example, children who dare disrespect the iconography of the buffalo horn drinking cup as a royal object that they ought to aspire towards and acquire in future were heavily fined and their interests and efforts towards other ventures thwarted. And, although Pa Agang was not a titleholder and did not own a buffalo horn drinking cup, he was highly interested in titles for he strongly believed that without a traditional title and objects such as the buffalo horn drinking cup, his son was going to be “a no man” or someone without status in the kingdom.⁷ His strong desire to see his son attain the status of a titled man was motivated by the

Figure 2. Buffalo horn drinking cups (title objects) collected from the Bamum Kingdom in the Cameroon Grassfields during the German era—1889 to 1915. Ethnological Museum, Berlin, February 2013.



importance that royal elites attached to themselves and their accompanying objects. Their social status, which was the basis for ownership of buffalo horn drinking cups reverberated on most families and made them want to attain similar status soonest (Figure 2).

Like Marcus Garvey's quote that "a people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots" (cited in Blaisdell, 2005, p. 25), Grassfields parents also value the traditional iconography of the buffalo horn and related title cups. This is because these parents saw the knowledge and practice of tradition as a prerequisite to adulthood and titles. Ownership of a buffalo horn was of the utmost importance to the people of the western Grassfields because royal elites had made such objects much sought-after and objects with which men could negotiate their access into the power structures of the kingdom (Gramsci, 1971; Marx, 1977; Sajnani, 2015). In simple terms, buffalo horn drinking cups were seen as highly precious resources that could help Grassfields men achieve what Gilles Seraphin calls a "statutory quest" (2000, p. 117). This explains why the iconography of the buffalo horn drinking cup was the embodiment of authority, and, by extension, success in traditional cycles prior to the emergence of cow horn drinking cups decorated with foreign aesthetics which now appeals to youths and the previously marginalized.

3. The decline of the iconography of the drinking horn

Hegemonic culture is first and foremost the values that serve and justify the privileged classes in any given society, and they are thusly privileged because of their relation to the mode of production (Gramsci, 1971; Marx, 1977). When the mode of production changes, there are fundamental changes occurring in the society as in the case of the Grassfields, and Bambui, such that new modes of production become dominant, then new classes are formed, class relations shift, and the new class(es) that rise to power then construct new cultural objects, iconographies, aesthetics, values, and ultimately ideology, that justifies their hegemony (Mbembe, 2015; Prashad, 2001; Sajnani, 2015).

Writing about "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive," Achille Mbembe (2015, p. 3) notes that "the decolonisation of buildings and public spaces includes a change of those colonial names, iconography, i.e. the economy of symbols whose function, all along, has been to induce and normalize particular states of humiliation based on white supremacist presuppositions. "Such names, images, and symbols, Mbembe (2015, p. 3), goes on, have nothing to do on the walls of a public university campus more than 20 years after apartheid." In his study on "HipHop Origin as Organic Decolonization" Sajnani (2015, p. 1), notes that "HipHop culture, at its origins, is an organic decolonization of local urban space by internally colonized people in post-industrial 1970s New York." In the same vein, Bruce Lee's iconography is an organic decolonisation of the local Bambui space by internally marginalized youths in the present day Cameroon Grassfields. Accordingly, the term iconography alludes to the royal elites of the kingdoms of the Grassfields, who used objects such as the buffalo horn drinking cup as a means of exaggerating their importance and dignity in the face of their subjects, and especially a form of administration through which a certain political and social order is maintained at the expense of others (Fubah, 2016b). More specifically, iconography refers to the class of traditional elites who prior to the shift in the iconography of the drinking horn in the region, promoted and upheld the traditional values associated with the buffalo horn drinking cup because they did not want change. It was this staunch belief in the cultural values of the region that motivated the British to entrust the administration of the system of Indirect Rule into the hands of local chiefs of the region (Jua, 1995; Nkwi, 1979).

Across the Cameroon Grassfields, and the Bambui Kingdom, in particular, Indirect Rule involved the use of chiefs to implement colonial policies (Jua, 1995, p. 40). Following this system, many of the chiefs and elites who had the privilege of using certain categories of objects saw their love for tradition, and by extension, their authority over the population protected. The implication of implementing the system of Indirect Rule in the Grassfields was that, it left the traditional iconography of the region, largely intact. Given that a man's social status conditioned the type of objects he could use in the society at that time, the youth and commoners saw themselves denied access to the buffalo horn drinking cup and the cow horn drinking cups that were already empowered through being used in rituals for royal elites (Fubah,

2014). To this end, a large segment of the population was treated rather negatively because they constituted the “social juniors” of the society or those who do not really matter socially (Fubah, 2014).

