

Original Research Article

## Symbolism of Feeding During Funerals among the Bangangte People (West Region - Cameroon)

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**Abstract:** Celebrating a funeral for the Bangangté people is a way of paying a last homage to the dead. On this occasion, food is the essential point. The success or failure of the organizers is measured by the quantity and quality of food offered to the guests. The aim of this article is to examine the symbolic value of food and drink consumed at funerals in this community. The methodology is focused on documentary research and field data were collected with the help of qualitative research techniques in Anthropology such as: direct observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Variants of content analysis as developed by Grawitz M. (1983) have helped to bring out the functions, the hidden symbols of representations of eating during funerals. The theoretical framework was built around the culturalism of Mead, M. The results of the survey revealed that food consumed during funeral rites have meaning and significance. Their tasting is a means through which the Bangangté accompany the dead to the ancestors or the gods. The meal offered to the deceased has several functions: its nutritious value, the request for protection, blessing, and the smooth running of funeral ceremonies. The system of gifts and reciprocal-gifts, of exchange of food that takes place during the funeral symbolizes understanding, mutual respect, affection, communion, seals the bonds between the parties involved.

**Keywords:** Ceremony, consumption, food, funeral, rites, symbolism.

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## INTRODUCTION

Man is born, lives and dies. In this cycle of life, the third stage, which is death, necessitates a lot of manifestations. In most African countries and mainly among the Bangangte of West Cameroon, to mark the breaking of the links between the living and the dead, several rites are performed, in this case funeral rites commonly referred to as “funerals”. According to Mendouga (2005), funerals consist of integrating the deceased into the “community of the dead”. They can be considered as ceremonies celebrated in honor of the deceased sometime after the “end of mourning”. In the past, they took place several years after the “novena”. Nowadays, there is an innovation in the organization of funerals. Increasingly, families are opting for their celebrations immediately after the burial.

During these ceremonies, food occupies a paramount place, given the arrangements made by the organizers. This tradition entails a lot of expenditure, necessitates enormous sacrifices on the part of the bereaved family. Expenses vary depending on background. They can range from 100,000 Fcfa for modest families to millions of cfa francs for so-called

wealthy families. During this event, mourners from other areas who come to condole with the afflicted are expected to appreciate the quality, quantity, variety of food and drink offered.

Food during funeral rites in Bangangté is one way by which this community exhibits its cultural identity. According to Garabuau-Moussaoui (2002), consumption is not only a process of acquisition, exchange and use of goods and services but also a social construct, a social production, that is to say, a system of behaviors and representations of social life.

Among the Bangangte, though funerals are meant to commemorate a sad event marking the disappearance of a loved one and to pay him homage for all his achievements, they are rather transformed into an occasion for great celebrations, and family reunion. They also contribute to clan cohesion. Everything takes place around a dish, giving rise to communion, to reuniting and to the exaltation of the ancestors who create or protect a lineage. As Garine Igor De (1989: 81) notes: “Most of the events that mark the life cycle

of individuals; birth, marriage, funerals, mourning, are accompanied by food provision and libations”.

The Bangangte people have developed a belief system around the food consumed before, during and after funerals. Going by the samereasoning as Bourdieu P. (1979: 209) who declares: “Man attributes a value to his food, a value linked to his social origins”, the symbolism of the local dishes and drinks consumed or distributed during the three phases of these ceremonies nowadays, dates back to the time of the ancestors. This brings us to examine the symbolism of food at the Bangangté funeral.

The objective of this article is to examine the symbolic value of food and drink consumed at funerals in the Bangangte culture.

This study contributes to enriching reflections, not only on funerals but also on the dietary practices that prevail during this ritual. She brings additional knowledge about the representation of foods in the context of anthropology in general and food anthropology in particular.

Of all the debates made on funerals, especially in the western region of Cameroon, our research work intends to provide additional information on the use of food during funerals in the Bangangté cultural universe. In addition, the results of this study call for reconsideration of dietary practices observed during funerals in order to preserve relationships between members of different lineages. In addition, they will also provide an overview of the Bangangté community in terms of food.

