

Museum Experiences in Cameroon as a media for tangible and intangible heritage

By : Fabienne Galangau-Quérat and Yves Girault

National Museum of Natural History – Paris

UMR 208 (MNHN-IRD) PaLoc., Dpt “Hommes, Natures, Sociétés”

The question of the place and role of community museums in Africa is central in museology. This study attempts to arrive at an understanding about how this issue corresponds to a diversity of local expectations and to examine if it is rather geared to more specific needs such as the concept of identity reconstruction, heritage conservation and development, put at the disposal of economic-tourist preoccupations, to serve as a post colonial tool. It is to be remembered that *the Museum industry in the 21st century has become an important actor in the economic sector; never has the desire to visit new museums been so pregnant no matter what continent is involved*, as stated by Theierry Ehrmann¹ on the subject of the huge investigation on museums being undertaken now for 3 years. In order to best understand the pace of Community Museums without pre-conceived ideas or models, essentially a descriptive and narrative methodology has been undertaken, based on interviews with local people in charge of Museums and also through visits to these museums.

Cameroon, a Nation without a National Museum

This research project was undertaken in the Bamiléké region in the Cameroon, the *product of geopolitical processes consequent of the interplay of European political forces in the 19th and 20th centuries as well as internal dynamics resulting from decolonisation and attempts at nation-building* »². This territory was constituted as a German Protectorate in 1884. However, after the German defeat in the Second World War, it was placed under a United Nations' Mandate, separated into two parts and administered by both Great Britain and France. The periods of insurrections which preceded and followed Independence in the 60s are particularly marked by ethnic riots and violent repression, especially in the district of Bamiléké. The complexities in the political process of that period put in place by a Cameroon government very much attached to the idea of a strong and centralised State led to the marginalisation of all forms of social expression and to an important centralisation of power. Inevitably this led to an exasperation of rivalry. Hence, the ideology put in place is that of Unity and the cult of the Nation. As from the 70s the Federal Republic of the Cameroon is replaced by a system embodying the

¹ Ehrman T., (2012) « Des musées fleurissent un peu partout dans le monde » in Libération (2 octobre 2012)

² Yenshu Vubo E. (2003), Levels of historical awareness”, The development of identity and ethnicity in Cameroon, Cahiers d'études africaines,

concept of a Unified State which offered little scope or place to any opposition. Thus the political discourse put forward the idea of national unity and attempted to erase the cultural differences. Subsequent to social unrest and to a difficult economic situation, the 90s brought about changes through the arrival on the scene of a multiparty political system and efforts at encouraging a decentralisation process which is still being put in place. The Cameroon could be said to be a complex country. Side by side, live 230 cultural and linguistic groups. And the national reconstruction in process is very recent and very fragile³. In addition, the Cameroon, in view of its geographical location, its great variety of landscapes, its diversity of peoples, is often deemed to be a microcosmos of the African Continent⁴ deprived of, up to the present time, of a National Museum open to the Public. In the 70s, construction of a National Museum was decided upon by the then Government. In 1972, the initial project was being put in place in the context of political and social reunification. But, it was at that time that the Cameroon ended the Federal Government concept to replace it with that of a United Republic of Cameroon. The instructions emanating from the Cameroon Authorities were that *the Museum should promote conservation, education, entertainment, leisure activities, and awaken national awareness*⁵. The task of the museum was to relate the story of the daily lives of the Cameroon people through the construction of an image of a Nation within its geographic limits, making no reference to ethnicity. In the 80s, it was decided that the Museum should occupy a former colonial building which had been used as the Government Headquarters following Independence. Also it was alleged that the Museum should also be Ecology oriented. The plan was to create a Museum of Mankind and Nature, devoted to Time and Space but with no reference at all to the cultural diversity of the country. In fact the project seemed to correspond more to « *schematic and simplification of the cultural diversity of Cameroon society and.....appeared to be likened to a camouflage of ethnic categories*⁶. However, even in 2008, the Museum was still not opened and in consulting internet, it is to be noted that there are concerns about the absence of any government decisions regarding the conservation of the country's national heritage even though the Cameroon had ratified, in 1982, the Convention on the Protection of Natural and Cultural World Heritage⁷. More Recently, the Cameroon, in 2012, ratified a Convention on intangible heritage⁸. And despite some attempts to carry out a heritage inventory in 2001 and in 2006⁹, the State