Indeed, across the region, the royal elites who were also known locally as *betahla-ah* (heads of the kingdom) were until recently the sole iconic people who acted as intermediaries between outsiders or Europeans and the local population (cf. Geary, 1981, 2011). Additionally, right up to the early 2000s, these *betahla-ah* and the objects they used embodied the old iconography of the Grassfields and Bambui. In contrast to youth and untitled men who were denied the privilege of using titled objects because of their social status, *betahla-ah* controlled and benefitted from the kingdom’s resources due to the traditional ideology that gave them the notability required to be local elites. As a matter of fact, young men and untitled adults who successfully served in the palace either as *kwifor* retainers or curators of the royal treasury, and who had a good mastery of the traditional etiquettes, were sure of being awarded titles in recognition of their contributions to the royal household (Kaberry, 1962). The procedure for the selection of a candidate for the award of a title was based on recommendations from the royal elites about the candidate’s character and the role of the potential awardee in traditional issues. For instance, to be awarded a traditional title as the *fon* or king’s messenger, the “serving or sitting messenger” had to identify and recommend a candidate based on his knowledge of the role of a messenger, as well as the candidate’s ability and willingness to commit to the tasks associated with the title. Once a particular person was recommended, necessary consultation was undertaken by the *fon* and his closest notables on the suitability of the candidate. Background checks were also done to ensure that the person in question did not have a criminal record. Once this was ascertained, the potential awardee was informed and a date and an event earmarked for the award of his title.

Titles in most cases were accompanied by objects such as the buffalo horn, a title stool, a traditional gown, a cap and a traditional bag, since these newly promoted elites were expected to join the ranks of the others. In awarding the titles, the aim was to motivate the awardee to continue to promote and uphold their cultural values. Hence, titles and the social status that came with them provided the titleholders with the means for lobbying and securing opportunities for the kingdom, the *fon*, and themselves. In Bambui, for example, those whose titles were associated with the protection of the kingdom’s boundaries and land, had to collect fines, gifts and any other item that was associated with the problem. The *fon*’s messenger accepted and delivered messages from the *fon* and kingdom to the population as well as to other dignitaries outside the kingdom. Cultural security officers collected fines and levies associated with cultural issues and this continued across the different traditional departments.

Given these privileges, titleholders were able to contribute not only to the welfare of the kingdom, but they could also look after themselves since they were allowed to keep part of the proceeds collected for themselves. Moreover, the resources associated with titles such as the exquisitely decorated buffalo horn drinking cup enabled titleholders to enjoy exclusive rights and privileges in society. An uncle of mine who was once a titleholder, and who recently joined one of the Pentecostal religions in the Cameroon Grassfields, recalled with regret the good old days when he used to drink from a buffalo horn drinking cup, eat chicken gizzards among other titleholders, get car lifts from any part of the village to his house for free and could talk to any woman he admired.⁸ As he explained this to me during discussions in his house in Bambui in December 2015, he remarked:

I feel sorry that even with your PhD today, the *fon* or king cannot award you a traditional title. With little or no education in the 1970s, I was promoted to the rank of *tanteh* or quarter head by the then *fon* of Bambui, Amumgwafor II. One of the main reasons for my promotion was my knowledge of the kingdom and quarter issues. Some people argued at the time that I was awarded a title because I lived in Tiko in the South West Region for eight years but I said No. Living in Tiko alone was not enough since I was somewhat cut off from my village and culture. Listening to you and learning about how many countries you have lived in besides your education, I think you would have been more than qualified to become the *fon* of Bambui. My title came not only because of my knowledge of Bambui customs and beliefs. It was also because of the fact that I started working as a palace retainer when I was just ten years old. That seem not to be the case with you or am I lying?⁹

As a result of the opportunities, privileges, authority, and power associated with tradition, my uncle and by extension, his resources such as the buffalo horn drinking cup were seen as the ideal iconography for Bambui men. For many Bambui youths and commoners, becoming real men in society meant working towards acquiring traditional titles and title objects. For example, young Bambui boys who allowed themselves to be recruited into *kwifor* and other palace masks lodges in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were not only looking for daily bread. Through their services in the palace, they were also striving to achieve their dreams of becoming titleholders with the right to use title cups such as the buffalo horn drinking cup and related paraphernalia. This was one of the fascinations for most youth, including the author who at some point in the early 1990s wanted to abandon school and train as a herbalist in order to achieve his dreams of attaining a title, but was advised otherwise. With the societal influence and personality that royal elites had in those days, many families were tempted to have one of their sons join this category of people so that they could also benefit and be proud of the prestige associated with it. The high profile that the royal elites enjoyed across the western Grassfields in the 1960s, 1970s and 80s was justified by the fact that at the time, they symbolized what many Grassfields and Bambui people imagined as role model of success, and a betterlife. As one of the sons of a renowned royal elite who amassed vast land and other resources through his title observed, “my father is the richest and most popular person in this kingdom. That is the more reason why most underprivileged people admire him—they want to be like him”.¹⁰ In one of the discussions I had with an elderly elite in 2004 about one of his sons who was contemplating whether to go to school or join a traditional art workshop for apprenticeship, he had this to say:

Ajang is going to learn how to carve traditional objects and I think he is the right person to seat on this throne when I join my ancestors. I do not want my title chair in this kingdom to remain vacant or be taken over by a different person when I am no more. Ajang has all the qualities I want in a successor. I want the benefits of my contribution to this kingdom to tickle down to my family and descendants.¹¹

What this elderly man failed to realize was that by 2004, traditional titles and the prestigious buffalo horn drinking cup did not command as much respect and resources as it used to. However, he still saw traditional titles and the paraphernalia associated with them as the yardstick for success in the society. Yet, for many Grassfields and Bambui youths and commoners, traditional titles and most of the resources associated with them had already become obsolete since a new iconography was emerging across the region and kingdom.

4. The emerging iconography of drinking horns

If in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, traditional elites and elders portrayed traditional values and the elitist buffalo horn drinking cup as one of the main objects that could give status and success to men, then 1990s and 2000s were used to undermine these objects because they were impediments to the realisation of their dreams of the youth. Three reasons account for this. The first, is, that the ideology that presented traditional elites as the centre of all activities, and that according to Achille Mbembe (2001, p. 75), “enabled these elites to require submission and obedience of their subjects”, in order to be rewarded with exquisite objects such as the buffalo horn drinking cup was not true. The youth realised that there are alternative ways of acquiring status and distinctive objects than exclusively through respecting traditional values and royal elites.

Second, was the fact that young men and commoners realised that besides the titles and title objects, most of the titleholders depended largely on the population for financial support. As a matter of fact, most young men and commoners began to look beyond tradition, arguing as one youth, Adanghoh, did that a traditional title and a buffalo horn drinking cup without money to support the title was not something worth dreaming about.¹² With money acquired through membership in contemporary youth associations, young men are now able to turn the tides in their favour. Not only Bambui youth and commoners share this perspective. Across the western Grassfields, the transformation of the society through education and religion is reflected in the popular saying that *melieu-me-la-ah meh she- la-ah-fu* (tradition no longer pays off in Bambui). In this part of Cameroon, the

depreciation of the value of traditional titles and objects has resulted to a general contempt for traditional elites and their paraphernalia. For instance, one previously marginalized youth whom I interviewed in 2015, during my fieldwork on youths and foreign aesthetics in Grassfields art made this remark about traditional elites and objects:

When you watch all these traditional rulers and their notables gorgeously dressed in their traditional regalia and begging for simple beer in the beer parlour with the buffalo horn drinking cups, you cannot help asking if it is really worth being a titleholder?¹³

At the December 2004, *Abenefor* in Bafut palace, I watched a young man ridiculed a traditional elite in one of the beer parlours opposite the palace. As it was the festive season, elites, youths and commoners were feasting by drinking and sharing beer randomly when this elite got up and requested that his “33 export” beer be replaced with a bottle of big Guinness. In response to his request, the young man had this to say:

If the waiter changes your beer, will you pay the balance? Or you expect us, youths and commoners as you address us to contribute and replace “33 export” which costs 350 frs cfa with big Guinness which is more than twice the cost of the free beer we offered. By the way, what is wrong with you so-called titleholders that you hardly appreciate anything especially when it is not coming from someone like you? Must you be reminded that those who bought this “33 export” don’t have titles and are also not desperate for your empty titles. We can change your choice if you accept to change your title and replace your buffalo horn drinking cup with a cow horn drinking cup decorated with the facial image of Bruce Lee – the youth’s choice.¹⁴

Unlike the situation in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, the current depreciating interest in traditional titles and objects and the shifting iconography of the drinking horn has less to do with the result of the fascination with new aesthetic practices than with the fundamental changes that have been happening in the economy and society since the 1990s. Not only have these changes swept away the traditional ideology that in the past provided traditional elites with buffalo horn drinking cups, self-confidence and control over citizens; it has also greatly hampered their influence, as many are now openly challenged, even in beer parlours. This is how unimportant it has become, not only for traditional elites and their buffalo horn drinking cups, but also for those who are aspiring to join the ranks of the elites. Most of their dreams seem to have been shattered by the fast emerging previously marginalized youth and their obsession with contemporary cow horn drinking cups. In 2005–2006, those who were fortunate enough to be recruited to look after traditional objects in the Mankon and Babungo palace museums thought their traditional status was going to appreciate but this was not the case (Fubah, 2016a). Most of the youth and commoners who were expected to patronize these new cultural institutions showed little or no interest in visiting the museums. With lack of visitors from majority of the population, and also no salary from the government, these traditional titles and objects aspirants abandoned the museums for so-called greener pastures in the cities and abroad. Their interest, like that of other youth and commoners now rest in the new iconography, and by extension, the cow horn drinking cups decorated with facial image of Bruce Lee since this is the category of object that is associated with this new class of elites (Fubah, 2016a).