## METHODOLOGY

Several techniques for collecting qualitative data in Anthropology made it possible to collect the information, namely: direct observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

### Direct observation

Observation is one of the data collection techniques used to collect information on behaviors, attitudes and characteristics of living things, objects and phenomena. Direct observation takes place *in situ*. According to d’Arborio, A.M., and Fournier, P. (1999: 20) the essence of observation is to ‘go and see on the spot’.

It allowed us to observe the food offered during the ceremonies and also the practices related to the preparation, distribution, consumption and conservation of the dishes that are prepared there.

### In-depth interviews

Interviews are a question-and-answer exercise between an interviewer and an informant. They make it possible to collect data (information, stories, testimonies, feelings, etc.) in order to interpret and

analyze them. According to Blanchet, A. (1992: 34), it is the only technique “capable of delineating the sequences of spaces - practices – meanings”.

They allowed informants to express themselves freely and deeply on the issue of food during the funeral in the Bangangte.

### Focus group discussion

Focus group discussion is a data collection technique that requires the researcher to bring together six to twelve informants in one place to get their thoughts and impressions on a given topic.

To analyze the data collected during documentary and field research, content analysis was used to better identify the foods consumed during funerals among the Bangangte, the different dietary practices and their significance.

The thematic analysis made it possible to highlight the significance of food in the Bangangte culture. It is the something with structuralanalysis developed by Levi-Strauss, C. (1967), which is interested in the study of kinship systems related to the organization of funerals among the Bangangté of West Cameroon. These variations of content analysis have helped to bring out the functions, the hidden symbols contained in the representations of eating during funerals.

## RESULTS

During funeral rites among the Bangangte people of West Cameroon, a number of foods are prepared, distributed and consumed by the assistants. However, the use of certain ingredients is no accident. They all bear meaning.

### Significance of some ingredients used to spice funeral dishes

Ingredients frequently used are: salt, palm oil, *egusi* (Currcubitapeto), goat, small beans "koki" or dolc (phaseolus vulgaris), kola nut, jujube (Aframomum malegueta) or seeds of peace and yams (Discoreaalata).

### Salt (sodium chloride)

According to Ndanga, C. (2009: 64), salt "plays the role of sugar in the rite ... increases the value of the rite, makes it pleasant and at the same time symbolizes peace". In a similar manner, the salt that is poured on the skull to announce the funeral of the deceased testifies to the affection one had towards the latter during his lifetime. He needs to remember the flavor of this ingredient he used to consume. Therefore, any food given to the dead to eat only produces an effect if salt is added to it. For example, the offered salt-free *kondré* is seen by the community not only as an insult to the missing person but also symbolizes sadness. In offering him this meal, the officiant of the

rite, generally the heir or the traditional practitioner, pronounces these words: “*oh bo go ne keju brobro chou be*”, // oh people who only eat good things oh //”. It’s just a way of flattering the dead man by telling him that what you have just given him (salty or sweet) is pleasant in the mouth. So that any act he takes against his offspring or those close to him, be like salt.

In other circumstances, salt is an element of protection against evil spirits. Sprayed in the compound, it drives them away and destroys all their actions. It is assimilated with acid.

Salt is also used as an ingredient in the preparation of various dishes consumed during funeral rites. The one offered by the mother-in-law to her bereaved daughter-in-law allows her quite simply to salt the dishes to be prepared during the funeral.

### **Palm oil**

Palm oil is very important in cooking food among the Bangangté. It allows the meal to be flexible and good for consumption. Adding to the meal offered to the skull, it portrays the children's gratitude to the deceased, since during his lifetime he did not eat food without oil. It calms her heart. The palm oil sprinkled in the vicinity of the place of the rite makes the environment calm, reinforces security and peace. Associated without transformation with salt, it gives more strength to the expiatory rite.