³ Yenshu Vubo E. (2003), *ibid*, p598

⁴ Ardener S. (1996) The catalyst : Chilver at the crossroads *in* Fowler I. & Zeitlyn D. African crossroads. Intersections between history and anthropology in Cameroon, 192p

⁵ Ndofo M. (1999), Les musées publics et privés au Cameroun, *in* Cahiers d'études africaines. Vol. 39, n° 155-156, pp 789-814

⁶ Pompeo F. (1999) L'ethnologue « gênant » ou les vicissitudes du projet de création du musée national du Cameroun, *in* Les cahiers d'études africaines. Vol. 39 n°155-156, pp 815-827

⁷ Ekwé D. Patrimoine national : quand l'inventaire s'allonge ! *in* Journal du Cameroun.com

⁸ Ekwé D. *ibid*

⁹ Afrique mutations (2012), « La Route des Chefferies, un modèle de sauvegarde et de valorisation du patrimoine culturel au Cameroun », mars - Avril 2012, pp 4851

authorities didn't manage to put together a lasting structure aimed at doing an overall heritage inventory. This is all the more unfortunate in that the African Art Collectors Market was flourishing all over the world and in fact Cameroon Art, in particular items coming from the region called Grassland are among the most sought after. Now in 2012, the Museum has still not been opened to the Public and it is extremely difficult to evaluate where they are with the project.

Nevertheless, a lot is going on around the building; traditional-style houses are in the process of construction in the park surrounding the building. Access to the building itself is under strict surveillance thus preventing any trespassing on the premises. Tensions, often violent, in the effort to build a national identity and the government discourse proning the erasing of the concept of cultural diversity while at the same time the multi-ethnic characteristics of the Cameroon could be an explanation on why the setting up is problematic of this Museum which should be the flagship of the values and symbols of the Nation as could also be the case in other African countries¹⁰. Indeed, museums are deemed to be, above all, custom houses of memory, and when a museum is created, it is in the first place an act of negotiation with the past¹¹. However, in the Grassfield region of the volcanic highlands in the West and North West of Cameroon, these questions have been resolved. Hence, in this region a museum project is in process, orchestrated by a main centralised Museum backed up by a heritage inventory both tangible and intangible the story of which we will now tell you.

The Bamiléké Museums – a three-stage procedure

The native peoples living the Grassfield region have been very much the subject of research by many anthropologists¹². For more than 50 years, this research has brought to the forefront some specific characteristics of these cultural groups, notably that « *identity has been constantly reworked across a range of groups of quite different orders of magnitude. In this sense, all Grassfield communities are recent, irrespective of how long they have been around* » and that the concept of “*self classification never ceased*”¹³. Actually, the Bamiléké peoples are organised into extremely complex traditional societies, most of them going back to the 16th century. They form a spectrum of about one hundred politically and linguistically different communities. Such communities of different sizes, are structured as a

¹⁰ Galangau F., Nivart A. & Jonchery A. (2011), « Les musées en Namibie au cœur d'une société en mutation » Les musées au prisme de la communication. Revue Hermes CNRS, Ed. Rasse P. & Girault Y.