Indeed, when I met my uncle who was crowned *tanteh* in the 1970s because of his traditional prowess, but who later joined the church, I was astonished by his level of ignorance of traditional values. The traditional title and objects that made him famous and commanded respect in the society in the past had lost their value. Transformation of the society had changed his mentality and that of his once humble and law-abiding youth and commoners to the extent that only perhaps a few of them now cares about traditional titles, objects and the fines that used to support his lifestyle. As a matter of fact, this once confident and traditionally connected elite was now a shadow of his former self. In fact, one of his sons confided in me that he sold his buffalo horn drinking cup and related paraphernalia some years ago because the aesthetic was considered out-dated. He now uses a cow horn drinking cup that is the pride of youth and commoners.

This is the major outcome of this research on the shifting iconography of drinking horns in the western Grassfields and Bambui in particular. Traditional elites and the buffalo horn drinking cups which were once the centre of attention and attraction prior to the 1990s are gradually being replaced by a new iconography, such as cow horn drinking cups with the facial image of renowned actor, Bruce Lee, which is part of the new iconography of previously marginalized youths and commoners.

5. New elites: Marginalized youth, commoners and Bruce Lee's facial image cow horn drinking cups

Across the Cameroon Grassfields and Bambui, the 1990s and 2000s were associated with a shift in the way people perceived success and power. The shift has been attributed to the rise in new forms of iconography that seem to resurrect among Grasslanders the traditionalist ideology of the past. This is because most of those using and patronizing objects such as the cow horn drinking cup are the youth and commoners who were once denied access to objects of status and everything associated with them. In many respects these youth and commoners embody a class of self-made men whose inventive and innovative attributes have given hope to those who have continued to be deprived of certain categories of objects. They have shown that it is not only through tradition, titles and title objects that one can make their impact felt.

As is common among youth and commoners in the kingdoms of the western Grassfields, Bruce Lee's films are highly valued because of his defensive tactics which his fans use at times in defending themselves. Through the inscription of Bruce Lee's facial image on cow horn drinking cups, Pa Mandzi, the carver who claims to have invented the iconography believed that previously disenfranchised youth and commoners now have an instrument in the counter-hegemonic project. Fubah (2014) mentions, for example, the case of youth, especially those belonging to the Bambui Youth Beginners Association (BYBA) as some of those youth who are fond of these Bruce Lee facial image drinking cups. The BYBA, founded in 1997, is a youth group comprised of Bambui graduates from the Anglophone University of Buea. The group is charged with the recruitment and teaching of Bambui graduates in skills such as farming, and gardening in the village. The BYBA is also a *ndieu-chueah* or credit association where members contribute a particular amount of money every month to give to one of their members on an alternating basis until the last person receives his or her own share.

BYBA meetings are held once a month, usually on the first Sunday of the month and each member has a special seat allocated to him or her based on his status in the group. BYBA members participate in contemporary and recreational activities across the village, such as: church funerals and dead celebrations involving group members or their close relatives, *ehsio-oh* or church weddings, and *ndiamo-oh* or born-house (baby birth celebrations). As was, and still, is the case with traditional elites where buffalo horn drinking cups are reserved for them, BYBA members also have special drinking cups carved from the horn of a cow and decorated with the facial image of renowned actor Bruce Lee (Fubah, 2014). Through the accumulation of wealth and other resources resulting from BYBA membership, most of these successful youth now rival the traditional elites' display of firm and notability. Moreover, the ability of BYBA members and commoners to gain social recognition through the activities of the association, have directly or indirectly overturned the established system that had presented traditional affiliation as the only gateway into the process of accessing titles and title objects.

As a matter of fact, the strategies used by Grassfields youth and commoners in acquiring titles and title objects are indicative of the mutations that have taken place in the iconography of the drinking horn since the 1990s. The case of BYBA members, not only present a good example of how youth and commoners who were previously on the receiving end have transformed from "no people" into elites; it also highlights the changes that the youth as well as commoners and their fascination with cow horn drinking cups have brought into the western Grassfields and Bambui.