### **Egusi (Cucurbita peto)**

The variety of pistachio offered before, during and after the funeral is not accessible to all social strata because of its high cost in the market. Families sometimes allow themselves this food months before in other cities across the country to plan for the deficiency when the time is right. Its offer requires a financial sacrifice. This gives it special importance. Therefore, we must show a mark of esteem, recognition, attachment on the part of the organizers to receive this food. Cucumbers also symbolize vigor as they are generally given to men. In this community, giving a mourning basket to a man without the cucumber is a sign of non-respect, of contempt, of non-consideration. This leads people without the financial resources to stock up several months in advance to be able to respect the tradition when the time comes.

### **Goat**

Looking at all the mystery that Bangangte nationals build around the goat during the different phases of the funeral, one would be tempted to believe that it is the only domestic animal that is consumed in this community. Its particularity is that it is offered in various forms: raw or cooked, in part or in whole. The important thing is that the participants eat this flesh.

To announce and report on the funeral process for a deceased woman, the heart and thigh of the goat

are the parts indicated. The heir or the traditional practitioner is responsible for pouring the goat-palm oil-salt-plantain mixture, previously turned in an earthenware pot, on the head, uttering these words: “papa, as we have come to make your funeral, this is to tell you that we mourned for you and that went very well. We had to eat and here is your share of meat that we came to offer you”. In addition to goat meat, other items offered to him include: *bob nyiom chuet* (the hedgehog, the hare, and the porcupine), the *broug nyiom* (the antelope), the *niat* (buffalo). Just like the goat, buffalomeat is highly valued during the ritual of “catching the fire of mourning”. During cooking, its flesh becomes very consistent. In addition, its rarity gives it a sacred character. Offering it to the dead is proof of love, of attachment and above all of sacrifice because the buffalo is not accessible to everyone. This meal offered to the deceased has several functions: its nutrition, the request for protection, blessing, and the smooth running of funeral ceremonies. The latter protects participants against traffic accidents on the way there and back, does not allow any disorder or outcry during this period, because we can sometimes witness violent scenes or record cases of accidents during funerals. These incidents are attributed to the deceased who disapproves of these ceremonies because he is not satisfied with the quality of food offered.

One or more whole goats are also offered to the village chief as an announcement or a funeral schedule for a member of secret society or one who has ties with the chiefdom: notable, royal family, elite. In the latter case, offering a goat to the chief is a way of sealing ties with his community by inviting him to the funeral. This gesture reinforces his power with his subjects. It also leads him to delegate his nine notables to represent him in case of unavailability, or when the ceremonies are organized on a forbidden day.

The choice made on lipstick, palm oil and raffia wine when the Chief's funeral was announced is also justified by the fact that these foods are involved in several purification rites in the community. In addition, he also told himself that before his death, the deceased used it. The heir is obliged to return these goats to the chiefdom as reimbursement. The notables take care of the cooking.

Speaking of the offer of the goat to the heir by the son-in-law, the latter proves that he assumes his marital duty and reaffirms his presence in his covenant family. He is now the head of the family, so this gift shows that he inherited his father's wives as well as his property. This tradition is applied to all women widowed as well as to those married under a dowry regime.

### **Kunkekoa, small grains of "koki" or dolich bean (phaseolus vulgaris)**

In Bangangte culture, twins are seen as people with power. We must avoid committing acts that could

irritate them. As stated by Njike-Bergeret C. (2000: 66), they “are considered to be different beings from other children and, as such, they have special qualifiers: for example, “the friend of the leader”, because they have mysterious powers that warrant them respect as much as the leader, or even “son or daughter of laziness”, because their natural nobility is enough to exempt them from certain arduous work thus legitimizing their laziness”.

This peculiarity is also evident in the preparation of *Kunkekuea* during the funeral of a twin. Feeding the participants, the twins, the parents of the twins is a symbol of peace. It helps to coax them and honor them.

To serve them this food, a set of practices is observed. The maid should worship them during the service by clapping her hands while uttering flattering words to them.

Another special feature is the “twins cane”. The Bangangté give the same explanation relating to the *Kunkekua* to the consumption of the “twins’ cane” during their funeral.

