

“Born House” Phenomenon in Cameroon From Mechanical Solidarity to Survival Solidarity

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ABSTRACT: While bereaved mothers mourn the death of the children they did not bear, others hold ceremonies to welcome their newborns into the world. The birth of a child reaffirms the beliefs and norms that organize human relationships. It gives the event a festive character and seems to conceal the cultural practices that underpin it. The cultural care practices that accompany the birth of a child bear witness to the importance of the magico-religious bond that characterizes each individual and underpins their true personality. This article, based on research techniques and methods specific to the social sciences, shows that the child, through the solidarity that its birth engenders between individuals, is a means of socialization in human societies. It is at the origin of a social institution known as ‘born house’, which structures social relations. Documentary research and social science data collection techniques were used to gather the information that led to this research. This article analyses the changes that have taken place in birth celebrations and in practices of mothering and caring for newborns in the face of the transformation that contemporary societies are undergoing today. It attempts to show that the child is no longer the property of a family, but the product of society as a whole. The child is now at the centre of a network of gifts and debts that organize and bring together individuals.

KEYWORDS: Gift, solidarity, exchanges, rites, care

INTRODUCTION

Birth is the moment when a living being begins to exist independently (outside the maternal organism). This moment assures human reproduction and is facilitated by a vagina. The birth of a child is a sign of the pain experienced by the pregnant woman, especially when, as noted by Flavien Ndonko et al (2024), this is done traditionally, as in Togo. It is also a time when the mother risks her life by deciding to give birth, and as the child may die at birth. When the child dies at birth, it is said that ‘the water has been spilled, but the calabash has is not broken’ to console the mother, who still has the chance to give birth. If the baby dies at birth, families consider the death a non-event. If the mother and child are still alive, there are celebrations and ceremonies around the birth, often accompanied by songs, dances, games and the presentation of gifts, an expression of communication and solidarity. It is now accompanied by a phenomenon whose practices have taken on social and cultural connotations over time. The rite of the umbilical cord is reserved for the family, whereas the ceremony of welcoming the baby is social. Today, more than ever before, with the arrival of health centres and maternity services, the recovery of the umbilical cord at the birth of a child is becoming increasingly rare. Parents are abandoning the umbilical cord, and the rituals are being replaced by festive events called ‘born house’. Jacques Godbout (2000) says: ‘In the family or in society, the world of networks functions on the basis of gift and debt, and not on the basis of equivalence (as in the market) or equality (as in the State). When networks function well, this debt is positive: it does not engender anxiety and alienation, but trust and a desire for loyalty. And finally, it is through the relationship of debt (positive or negative), of give and take, that identities are formed or deformed. Through this study, we want to understand the current considerations and cultural habits that encourage the expression of solidarity around the birth of children.

1. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY AND RATIONAL

With Marcel Mauss (1997), classical ethnology takes up the notion of the gift and the forms and reasons for exchange in human societies. Mauss asks what force is present in the gift that makes the recipient return it? The birth of a child is another opportunity to experience this practice, to assess the games and issues involved in the exchanges and gifts observed within contemporary families. In the 2016 edition of the magazine on birth traditions around the world, it reveals that in China, when a baby is one month old, the parents organize a party to celebrate the birth of their child. This is an opportunity for most relatives to see the baby for the first time. To mark the occasion, the parents give or send red eggs to relatives to celebrate both fertility with the egg, and luck and wealth with the color red. In this culture, red symbolizes wealth, happiness and the fullness of life. We decided to undertake this

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study because of the link with our previous work on water rituals in health care and more recently, on sexual practices and reproductive health. This research gives us a broad anthropological overview of human behavior in several cultures. It aims to show that solidarity is a key value that helps people to live together in human cultures. It shows the link that a child maintains with the living and their ancestors in a genealogical group.

We were invited to attend a birth ceremony by two women, one from Bamougoum and the other from Bafut. The one from Bamegoum reminded us not to come ‘empty-handed’, i.e. to bring gifts, and the one from Bafut advised us to ‘empty’ our bellies before coming, i.e. not to eat enough in advance because there would be food for everyone. We began to think about the meaning of giving, gifts and exchange, and seized this opportunity to understand the contemporary nature of the principle of giving and the meaning of gratuity. This research was intended to help us understand how cultures value the birth of a child. Bamougoum is a village in the West Region. It is located in Cameroon some 139 mile (or 224km) Northwest of Yaounde the country's capital. In Bamougoum, the people speak the "Ngemba" a language spoken in six villages namely; Bameka, Bamejou, Bamougoum, Bansaou, Bafunda and mangoum. The name of these villages came from the people's parents who named them such because of some of their characteristics and behavior or their status in the family. Geographically, Bafut is located in Mezam Division, which on its part, is located in the Northwest Region. Bafut is famous for having preserved its structure as a traditional kingdom (or "Fondom»), under the leadership of the Fon of Bafut. Bafut is located about 20 kilometers (12 mile) northwest of Bamenda, in Mezam Division, and covers an area of roughly 340 km². It is located in the Western Grassfields geographic region, which includes Cameroon's Northwest Region and surrounding grassland areas. Apart from being one of the most powerful traditional kingdoms in the Northwest, it has such fascinating cultures. One of these cultural values is seen in the aspect of welcoming a new born baby, be it male or female. Born house, in the Bafut language is called Ndah-Mouh (Born house).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data for this study was collected in two Grassfield localities in Cameroon. These were Bamegoum in the West Region and Bafut in the North-West Region. We aim to understand and attempt to compare the ritual practices associated with childbirth. The interviews that led to the collection of data for this study were carried out in 2020 as part of the research for a book on diseases in the Bamiléké region of Cameroon. The ‘snowball’ technique enabled us to identify the households on our survey itinerary with nursing mothers whose children were between 0 and 12 months old. We interviewed the mothers, the fathers and the parents who assisted the newborns until the data were saturated. Content analysis of communications was necessary to examine the information gathered. This analysis was nothing more than a ‘form of deferred observation’. This analysis tool therefore makes it possible to capture information on the realities of newborn care and the ceremonies that accompany their birth, based on an in-depth reading of facts that did not immediately catch our attention during the observations or the collection of information during the in-depth individual interviews. This analysis aims to go beyond the overt and explicit content of the simple data to reach the implicit meaning that is not immediately apparent from observation, since implicit content is not the real subject of discourse, even though it is omnipresent in what people say.