¹¹ Chambers I. (2012), « Cultural memories, museum spaces and archiving » in Museums in age of migrations, Ed L. Basso Peressut & C. Pozzi, pp141-152

¹² Ardener S. (1996) *ibid*

¹³ Fowler I. & Zeitlyn D. (1996) African crossroads. Intersections between history and anthropology in Cameroon, 192p.

tribe around a Chief and in fact are very centralised in that the power is centralised around a king who is the traditional chief(*fo*). Each chiefdom constitutes a political unit federating off-shoot groups through a network of secret societies whose members are recruited among the many different components within the kingdom. The Palace is traditionally the power center and within is to be found the *sak*, which is in fact a sort of treasure chamber. The treasures of a huge diversity of shape and size are there for admiration but can also be used in the ritual practices and can be considered as a symbol of the power of the king. Some present day chiefs are even claiming that this space should be deemed to be the initial form of recognition to be given to a museum in this region in that “*a museum in reality always existed, well before the arrival of the Europeans, but it wasn't as such exhibited*”¹⁴.

During colonial times, the tribal system didn't weaken despite evangelisation, the constitution of an elitist class, education, contrary to what happened in other cultural groups, and the same applies to the sense of belonging to a tribe which prevailed. The discovery of traditional artefacts found in the *saks* played a role in the interest aroused in Europe as in Bamileke art. The Bamiléké people greatly suffered during the period of independence in the 60s, in that many of the tribal territories were burned out due to an anti Bamiléké propaganda campaign¹⁵. The outlook was gloomy for the tribal system and it appeared to be doomed. The palaces fell into decay and the kings were looked upon with contempt by the modern-thinking elite¹⁶. At the same time the political discourse was rising up against the disunity of ethnic origin; *the diversified groups, the different ethnic groups must... little by little melt into one greater national unit*¹⁷ with the result that the vision of an inside enemy begins to take shape i.e. becomes progressively the Bamiléké people.

However, as from the 80s, a phenomenon called « the return of the kings » took place which actually transcribed as being the emergence of Bamiléké kings in the political arena. In fact this was happening also elsewhere throughout the African continent¹⁸. Hence, at the beginning of the 21st century the ancient palaces started to be renovated and the traditional rituals enacted again. The return of the tribal kings to the Political Arenas since the 80s in our view is accompanied by a growth in a Museum development programme in three stages.

¹⁴ Extracts from interviews with different Bamileke kings (March 2012)

¹⁵ Deltombe T, Domergue M et Tatsita J. (2011), Kamerun ! Une guerre cachée aux origines de la Françafrique Ed. La Découverte, p449, p 543

¹⁶ Warnier J. P. (2009) Régner au Cameroun. Ed Karthala

¹⁷ Président Ahmadou Ahidjo : speech pronounced on 15 July 1965 in douala before Union for The Cameroon party members (in A. Ahidjo : Anthologies des discours.1957-1979)

¹⁸ Perrot C.-H, et Fauvelle-Aymar F.-X. (2003), Le retour des rois. Les autorités traditionnelles et l'Etat en Afrique contemporaine, Paris, Karthala