#### **Cola nuts (*Cola acuminata*)**

Kola nuts in Bangangte culture symbolize greetings, friendship and respect towards brothers and superiors. During a funeral, some guests donate these kola nuts in small packages as a contribution. It is served to guests especially to adults as a delicacy.

To consume it, some elderly men accompany it with palm wine. According to our informants, this fruit has several effects in the body. It is considered an excitant. To stay awake, sympathizers consume it.

From the ritual of *ne louk mbwogə vù* “to take the mourning flame”, it serves as a channel of transmission between the organizers and the skulls of the dead. A kola nut is first split into two, and then thrown at the grave of the deceased or on his skull. Upon the throw, if you get a “toss and tails”, this automatically means the dummy approves the initiative. On the other hand, if the two pieces are presented “face-to-face”, or “toss-tails”, then the family faces the grievances of the deceased who disapproves of his funeral. After invocations, incantations and supplications, expiatory rites are organized by the family until a favorable result is obtained from the deceased. From that moment, you can continue with the other rituals. During the course of the funeral, it is served to participants from the cola quarters. The whole nut can be served to dignitaries who in turn split them into parts to give to others. The kola nut is a symbol of greeting, of mutual respect between the guests. It is distributed to the dignitaries by way of greetings, of thanks. It serves to further seal the bonds of friendship. It enhances the flavor of raffia wine. According to our

informants, this fruit has several effects in the body. It is considered not only as an alarm, but also a tonic that helps keep participants alert during funeral days.

#### **African jujubes (*Aframomum malegueta*) or seeds of peace**

As for the african jujubes, they are not a staple food during funerals. They are just sprinkled around the places of the ceremonies to implore the benevolence of the ancestors to come and ensure the smooth running of the festivities. The jujubes symbolize peace and reduce tension. They contribute to the smooth running of funeral rites. It is common to hear people complain in this form: “Funerals are sleeping. Tam-tam players, despite their best efforts, musical instruments do not resonate as they should. In addition, the dancers feel heaviness in the legs. The spirits and the skulls present in the compound are not happy. They are asking for something”. To remedy this situation, the initiated equip themselves with a reasonable quantity of jujube seeds, salt which they sprinkle all over the compound to coax them, ask their blessing. Once this ritual is performed, the effects are immediate. The dancers and orchestra players are filled with vitality, energy. The instruments reason, and they can dance for hours without getting tired.

Very often this situation occurs during the funeral of the twins. In addition to sprinkling the seeds, they are fed to the twins, the parents of the twins, the eldest twins who are present on the premises. The consumption of jujubes soothes them, protects them from sadness and resentment.

#### **Yams (*Discorea alata*)**

The yam also called *lògnsewn*, yellow yam in Medumba differs from other varieties of yams by its flavor, consistency, cooking time and long shelf life. By its texture (yellowish color), it symbolizes attachment, the mark of esteem, sympathy, honor to the place of the person to whom we offer. For example, the yam offered by the daughter-in-law to the husband's father is a mark of affection to the wedding family; it further seals the bonds between the two families. The specificity is that this yam is put in the mourning basket in the form of raw food so that it is not only consumed immediately, but that it also allows the recipient to commemorate or remember the funeral to which he was invited several days later.

On the other hand, this is offered to visitors cooked for short-term consumption. In its raw state, its shelf life does not exceed two days after harvest. So it symbolizes a kind of communion between the participants in the funeral.

#### **Symbol of the main dishes distributed during funeral rites**

During the funeral, a multitude of dishes are cooked. Attention is drawn to *Tàgnjab*, corn cake with



vegetables and *Kàlò mbab mbwə* also called *kondrè*, plantain made with goat meat.

### ***Tàgnjab*, corn cake with vegetables**

The ritual of taking the fire of mourning is punctuated by the sharing and consumption of *Tàgnjab*. But first, a fair amount is scattered over the grave and throughout the compound to feed the deceased and everyone in the compound as well as other unseen guests. The amount of ants instantly bustling with spilled food not only shows the dead person's approval but also heralds the funeral color. In this precise period, all this ritual is punctuated by the words addressed to the dead.