Abong, is one notable example of a BYBA member whose success has inspired, and continues to remind the youth that they can succeed without following traditional values and routes. In 1999, Abong received the sum of two hundred thousand francs as part of his credit association contribution. With this sum, he started a vegetable gardening project in the village. Over the years, Abong's gardening project proved to be very successful, and this prompted him to extend into poultry farming. By 2004 when I met him at one of the BYBA meetings, Abong's profit was already sufficient enough to enable him to buy a private car. But, with little or no knowledge of the type of car to buy, Abong invited me and I accompanied him to Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon. While in Douala, Abong insisted on buying a black Mercedes (V-boat) car because the name and colour were fashionable and it was one of the most commonest cars used by most new elites. Eventually, we bought Abong's Mercedes for three million five hundred thousand francs, an amount that greatly astonished me, and one that most of the traditional elites who had denied youth like Abong access to titles and title objects could not afford. Upon returning to Bambui with his Mercedes-benz, Abong and some of his BYBA colleagues who have acquired wealth and fame through gardening and their monthly contributions became the new elites of the village, and region. Their new status was manifested through cow horn drinking cups decorated with facial image of Bruce Lee, the Mercedes-benz, and other luxurious items (Figure 3).

With the successes emanating from membership of the youth association, the former disenfranchised youth were able to empower not only themselves but also their relatives and communities. To join the ranks of this category of youth or new elites, prospective members had to be able to afford and use objects associated with them. According to an informant, a Bambui youth who was not a member of the BYBA, some of the most successful members of the BYBA were lured into acquiring traditional titles and objects such as the buffalo horn drinking cup because traditional elites wanted to benefit from their wealth. However, because majority of them had lost interest in traditional titles and objects such as the buffalo horn drinking cup and its restrictions, they turned down the offer.

The example of the BYBA which is far from being an isolated one indicates that, unlike the traditional iconography of the 1960s, the 1970/80s, the youth and commoners of the 1990s and early 2000s owed their titles and title objects to their ability to look beyond tradition and to make use of the opportunities presented by education and creativity. Nkwi (1996) has noted that in the 1990s, formal education presented itself as a greater mechanism of social mobility, and recruitment, and by extension, interest in joining *kwifor* (to gain titles and title objects) did not produce high social status. Moreover, the remuneration of retainers through an irregular gift process did not attract

Figure 3. Cow horn drinking cups on display in Abong's living room. Bambui, Bamenda Grassfields, Cameroon, December 2015.



many young men into the service of the king. As a result, the number of retainers or previously marginalized youth and commoners recruited did not suffice to perform the variety of duties that title and title object seekers once performed. This negative attitude towards the old iconography of the drinking horn in the Grassfields and Bambui, inadvertently gave way to an alternative means of acquiring titles and title objects. In doing this, youth and commoners consciously or unconsciously created a new iconography for the Grassfields and Bambui, one in which they are no longer the disenfranchised.

6. The new iconography of the drinking horn

In present day western Grassfields and Bambui, previously disenfranchised youth and commoners are fascinated by the benefits and dignity associated with belonging to a youth association. Most youth and commoners aspire to belong to one or more of these associations because they feel the associations serve as an alternative means of achieving their dreams of also having titles and title cups. Indeed, most of the members of the BYBA, especially those who started the association have become role models for every young aspirant in the village.

For instance, in a recent research trip to the western Grassfields, I was astonished by the extent to which the new iconography has impacted society. In most of the villages and associations that I visited, young men who once aspired to acquire traditional titles and the paraphernalia associated with them such as the buffalo horn drinking cup were no longer talking about these items. In fact, most of them, especially those in Atunibah quarter, Bambui, welcomed me with contemporary items such as the cow horn drinking cup decorated with a flower motif and Bruce Lee facial motif, cow horn bracelet, beer, and wine (Figure 4). The esteem that most of these youth and childhood friends showed in their new dispensation was manifested in the type of stories and issues that we discussed. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, the stories would have been centred around traditional issues and rituals for someone who has lived out of Cameroon for many years. Instead, our discussions focused on the need to get rid of certain aspects of our traditional values on the grounds that they retard development across the Grassfields and Bambui. As Anangha, one of the previously disenfranchised youth who owns a grocery shop in Kedjum Keku, a neighbouring village, maintains:

Doctor, under the traditional system where we were expected to work in the palace or serve the king and notables in order to be rewarded with titles and title cups, I would not have been where I am today. I would have welcomed someone like you in the palace hall or beer parlour since palace retainers had prestige but without money or resources. All the resources we worked for were reserved for the king, his notables, and elders of the community.

Figure 4. Cow horn drinking cup decorated with facial image of renowned act, Bruce Carver, Pa Mandzie, Baba Kingdom, Bamenda Grassfields, Cameroon, December 2015.