What we call, in our own words, the **first stage** for community museums development originates in the 60s. In the small town of Bandjoun, the traditional chief set up a museum. This resembled a sort of Art Gallery destined to “*ensure the propagation of the secular values of the Bandjoun*”¹⁹. We don’t intend to include in our analysis two rival museums built much earlier in the 30s in the town of Fouban the origin of which has already been explained by Steven Nelson and which doesn’t seem to us to take on the same approach as ours²⁰. In fact it is, in particular, as from the 70s during trips notably to Europe, a time when some traditional objects have been lent to museums to be exhibited in international exhibitions, that the tribal chiefs will have the opportunity to discover the scope of a museum project and be inspired by it. A museum would be testimony to the existence of their culture. At that time in France, the values associated with Museums is in the throws of undergoing dramatic changes, involving their place in society; new concepts are coming forward notably that of involving local communities. In the Cameroon, therefore, a few small museums will be set up in an informal manner near the traditional *saks*, that is to say at the very heart of the power system. The presentation is quite simple - the artefacts that have been conserved are disposed side by side without any other form of mediation support material other than a guide accompanying the visitor as is still the case in certain tribes at the present time. Thus, the king of the Bamendjou tribe, Sokoudjou Tchendou, soon celebrating the 60th anniversary of his reign, explained to us that wheeace came again to his territory, and when the cultural heritage of the Chiefdom was reunited in the Palace, he decided to open a museum to the public in 1975 “*following my very first visit to the Museum of Mankind (Musée de l’Homme) in Paris, as well as the Louvre Museum along with other museum visits in Germany.....I was very much impressed and in particular that the cultural impact specifically that of the Bamiléké hadn’t received recognition. Indeed the cultural wealth of the Bamiléké people was little known to the general public*”²¹. His aim was to turn the eyes of the rest of the world on the Bamiléké culture through the prism of a Museum project. The idea was not only to conserve the tangible heritage in the shelter of the *sak* but also to assert the vitality of this culture and its rituals. In the light of this, this museum project corresponds to a modern mediation tool for the Bamiléké culture in a fragile political position, in a country on the road to modernity. Thus, set up in the heart of the tribal palace, is a way to conserve its legitimacy as traditional authority within the community and vis à vis the Cameroon political authorities.

The **second growth and development stage** for community museums in the Bamiléké region takes shape at the end of the 80s. During this period there was

¹⁹ extract from interview with museum guide - Bandjoun, March 2012

²⁰ Nelson S. (2007) Collection et contexte dans un village du Cameroun *in* Museum International n°235, pp21-29

²¹ extract from interview in Bamendjou - March 2012

great political and ethnic tension and instrumentalisation of the different cultures²². Actually elsewhere in the world there is to be seen a boom in the museum industry and its commercial aspect, bringing with it an increase in preoccupations of national heritage. In the Cameroon, the strong return to favour of traditional authority brings with it a reinvention of what a chiefdom is, getting support from the fluidity of the hierarchical system of Bamiléké societies, from the modern-minded elite (notably that of the diaspora) and from national economic operators²³. Such reinvention therefore gives the king and his subjects the opportunity to develop modern programmes integrating such parameters as urban development, globalisation of the commercial, cultural and media flow, and thus demonstrates the adaptation capacity of such traditional structures vis à vis social requirements. This form of adaptation is however alleged to be a politically conservative African form of modernity²⁴. It is to be said that the force of traditional tribes is so strong that for a Bamikélé, even in exile in a city, it would be impossible not to acknowledge belonging to a chiefdom.

All of the Bamiléké population take part in one way or another, in the daily life of their chiefdom and in the development activities in their region. In fact, it will be those Bamileke, educated and trained in France, who will be behind the second stage of the Museum project. These include successively a university graduate in the History of Art, Anthropology and Museology²⁵ and an architect²⁶. Both will be involved in the task of stimulating the Bamiléké communities towards a new representation for their museums. This will be both a symbolic tool carrying with it meaning, and a system for the conservation of tangible and intangible heritage. Benefitting from the assistance of an Italian NGO, small modern museums were able to be created in four chiefdoms (Mankon, Babungo, Baham et Bandjoun). These places were chosen because of the presence there of a considerable amount of heritage items, and because of the willpower of their tribal chiefs to make heritage items belonging to the chiefdom, as well as premises, available. In parallel, the Italian NGO took on the responsibility of training the future curators, these being some young people from the chiefdom. The aim of the project is *“to protect and develop the cultural and artistic heritage of the Cameroon there and then where it actually comes from, to encourage cultural dynamics and economic development and to form young people for museology positions”*²⁷. For those who have initiated the project, the aim is that traditional objects be given a true value, in documenting them, and putting forward their religious and symbolic dimensions. Thus the four museums, opened in 2003, propose a museography scenario centred around the artefact itself accompanied by a series of information panels located around the artefact

²² Antoine Socpa (2003) Démocratisation et autochtonie au Cameroun: Trajectoires régionales différentes. Ed Verlag Munster

²³ *ibid* Warnier J.-P.