Rarely cooked nowadays in households and unknown to children, the consumption of *Tàgnjab*, a corn cake with vegetables during funerals, is a way back to basics. The uniqueness of this dish is that it is served in the palm of your hand. This act is justified by the fact that it is not prepared in large quantities. This is not about making him eat his fill. The goal is that all participants receive a bit. A large symbolic consumption of this dish by the participants at the funeral site is synonymous with the success of these ceremonies.

### ***Kàlò mbab mbwə* also called *kondrè*, plantain with goat meat**

The Bangangtes identify with the *kondré*, to say that one cannot imagine a funeral in this community without this food. Consumed in all categories of funerals, *kondré* symbolizes sharing, assertiveness, respect for the tradition that dates back to the dietary practices undertaken by the ancestors.

Since the preparation of this food during funerals is well-established, breaking this tradition could result in the curse of an entire lineage. It sometimes happens that some families do not have sufficient financial resources to obtain a whole goat. To overcome this difficulty, "They buy the parts of the goat such as: the lungs, liver, head and legs to make a whole goat in order to comply with the ritual of *kondré* to the goat", explains an informant. This makes it possible to meet the requirements of participants who believe that eating well at funerals means enjoying this food regardless of the varieties of food offered, as revealed by one informant: "There are participants who demand it, because when you serve him food, he asks you: is there any goat plantain. He expresses his dismay when the answer is negative". This meal has nowadays become a mark of snobbery. So making the guests eat *kondré* goat cheese is a sign of success and moral satisfaction for the organizers.

However, it should be noted that Bangangte natives practice food murder by slaughtering goats, the number of which varies according to the purse of each family. The dominant breed in this cultural universe is

fat, with short legs, small horns ... According to the Bangangte, this variety has a firm flesh, a succulent taste. Over the years, this breed has not changed. However, we can notice a change in the culinary art where in addition to *kondré*, this kind of goat is used in cooking broths, grilling, or in the form of "barbecue" for wealthy families.

The first step in distributing *kondré* is to make sure that all parts of the goat are effective. After this verification, they are served according to social categories. The head, for example, automatically returns to the uterine nephews, "*mekaat*". This act makes it possible to trace the genealogy of the family.

### **Symbol of the drinks consumed during a funeral**

Besides water, palm wine is the first drink in demand. Its consumption dates back to the time of the ancestors. Palm wine, like cola, symbolizes a pact, a kind of contract, of union between the various participants in the funeral.

Palm wine keeps the tradition alive. It plays the role of arbiter. During the funeral, hostile words may have been said to each other that created resentment and which will be difficult for the protagonists to forget. But, if the heir to all their ancestors manages to put an end to the dispute between them, those who had taken part in one way or another will be invited, on the day of reconciliation, to share the same glass of palm wine. This gesture thus seals thenewfound love. Those who drink and eat together cannot fear each other. Then the head of the family pours water or palm wine from a calabash on the threshold of the door, in order to bury the hatred forever, advising those who will leave the room that they will have to step over the liquid thus poured out.

The palm wine used on this occasion is just a form of homecoming, to signify that it is the main nectar extracted in the community. "It brings all consumers to their origins, helps to build peace ... to consecrate friendship, union in multiple families," *Ntang La*.

Due to the new technology, the beers and liquors offered at the funeral do not detract from the sanctity of palm wine.

### **Food serves as a factor for exchanges and strengthening family and extra-family ties during funerals**

The system of donation and counter-donation, of exchange of food that takes place during the funeral symbolizes understanding, respect, affection and communion. It seals the bonds between the parties involved. Because, as Mauss, M. (2003: 162) declares: "To refuse to give, to neglect to invite, like refusing to take, is equivalent to declaring war. It is to refuse the covenant and the communion".

