

CUSTOMS

But in brief I was proposing that we all treat a subtopic before moving to another because if am to send mails on customs and may be the other person is doing on tradition then we'll be disorganised. When we talk of culture we generalise everything so I thought that detailly explaining certain aspects would be good. For example custom, marriage, tradition are broad topics but they are subtopics to culture. The way marriages in African countries proceed might not be the same in European or American countries, same as with customs or tradition. There are certain aspects that differentiate from each other and thus enriching the culture of a tribe or a state in general.

Briefly let us have a definition of what culture is. Simply put culture is the way of life of a particular group of people at a particular time. It can also be an art such as music, theatre or literature but what I base interest here now is on the way of life. So there I therefore begin with custom as subtopic.

Custom follow the definition of culture i.e a way of behaving or a belief which has been established long time ago. In other words **they are the rules that were established by our forefathers, which govern the behaviour of people nowadays**. In Cameroon there are more than 200 ethnic groups that together form the state and republic of Cam and each ethnic group have different aspects of custom even though majority of the customs seem to be nearly the same. These customs come to be established when a well known person of a tribe introduces styles of praising and doing things. Generally, they are orally said and by the time of the introduction the introducer often gives directives such as "whether he or she, being a descendant or coming from the family who disobeys is exposed to curse", "he who tries in breaking down these laws will follow the same sort". It is just as with the case Biblically of Adam Eve who disobeyed and the result being the sufferings of all humans (it is said that man resembles God, reason why there is power in his words). And so that is how with the passing of time the customs tended to be famous, as descendants grow up and also as families merge up. Even till date these practices of introducing customs still go on. For example in the Mbouda tribe (in the **Bamileke** ethnic), a well known notable tried to disobey to a custom that was once established by his forefathers, the results being those of the death of four of his children in 3yrs. He could not understand how this could easily happen until a soothsayer told him the reasons why. In order to ask for forgiveness to his forefathers, a series of complex rites were made usually involving much expenses. And so after realising the effects he decided to form a new custom in memory and in praise of his forefathers based on a particular way of dancing. But, creating a custom is not just as easy as to just pronounce words. You need special authority from your tribe's chief and later on complex rites. So that is how some customs came to exist in CMR. Now let us look at the aspects of some customs.

1. The attribution of names to babies.

In many cases, names are always 3 or more. In very few cases you may see 2. The 3 names are generally composed of **a traditional name** which is that of an ancestor, or say a person still living who got the name following a forefather, **the 2nd name is that of your father** which is often called the family name, and **lastly a surname**. This one can be the name of anybody, any place or a created one for personal reasons and that is how the procedure has to be followed in order to be sure that the custom is respected. Even if you do not want to give as much names to a child you must at least give an ancestral or to say **a tribal name**. This is the reason why some people are easily detected from where they come just by appellation of their ancestral names. The names always have a meaning when pronounced in the local language. For example, my name "**Yombi**" means "**seeing before accepting**". There is a case where you do not need to look far for a tribal name. It is that of when a baby comes to life and is directly following twins in the family. This baby, if a boy, automatically carries the name "Talla", and if a girl it is "Malla", meaning my father, and my mother respectively. So that is how

in the West region (and some villages in the N.West) names are attributed to children. With the *Beti* and *Ewondo* around Ydé it is also the same case but here there are more cases of 2 names than in the *Bamileke*. The most known people to have 2 names are the *Fulanis* of N.Cmr.

2. The initiation of children to adulthood.

* In dances

In villages at times dances are organised for spectacular reasons but these dances are also for customary reasons. First, they are to praise the *gods*. The dances 2ndly are organised to initiate children into customary respects. Those mainly initiated are boys. I myself was initiated at a very young age by my parents (6yrs) so I've escaped customary troubles. It was to my advantage because if that was to be done at this my present age it would have been complex and to an extent mystical. I was obliged to do that because my father is a Notable and who really respects custom even though in town.

* In circumcision

The tradition of the *Baka* people (in the east of Cmr) says that for a male child to be considered a "*real man*" he must have been circumcised at the age of 15 and above. And the circumcision is often done traditionally i.e using sharp herbs for that and at the end unrefined palm oil is used to rub the wound. This too is customary but the law is optional because it is just by the wish of the parents that this is done. So some people of the east do so for prestigious reasons i.e to mean that their sons are "*real men*". This practice is still common with the *Pygmies* and the *Baka* (*Baka* is the name of the tribe and also the name of the ethnic).

3. Why there are polygamists in our villages (Cmr in general)

Following the custom, notables (important persons who assist the chief in all domains for the village) are supposed to marry at least 2 wives. As to say, a notable is considered to be a member of the royal family and so following the royal custom there must be as much children in the community, and to do that you need many wives, reason why I come from a polygamist family and also why I come to understand much customary respects. This idea is mainly traced from the Bible as God said "go, multiply and fill the earth" (a reason why some pastors say that there are some aspects of some custom that match with the Church)

Other people come to be polygamists just for personal reasons.

Also, following customary reasons, when a notable or the chief dies, the successor succeeds his father in all domains i.e even the wives of his father become his wives. For example the present chief of my village has about 106 wives who still live amongst which 42 are those he married himself.

Customs nowadays tend to lose their strengths. This is because people use hypocrisy to escape from the practices meanwhile they perfectly know what can happen to them following their acts. Therefore some aspects that are found in our customs are very harmful while others are advantageous. For example because of customs people are able to fulfil God's wish of filling the earth. On the other hand he who respects custom to the fullest is restricted from enjoying most aspects of life.

To sum up, I think that we can just manage our custom as some people are ignorantly doing i.e escaping from the most harmful ones and staying with the appropriate ones. This can be done if parents take conscience and stop initiating children to some aspects of tradition. True we do not have to completely abandon our custom if not we'll be losing our personality because a person with a good personality is one who has and who knows his origins (which is his culture), manages it and not to be hypocrite.

That was all I could say about custom but maybe I forgot to say something and if it is the case and that you feel preoccupied about sth don't hesitate, I will be there for you.

I am now waiting on for your contributions concerning this topic.

** Fiona you talked about broken porcelain and seeing a black cat in ur msg, I wish to know if they are true facts or just beliefs and if just beliefs do you believe in such things?

dorval