²⁴ *ibid* Warnier J.-P.

²⁵ Jean-Paul Notué

²⁶ Sylvain Djache Nzefa

²⁷ <http://www.museumcam.org/dettagli.php>

exhibited. In fact, it could be said that this presentation is destined for the foreign visitor particularly interested in the aesthetics of traditional artefacts. However these items remain very much alive in that they are still in use in the community. Each of these museums was supposed to be accompanied by an itinerary of the collective memory to give the visitors an opportunity to discover the full district occupied by the tribe and its various places of memory. This part of the project today seems to have lapsed.

The project is relayed in the programme orchestrated by the Bamiléké architect, all the more sensitive to the situation given his research work on the consequences of the modernisation of traditional structures and heritage conservation²⁸. So he built a very ambitious project which resulted, in 2006, in the elaboration of the so called “Route des Chefferies”²⁹ signed by 25 traditional chiefs also preoccupied with heritage conservation. The objective was to impact on new cultural, tourist, and economic dynamics at regional level by the creation of an Interpretative Centre in the town of Dschang, heritage/theme based traditional heritage huts in each of the chiefdom that had signed the Road Map. Also a vast heritage inventory operation was launched. This is co-financed in partnership with France, The European Community, the business community and local elite community members

a) Heritage Inventory

Pillage of tangible heritage in the Cameroon is a fact that was denounced for a long long time by the Cameroon elite members and against which the Route des chefferies stresses the urgency of creating an inventory and security programme on the tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Therefore, between 2007 and 2010, 14 chiefdoms opened up their doors to the Route des chefferies programme aiming at drawing up a list of their heritage items. This inventory, for some of the chiefs, constitutes an essential element marking their adhesion to the project. “*The inventory is something that urged us on... due to the robberies, due to the art item smugglers...I said to myself that if items are in an inventory...robbery becomes difficult*”³⁰. This point is supported by those professionals implicated in the Route deschefferies programme in the way they show us how they proceed : “*Actually there are Chiefs who expressly asked us to give them assistance in doing an inventory because they see the extent of deterioration that exists in their heritage items....In the past an inventory had been carried out by the Government....but there is no trace of it. So the Chiefs coordinate the inventory work carried out by students. Work is also being done in digitalizing information thus affording access to others... but the main problem is insufficient funding...*”. Hence the team working with the Route des chefferies

²⁸ Djache Nzefa Sylvain, (1994) Les chefferies Bamiléké dans l'enfer du modernisme...réflexions sur l'état actuel des chefferies Bamiléké...une chefferie de demain...renaissance, recherche et affirmation d'identité / DJACHE NZEFA Sylvain, Dessy, Yves. Préf. - Couëron : - 202 p. : ill. en n. et bl. ; 30 cm. - ISBN 2-9508283-0-2

²⁹ Piou E., Djache S., Taboue F., Fotso A. (2012) La sauvegarde et la valorisation du patrimoine culturel au Cameroun. La lettre de l'OCIM, n° 139, janvier-février, pp30-39

³⁰ extract from interviews with different Bamileke kings (March 2012)

programme is fully aware of the danger of an inventory “...our presence is not aimed at depriving the chieftom of their heritage, all that is considered ritual- related remains so, and will not be made public; at the most, it will be said that it exists and even photos will not be exhibited”³¹. At the end of each inventory work, a copy is given to the Chief. “In fact, on the basis of the inventory, a theme is proposed to the Chief who in turn validates it or turns it down”³². Thus four heritage huts have been created since 2009.