For example, the pistachio and yam that the daughter-in-law gives to the wedding band to announce or thank them for the “mourning basket” received is a mark of affection. This gesture seals the bonds between the two families.

Everything is also based on the principle that “the basket you receive never comes in empty”. To say that when the basket is emptied of its original contents, the receiver is obliged to replace it before putting it back. It is important to note that the nature of the gift varies according to gender, age and social rank. An organizer cannot put wine in the mourning basket instead of palm oil to give to a woman. Likewise, she cannot give peanuts to a man instead of pistachio.

Therefore, one would be tempted to believe that there is a disorder in the distribution of food before, during and after the funeral if one considers the high number of participants. Which is not the case. Everything is organized and follows a logic.

### **Food and mutual aid during funerals**

In Bangangte culture, funeral ceremonies are much more than an occasion for reunion between people scattered across the country, and even the world. They always move a large audience, even if the deceased seemed to be alone during his lifetime. And the least important of these funerals bring together at least a thousand people who make it their duty to contemplate the face of the deceased for the last time.

Food that is the focal point of these ceremonies cannot be the duty of one family. Therefore, more than mutual aid, it is more the subject of a kind of “Djangi”. In other words, it is an opportunity for members of proven families to collect in the form of compensation, any donations which they had earlier made to friends and acquaintances during their own ceremonies. At the same time, they receive allocated sums from associations, so that when the balance sheet is drawn up at the end of the ceremonies, very often the funeral organizer has not disbursed his own money. As Njike-Bergeret C. (2000: 93) points out:

*Of course, it is the heir who organizes them. But it is often said that they are like a tontine, these financial associations of private individuals, widely practiced in Cameroon. Indeed, throughout one's life, we attend the mourning of others so that, the day the family organizes their own, the descendants of those we have mourned come in turn to assist the grieved. A beautiful funeral is a purely moral satisfaction for the Bangangté, and they are ready to go the extra mile, to give whatever they have to make this day a memorable one.*

When the successor receives goats and tins of oil from the sons-in-law of the family, he redistributes these goods to other family members who do not have enough means. This allows them in turn to prepare their pot of plantain with the goat that they will serve during

the ceremonies. Along the same lines, Mebenga Tamba, L. (1996: 388), expresses himself in these terms:

*During the funeral rites the new head of the family receives the power of command and organization ... This suddenly elevates him to the upper level of the social hierarchy, and at the same time provokes around him hatred, jealousy and witchcraft practices. To alleviate this situation, the solution seems to be through the distribution and use of the goods acquired for the benefit of the whole community. This is where the abundant consumption of food and drink finds its significance. In all cases, we must manage to satiate the community to avoid its anger caused by this circumstantial economic emergence.*

After this analysis of food and caring for funerals, the next point will be to describe food classification.

### **Categorization of food during funerals**

Speaking of food classification, Laburthe Tolra, P. and Warnier, P. (1993: 355) note that: “Foods are not only good to eat, but also good to think about... their classification as edible or not, hot or cold, cooked or raw, roasted or boiled, depends on the classification methods specific to a given civilization”.

The Bangangté people have developed a belief system around the food consumed or offered during funerals to the point where anything that should be offered to participants should not be “vulgar”. Thus, all expressions converge on what is rare, worthy, out of reach: goat *kondré* is made with true *Kàlò tun* plantain (*Musa sapientum paradisiaca*), corn cake with *njab ntun*, true vegetables, peanuts from the bottom of *tam-tam*: *kenà là* peanut village, goat: domestic animal whose market value is not on the stock exchange of the *have-mots*, the *lòhnsèwn*, long-lived yam, *nze' ntàd* cucumbers ... These examples serve to show that of all the food crops in this community, when it comes to funerals, food is selective. To show its dignity, its nobility, elegance as it is said in this region, it is therefore necessary to avoid ridiculing itself by offering food considered of little value, within the reach of all budgets: “it is necessary make the difference”.