Today, I am able to welcome you into my house, to offer you a descent seat, beer, wine and this prestigious cow horn drinking cup carrying the facial image of Bruce Lee, the youth's buffalo. My wife, Angeline is in the kitchen cooking and soon she will serve us food. I feel this is the difference between the now and the old system. At least one is independent rather than continuing to be dependent under the pretext of being awarded some traditional title. With my resources, I can buy these titles if I want them.¹⁵

As a matter of fact, most of the stories narrated by youth and commoners at the time, centred around the achievements resulting from their reinvention of new cultural values, and their associated benefits. Across the Bambui Kingdom, most of the previously disenfranchised youth and commoners portray their successes through distinctive objects such as cow horn drinking cups, cars, beautiful women—normally one in the house as a wife, and numerous girlfriends in other places. In most of the villages in the region, it is common to see young men who are aspiring to be successful ones wearing T-shirts and caps with the logo of their favourite youth association(s). With these T-shirts and caps, comes the desire to buy cow horn drinking cups with the facial image of Bruce Lee as a symbol of their support and interest in the new iconography.

Some of the most successful, but previously disenfranchised youths and commoners have developed the habit of sponsoring events such as inter-quarter football competitions, contemporary dance competitions, choir competitions, and music festivals. For example, in August 2013, I had the opportunity to participate in an inter-quarter football competition sponsored by the BYBA. The competition brought together twelve teams from across the village. The four weeks competition was interspersed by activities highlighting the work of the BYBA and its members, such as: the importance of owning a small vegetable garden, or a shop or engaging in poultry farming or “alternative rural livelihoods” (Mensah, 2014). Moreover, most of the term jerseys had the logo of the BYBA and decorations across the stadium had the portrait of the top BYBA members such as the president, and secretary for example. A special section of the stadium was reserved for the sale of arts and craft items such as cow horn drinking cups, wooden key holders, wooden beer openers and related souvenirs (Figure 5).

Post-match activities saw the BYBA members retreat into neighbouring beer parlours to lavish their wealth with the few lucky ones and women. Because I was one of their special guests, I was given the privilege of bringing one or two friends to these gatherings. During one of the meetings, I overheard an elderly man who was sitting on the opposite side asking if the type of money that these youth were spending was only from the gardening. In response, his colleague said the youth were likely members of a secret cult. The elderly man also questioned if the exquisitely decorated cow horn drinking cups were a challenge to the traditional elites buffalo drinking horns or just something new. When questioned why he thought it was a challenge, he responded that, as successful youth, BYBA members would have consulted the *fon* and his notables to award traditional titles and title objects rather than what they had as drinking cups.¹⁶ However, to his greatest surprise, one of the successful youth told him that his advice belonged somewhere else. “We are living in a new world, a world that has little or nothing to do with what you are dreaming of”.¹⁷

While some of the elderly men still believe that the successes of these young men and commoners require traditional recognition, most youth, especially those who are still struggling, see their alternative lifestyle as ideal. Accordingly, most of these struggling youth are emulating the example set by the previously disenfranchised. For instance, young men from Bambui and neighbouring villages who want to be seen as successful and commanding power and wealth have made it a duty to either become friends with successful members of the BYBA and other associations, or bring one of their sisters or female friends closer to the BYBA members. Through these acquaintances, youth, particularly those who are still disenfranchised are increasingly joining associations, thereby increasing the number of people patronising beer parlours with cow horn drinking cups with Bruce Lee's facial image.

Figure 5. Assorted art and craft items or souvenirs displayed for sale at a special location of the August 2013 inter-quarter football competition sponsored by BYBA members. Bambui, Bamenda Grassfields, Cameroon, August 2013.



This fascination with the new iconography of previously disenfranchised youth and commoners across the western Grassfields, and Bambui, in particular, raises a number of critical questions, the answers of which might help us understand the rationale behind the shifting iconography of the drinking horn. Notable among these questions is: what makes drinking horns decorated with the facial image of Bruce Lee attractive to young men and commoners across the Grassfields, and Bambui? And what kind of message does the interest in these cow horn drinking cups rather than the buffalo horn drinking cup used by elites, convey? Four suggestions, which are not definitive, attempt to answer these questions.

First, Bruce Lee is famous as someone who, in the 60s and 70s, radically transformed and reimagined a traditional art. He shattered taboos about what was and was not to be done by someone of his ethnicity in general, and with his art in particular (Prashad, 2001; Sajnani, 2015). Also, not only did he reinvent *Kung-Fu* by mixing it with other foreign arts, as the “youth” are mixing their cultural objects with Bruce Lee’s facial image, but in doing so and in breaking the rules of what it meant to be Chinese he did not cease in being Chinese but created a new, attractive, and compelling idea of what it meant to be Chinese (Sajnani, 2015).