b) Heritage Huts, Community Museums

Tribal heritage huts created under the auspices of the Route des chefferies in fact are small community museums on local traditions exhibiting artefacts still being used in the course of different traditional ceremonies, on the one hand, and focussing on a specific aspect connected with the history of the artefact, on the other hand and based on the inventory, as already written. The museums were founded within a community framework, set up within the chieftom district, located closely to the King’s Palace, the latter being the symbol of power, ancestral influences, and society as a whole. So as to put them in place, specifications were drafted giving instructions concerning the building (dimension of different exhibition areas) but the style of the building is left to the discretion of the Chief. Once a theme for the permanent exhibition is validated (for example, slavery, art or blacksmith ironwork) the traditional chief then validates the scenario written up by the Route des chefferies team. It is up to each community to find funding for the building of their heritage hut. This requires the calling on participation from different partners and notably the implication of the members of the chieftom elite members. Accommodation is sometimes provided for, in public areas within the district, to give tourists the opportunity to have food and sometimes lodgings. The visit of the heritage hut is usually conducted by a guide coming from the community itself. The guide usually adapts his speech to the needs of the visitors. The guide is also responsible for organising pedagogical activities inasmuch as in addition to tourists, local children are also targeted, as it is deemed that *the children will discover themselves during their visit to these museums*³³. Also, each one of the heritage huts has a boutique where local craftspeople can deposit and sale their work. 30 per cent of any sales revenue is paid to the community museum. Thus, these heritage huts are a means of bringing revenue to the chieftom. However, the number of visitors and purchases remains rather low for the moment and so it’s too soon to talk about profitability.

Overall, it is deemed that this second stage in the museum project, validated by the traditional authorities, set up by means of the Route des chefferies, is something articulated around and representative of the local community as well as being an

³¹ extract of interview with one of the members of the Route des Chefferies Committee – March 2012

³² ibid

³³ extract from interview with different Bamileke kings (March 2012)

instrument for heritage conservation both at local and regional level. As seen during our investigation survey, such small museums are a real source of pride and give rise to a sense of belonging to a community.

c) The DSCHANG Interpretative Center

This big building has been constructed in the city of Dschang. Its architecture has been inspired by the traditional architecture of the Bamiléké chiefdoms. Bamiléké symbols have been integrated into its facade. Inside the center one is impressed by its modernity in the presentation of ideas and objects, alternating very wisely, modern style museology support material such as information boards, audiovisual tools, miniature models. The contents have been articulated around four different themes:

- 1) an overall presentation of the history of The Cameroon (from the period illustrating the first signs of human occupation to modern times)
- 2) a very pedagogical explanation on the inhabitants of the four largest biogeographic zones focussing notably on the Grassfields zone.
- 3) A detailed explanation on the architectural style and the symbols connected with each Tribal district.
- 4) An area dedicated to each of the Chiefdom who have signed the Route des chefferies convention. It is to be noted that each of the chiefdom are given the same museographic treatment, i.e. an alcove comprising of an information board giving details on the specific characteristics of the chiefdom along with 2 or 3 heritage items either lent or deposited by the community.

We consider that this museum constitutes, in a very clear manner, both a communications and reference system³⁴ for the chiefdoms. The programme entitled the Route des chefferies has very much evolved since its beginning and today is deemed to be entering the second phase of its development: when the heritage inventory of the tribal districts has been completed, the Bamiléké heritage could then become part of a global heritage protection programme leading to it becoming UNESCO World Heritage. It is also being contemplated that tourism be more developed through the setting up of an Agency for Tourist Development³⁵. The Route des chefferies, initially forecasted to be a sort of polyphony targeting the multi-identities of the Bamiléké peoples, could now be analysed as having become a hegemonic instrument to give importance to heritage, and also for tourist development. In this context, however, the role of the traditional authorities could be said to have become peripheral and of minor importance in a project that has become dominated by the imperatives of strategic marketing. As said by Hugues de Varines, « *there is a real danger of having governments, official*

³⁴ Davallon (1999). L'exposition à l'oeuvre : stratégies de communication et médiation symbolique. L'Harmattan, Paris

³⁵ http://www.routedeschefferies.com/fr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=215:rdc-phase2--de-grands-chantiers-pour-de-grandes-realizations&catid=42:news-rdc&Itemid=43

bodies, traditional museums and even museum specialists involved in developing ecomuseum experiences »³⁶.