In addition, the Bangangté appropriate dishes such as corn cake with vegetables, yellow sauce, peanut and *egusi* dishes and proclaim themselves specialists in the culinary art to the detriment of other communities in the region of the west. Because for them, if a participant consumes them during the funeral, he will no longer enjoy tasting them in other communities.

Thus, eating at a funeral becomes a kind of assertiveness, exhibition (emphasis is on quantity), snobbery, exposure of one's culinary abilities.

### Food and social classification during funerals

The foods used depend on the type of funeral and the recipient. Through the varieties of food offered in the form of raw, cooked, roasted, boiled, local nationals can already tell the social class to which the donor and the recipient belong. For example *Kunkekuea*, small beans of cowpea and the "twins cane" are served and consumed first by the twins during the funeral of one of their own or during those of a parent of twins or a diviner.

Raw squash (egusi) kernels with yams are offered to members of the family-in-law as an invitation and appreciation. During the distribution of the goat, for example, the head goes to the grandsons of the family. Kola nut is consumed by men, and even some adult women. As such, we can speak of food as a classifying element.

### Food during funerals as a rite of purification

Eating before, during and after the funeral becomes a rite of purification where healing is obtained through the excessive distribution of food and drink. The virtues generated by the very strong links forged from time immemorial between individuals, within the family, between ancestors and descendants, members of the chiefdom, participants in general are: altruism, solidarity, individual development, respect for others and reconciliation.

Before the ceremonies begin, the "tag", a corn cake pounded with oil, jujubes and palm oil are sprinkled in the compound. This gesture is also repeated before the rite of "ne brou vù" to make peace reign in the places, forging links between ancestors and descendants. It can happen that the spirits of the dead disrupt the smooth running of the funeral. These dishes are given to ask for their protection.

Celebrating funeral rites is a way of bringing peace to the family and bringing together members around the same objective which is to commemorate, to remember the deceased, his achievements, and the life he led. It's also a way to bring the family together.

### Food as an element of acculturation

During a funeral, the Bangangte people engage in a kind of food acculturation. With local dishes, they combine dishes from other cultures, the objective being to satisfy all participants or guests from other regions. This is how we will find the *Ndolè* au miondo from the Littoral Region of Cameroon, the "Eru" which is a specialty of the South-West Region, the trademark of catering services namely: roasted chicken, roasted pork, appetizers, and many other foods. The organizers take care to offer a wide variety of meat or fish.

It is the same thing for the drinks where we denote the nectar of palm wine and a varied range of liquors, table wines, so that everyone, back home does

not complain that he has not consumed anything or not stuffed at his convenience.

### Food and playfulness during funeral rites

Funeral rites refer to what is commonly known in the Bangangte community as "salaka", that is, the act of giving people food without expecting something in return. During the rite of "ne brou vù" for example, peanuts and drinks placed at the bottom of the drums are not distributed to the audience.

The success of the funeral is judged by the violence that drummers, dancers and singers use to get either a bottle or a mouthful of peanuts. We sometimes see brawls leading to injuries, because during the stampede, the bottles can break, or the weakest are crushed by the strongest. Members of this family should not consume or eat these peanuts for fear of attracting evil spirits.

Besides the fact that this is to give funerals a playful connotation, another reason given here is to avoid resentments that would come from those who did not receive anything.

## DISCUSSION

Some authors have been interested in the interpretation of sacrifices and offerings during funeral rites. For them, they become more and more a kind of obligation which binds the living to the dead, the world of the dead. For this, it was necessary to sacrifice a goat or a billy goat in the bush in the name of the dead. This rite was practiced in secret by men since it was about the initiation of the dead. For the conduct of this rite, these men began by calling the deceased by name, by his "dan" (sic) on the drum, and his "Ekuga". They adjourn and hear a voice from the distant bush responding to requests, giving some direction to the survivors, and asking for help to get through to the "bekon". They will therefore sacrifice a goat or a billy goat in the name of the dead man so that he can have access to the court (*nsen'*) at the ghosts and so that he crosses without hindrance, the bridges established above the various abysses that lie in wait for him.