Second, most Grassfields and Bambui youth are fascinated with the cow horn drinking cup because ownership of the cup is one of the main criteria for evaluating the status of youth, since the local population prioritizes a drinking cup as evidence that a youth is a man and titleholder or “a someone in society”. Indeed, in Bambui and the Grassfields, nothing reflects the status of a youth more than his drinking cup—that he polishes and puts in his bag whenever he is going out (Fubah, 2014). The drinking cup is also popular because it is used in drinking palm wine mixed with the blood of a “sac-
sacrificial fowl” or cock (Warnier, 1993a, 1993b, p. 311). As Warnier (1993a, 1993b, p. 311) notes, in the case of the neighbouring kingdom of Mankon, the drinking cup was used by trade friends in the past in creating formal alliances, by drinking from their cups, after saying aloud: “if I know something about you and fail to tell you or if I betray you, may this wine (or blood) tell it to my stomach”. The understanding behind such a statement is that the “wine from the cup stays in the person’s stomach, and if he betrayed his friend, even years later, justice will be done by causing his ignominious death

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with swollen feet or a swollen belly” (Warnier, 1993a, 1993b, p. 311). The popular belief in Bambui and the Grassfields is that alliances created using drinking cups other than the cow horn can never be effective. This explains why youth are so fascinated with owning not just a cow horn drinking cup, but one that is decorated with the facial image of their favourite actor, Bruce Lee, hence, also placing them within the aesthetics of the contemporary world in which they rightly belong.

Third, most youth, especially members of contemporary and youth associations, have become convinced that one notable means of attaining their goals and social status is to own a cow horn drinking cup decorated with the facial image of Bruce Lee. Accordingly, many have come to associate ownership of such drinking cups with the affirmation of ethnic and social backgrounds. In present day Bambui, ownership of a cow horn drinking cup in the name of Bambui and in ethnic pride in foreign aesthetics is more important than ownership for the sake of status and social recognition because, many youths feel that cow horn drinking cups serve less as signifier of social status than as a marker of social identification. Indeed, ownership of cow horn drinking cup in present day youth associations is concrete proof that, these youths form an important part of the Bambui traditional and contemporary elite’s class. It is also a confirmation that, despite the restrictions from owning certain traditional objects and titles, these youths remain sons of Bambui. For most Bambui youth, a drinking horn with the facial image of Bruce Lee can also serve as an object of status and recognition, which marks their place in the traditional hierarchy, since it is through such awards that the youths can obliterate the social stratification between traditional elites and themselves. By so doing, ownership of a cow horn drinking cup as a symbol of ethnic affiliation neutralizes the distinction between traditional elites and youths (Malaquais, 2002).

Fourth, because of the restrictions associated with the ownership of the buffalo horn drinking cup and other traditional titled objects, youths see the cow horn drinking cup decorated with the facial image of Bruce Lee as an instrument in the counter-hegemonic project. As a matter of fact, most youth felt that it is through using the cow horn drinking cup that they could challenge the overwhelming regime of traditional elites that gives status to customary and politico-bureaucratic elites at the expense of social juniors. More importantly, this traditional objects resistance enables the newly emerging class of youth, such as the BYBA members with their cow horn drinking cups to contest, not only the pre-eminent position of the Bambui customary leaders in the buffalo horn drinking cups, but also their claims of exercising control over local people through what I would dare call Bruce Lee drinking cup governmentality. Because the emerging cow horn drinking cup with facial image of Bruce Lee embody the desire of Bambui youth to invert to their own advantage, particular configurations of power, and hierarchy that have so far characterised the Bambui traditional society, and because the ownership of the buffalo cup insinuates a critique of the traditional customary hierarchy, while hiding behind mischief and malice, it is possible to read these developments as “hidden” objects of resistance (Scott, 1985). However, by highlighting the hidden nature of the cow horn drinking cup as an object of resistance, I am not suggesting that the interest in it does not also boost the image of youth as people who can, and are trying to shape their own life condition.