The third Stage in community museums development in the Bamiléké region of the Cameroon, in our thinking, could be said to be now taking shape by means of giving museum professionals a free hand. Very likely these new dynamics are one of the results of the Route des chefferies programme and at the end of the day, also one of the successes of the aforesaid programme. It must be remembered that this programme revolves around an axis, i.e. the Interpretative Center, around which traditional heritage huts have been assembled. Overall, this makes up a very strong communication tool which today is much better understood by the local community. Hence to quote a Bamiléké proverb, *no good waiting for the fruit to ripen and fall down to be then picked up, rather find a way to climb the tree to pick the best fruit³⁷*. Thus it is our belief that, thanks to this experience and learning process, the traditional chiefs and the elite members of the chieftdom have now entered the phase of assimilation of the programme, and in particular, of the inventory tool, even though the actual inventory process seemed to have escaped, at least in part, the implication of the traditional chiefs. As we said earlier, they seem to be finding themselves at the periphery of the project rather than at the core of it. Definitely, the inventory plays a fundamental part in developing feelings of belonging and assimilation. The danger to their tangible and intangible heritage items looming over their heads tends to egg them on to, in the pursuit of modern techniques with the result that, in the future, these chiefs could undertake autonomously themselves their own heritage inventories, thereby combining both modern technology and traditional methods. Through this type of assimilation of a portion of the museum process (making an inventory) original instruments could emerge that would be connected with the reality of each community and thereby reinforcing the link with the local community and contributing to its long-term existence.

Conclusion

The Bamiléké chieftdoms have shown amazing adaptation qualities in the contexts of economic, political and media changes occurring since the Independence of The Cameroon. This is testimony of the deep adaptation capacity and internal of these social structures as so well analysed by Jean-Pierre Warnier. Such phenomena has been called *The Return of the Kings* based on respect of local traditions and the person of the King. Such a system would appear to be long-lasting in that it exploits technologies connected with belonging and power, producing in turn the idea of

³⁶ Hugues de Varines in http://www.trentinocultura.net/doc/soggetti/ecomusei/Atti_Convegno_eng.pdf

³⁷ Tanefo J.-M. (2012). La chefferie traditionnelle : hier, aujourd'hui et demain

locality, thus creating a link with the physical dimension of what is known as the city³⁸. Actually during the course of, and at the end of various serious social crises which the Bamiléké people has gone through, during these hard times, the Kings, alleged to be central to, and the guarantors of the tangible and intangible heritage, tended to exploit the symbolic dimension of a museum. Then with the advent of the Route des chefferies programme, these chiefs were better able to understand what was at stake, notably the concept of belonging. Notwithstanding the fact that this programme is being transformed into a sort of centralised authority putting itself on a pedestal above the community museums, thus relegating them to a sort of peripheral role, some chiefs could be in the thinking mode of defining a new museum route that would treat with more respect a fundamental element in the Bamiléke intangible heritage, i.e. central authority. The museum machinery is not only a showcase but equally as a source of questioning, interrogation, and thereby benefit the communities in reaffirming their own values and notably the most fundamental of them. In this case, Kings, now entrusted with traditionality duties, have managed to recompose modernity especially through the progressive action of discovering a museum which, from our point of view, will end up making them want to take control thereof completely. Hence, the system that will fall into place should be respectful of the profound traditional sense, i.e. the Chief, elevated to the position of a sacred being, is the incarnation of a social order, and will always remain at the core of the community.

³⁸ Warnier J.-P. (2009). Régner au Cameroun. Le Roi-Pot, Ed Karthala