This is the case of Deschamps, H. (1977) who was interested in funeral rites among the Dogon and the peoples of the Côte d'Or. With regard to the first people, the rituals last two days and are subdivided into two orders of funerals. Thus, we witness the abundant consumption of beer and sacrifices on altars erected on tombs. These usually take place during burial ceremonies, and sacred dances accompanied by religious incantation formulas are not to be outdone. Regarding the second, Deschamps describes the Ashanti funeral where we witness the offering of a sheep and palm wine to the dead and many other sacrifices. The meals taken together take place a year later to implore social peace and prosperity from the ancestors. Among the Bambara, the author revisits a

sacrifice intended to ask for peace, the blessing for an abundant agricultural harvest. On this occasion, the altar is first sprinkled with the blood of the sacrificed animal. Then the objects of the deceased are destroyed by combustion.

Eating practices are perceived by Calandre, N. (2002) as identity markers, codes of social differentiation, activities that underlie symbolic qualities, emotional and cultural roots (customs, beliefs, and regional mentalities).

For Otye Elom, P. U. (2004), death among the Bënë is perceived as a supernatural phenomenon. According to them, the deceased does not leave his family for good. He continues to live in the world invisible to the living. Speaking of food during this rite, the author indicates that when the deceased was offended before dying and this offense has not been repaired, the offender must deliver to one of the uterine nephews of the deceased a rooster which must be sacrificed on the fire of the disappeared before its extinction. After the rooster is sacrificed, the offender is required to offer about three kilograms of fish to the village elders. This fish replaces the goat that was once offered. In order for the funeral to run smoothly, the young people should offer food and wine to the village elders before they organize a dance party.

Njiassé Njoya and Njimotapon Njikam (1985) focused in their article on the funeral of a Bamoun head of the family from Maghet-Malentouen. It emerges that the funerals of this social category have the function of repaying the debts of the dead and helping him reach the world of the dead. On this occasion, the ritual of eating on the grave, the hiding of the head of the sacrificed animal and the washing of mourning is observed. For this purpose, the heir must wash the face with water, perform the common incantatory prayer, and hand over a goat and wine to the guests". These guests are related to the deceased. They are made up of the grandfather of the deceased, that of the heir of the sister of the deceased, the step-sons and husbands of the grand daughters of the deceased, the parents of the sisters-in-law and daughters-in-law. Together, they form small social groups. During the ceremonies, each group was accompanied by its "society of rituals". These authors complete their description with the contribution in food and drink by each group. According to these, the funeral rites of a head of the family in this culture is a time of popular celebration.

The local dishes consumed during funerals offer the possibility for future generations to remain linked to their parents, their ancestors, their compound, their culture, their land, even if they are scattered around the world because as Njike-Bergeret tells us., C. (2001: 94): "Listening to the other or pretending to listen to him is not sharing the most convivial thing: eating and drinking..."

Further studies could be done on funeral festivities as a means of reunion for members of a given community all over the world.

## CONCLUSION

Death among the Bangangté is not an end. On the contrary, it is a renewal, it is continuity whose culmination is nourishment. This is all the more present in the belief systems of this community as the person empowered to ensure this continuity is the heir who is called in *mədumba njunda*, "the one who ate the house". Funerals are a farewell ceremony where family members invite friends and colleagues, contact dance groups and associations the deceased joined to organize popular celebrations. Foods eaten during funeral rites carry meaning and significance. It contributes to strengthening social relationships. Each dish consumed has a symbolism established by the habits and customs specific to this community. Among the Bangangtés, *le kàlò mbab mbwà*, also called goat *kondrè*; *ban ngàfəd bô sogcèn*: corn *couscous* with yellow peanut sauce; *tag njab*: corn cake with vegetables; *kun kekuea*, "koki" or dolich bean (*phaseolus vulgaris*), reveal their cultural identity. The consumption of these foods is also seen as a means through which the Bangangtes accompany the dead to the ancestors. Following this logic, we can say that it is important for each culture to work to safeguard these dietary practices so that they are not forgotten.

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