7. Concluding remarks

This paper has presented an overview of the historical and post-modern condition or iconography of drinking horns in the Cameroon Grassfields, and the Kingdom of Bambui, in particular. The paper has argued that, while in the past, traditional elites and elders presented traditional values, titles and title objects such as the buffalo horn drinking cup as prerequisites to success and power, alternative objects and means existed, and are gradually being introduced by post-modern youth. This has been the case since the 1990s, when disenfranchised youth started being attracted to new and foreign aesthetics as a means of empowering themselves. Given this development, elites of the pre-1990s era have witnessed a marked shift in the iconography that was, and still is typical of them. Four reasons account for this shift. First, the uniqueness of Bruce Lee’s iconography, and in particular, the manner in which it transformed and reimagined traditional art in the 1960s, and 1970s. Second, the fact that traditional elites had presented similar objects, such as, the buffalo horn drinking cup, as an object of status in the kingdom and region, but with restrictions on who owns it and who does

not. Third, the fact that, most Bambui youth see the cow horn drinking cup as an affirmation of their ethnic backgrounds, since titleholders have presented the buffalo horn as such. Fourth, the fact that, the Bambui youth see the cow horn drinking cup as an instrument in the counter-hegemonic project. Given that the youth were restricted from using the buffalo horn drinking cup, except when they meet certain conditions set by the royal elites, the youth now see the cow horn drinking cup with the frightful image of Bruce Lee as an instrument of defence.

In defending their newly found aesthetic practices, Grassfields and Bambui youth are slowly, but steadily decentring the old iconography of the region, thereby ushering in new classes, new relations, new cultural values and eventually a new ideology that will help support their hegemony. Indeed, through the actions of Grassfields and Bambui youth, we can ascertain that “hegemony is never a permanent state of affairs and it is never uncontested” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 14). For example, Stuart Hall, one of the founding figures of cultural studies, has pointed out that “people are simultaneous makers and consumers of culture, participating in that culture according to their place in economic and political structures” (1980, p. 24). And that people, through “processes of encoding and decoding, shape culture and that institutions such as the church, the state”, as well as royal elites and BYBA (in the case of this paper), encode certain ideas in the mass media, which audiences then decode (Hall, 1980, p. 24). To this end, the new iconography of the cow horn drinking cup with the facial image of Bruce Lee cannot be any less traditional than the buffalo horn drinking cup.

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Author details

Mathias Fubah Alubafi^{1,2}

E-mails: malubafi@hsrc.ac.za, fubahalubafi@yahoo.co.uk

ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4577-300X>

Molemo Ramphalile¹

E-mail: mramphalile@hsrc.ac.za

¹ Human and Social Development Research Programme, Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa.

² Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Limpopo, Limpopo, South Africa.

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Notes

1. Royal as used here, refers not only to the king, or *fon* in the western Grassfields of Cameroon, but it also extends to other members of the royal family, including: princes, notables and heads of village institutions. The use of the term royal also extends to those who have been empowered through the award of titles by the *fon* to the level of titleholders. It is meant to distinguish this category of elites from the youth who are reinventing new aesthetics as a means of empowering themselves.
2. Bambui is one of the many kingdoms or villages across the western Grassfields and it is from Bambui that most of the examples are drawn
3. The Bamenda Art Institutions conference was an initiative by major art institutions in the Bamenda region of Cameroon, including Bamenda Handicraft Cooperative Society, Mankon and Bafut Palace Museums. The conference brought together representatives from these institutions as well as from the art, culture and heritage sectors across the region. The aim was to assess the state art and museum collections in these institutions and to determine the way forward.
4. The buffalo horn drinking cup is considered ideal be-

cause it is used in pouring libation to the ancestors and deities on the kingdoms of the Cameroon Grassfields. Cow horn drinking cups that have been initiated or empowered through rituals can also be used for this purpose. The use of these objects is based on the premise that ancestors and deities have control over their living kinsmen (Kopytoff, 1997).

5. Kopytoff (1997) has highlighted the ambivalent relationship between ancestors and their living kinsmen.
6. Grassfields sculpture with iconographic designs such as the leopard, python, elephant, lion, spider and buffalo were reserved for kings and their notables or elites (Geary, 1981, p. 32).
7. Pa Agang, personal communication, December 2015.
8. Across the Cameroon, and the Cameroon Grassfields, in particular, it is taboo for a woman to eat a gizzard. In ordinary parlance it is a 'male thing' and, hence, it symbolizes honour. So when a woman slaughters a chicken, if the husband does not see the gizzard in his dish, he will reject the meal (Fowler & Zeitlyn, 1996).
9. Uncle Njongu, personal communication, December 2015.
10. Mr Ajunga, personal communication, December 2015.
11. Pa Ajom, personal communication, December 2004.
12. Interview: Adanghoh, December 2015.
13. Interview: Peter Nkoh, December 2015.
14. Mr Che, personal communication, December 2004.
15. Mr Anangha, personal communication, December 2015.
16. Pa Nanghoh, personal communication, August 2013.
17. Mr Athanilius, personal communication, August 2013.

Cover image

Source: Bambui Fon, Angafor Momboo III pouring palm wine from his buffalo horn drinking cup into the palms of one of his notables. Bambui Palace, 2009. Photo by Mathias Fubah.

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