3. EXPRESSIONS OF SOLIDARITY THROUGH THE BIRTH OF A CHILD

Alexis Tague Kakeu (2022) affirms the solidarity of these peoples and shows that it has been a reality since antiquity. This spirit of solidarity has always enabled the Negro-African peoples to live and survive, to help each other and to offer each other mutual assistance in times of misfortune or happiness. The birth of a child is one expression of this solidarity. Susanne Lallemand et al (1981) put it this way: ‘Anthropological studies of childhood and children have been the subject of interest that has varied over time in the most diverse disciplines and in the most varied human cultures’. Birth has become, so to speak, a social phenomenon that is now understood from several angles. It is seen as a blessing and a reincarnation into the life of one of the newborn's grandparents, to be celebrated. This birth gives rise to controversy, especially when it involves others who have to visit the newborn's family. Jacques Godbout's study (2000) raises many questions about the phenomenon of gift or, better still, solidarity, understood as a principle or moral value and seen as the expression of a mutual commitment between two or more people. He says that gift and exchange are legal terms that need to be distinguished, because exchange is characterized by the right to demand something in return, and a gift lacks this right. In his view, to give is to deny oneself the right to demand something in return. But on closer observation, we wonder whether this solidarity is disinterested, whether the exchange of gifts that takes place during a baby shower does not have a future contractual requirement. In this context, Alexis Tague Kakeu (2022:14) says that ‘solidarity refers to the relationship between people that entails a moral obligation of mutual assistance. It can be understood as the relationship existing between people who, having a community of interests, are linked to one another. It can also be seen as the relationship of interdependence between things’.

3.1. Welcoming of new born baby

The birth of a child is seen as a joy and is celebrated according to the tradition of each people. This birth gives rise to indispensable rituals that take account of the child's rank and are necessary for his/her survival and development, but also for socialization and the transformation of its identity. Nowadays, the birth of children is accompanied by festive events such as baby showers. This social

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institution is an opportunity for family friends to bring donations to support the newborn's parents in the onerous task of caring for the baby, which often takes its toll on the parents. Alexis Tague Kakeu (2022:7) says that: ‘This solidarity, or if you like, the ethic of solidarity, was manifest in all areas of life - political, economic and social. It was a reality in the membership and participation of everyone, young people, adults, the elderly, women and men, girls and boys, in a variety of associations, secret societies, age groups, happy or unhappy events, etc., not forgetting the different types of work of individual or collective interest’.

On the day when a baby is put to birth in Bafut, especially if it's the first of a family, the celebrations are enormous. Almost immediately after birth, the placenta of the baby is taken from the hospital and kept in a freezer to avoid damage. Then when the mother leaves the hospital, the grand parents of the child together with the parents of the baby, go to an ancestral land. Under a plantain tree, a hole is dug, then the grandparents say some incantations or what they call ancestral blessings with the placenta in their hands. That is, it goes in rounds. After that, the placenta is buried in the ground and each member of the family contributes in closing the hole. This is a way of connecting the baby to the ancestral land. At home, two to three big bunches of plantain are placed at the center of the house with 10 liters of palm oil. Any visiting neighbour entering to welcome the baby, cuts 1 to 2 plantains, moves into the kitchen and roasts it. He or she then mixes it with palm oil and eats. Palm wine taken to send the plantain down the throat.

Apart from this aspect, the father of the baby prepares a very large pot of large sized plantains incorporated with long leaves of bitter leaf and overflowing palm oil. Without this, the Ndah-Mouh is not complete. Some parents depending on their financial status get either fowls or a goat to slaughter for the feast. The father also gets more than 20 liters of palm wine to welcome all the guests who have come to see the baby. John, 66 years old, argues that: “*Celebration of new baby is a part of our tradition, a baby comes from God, and the celebration is to link the baby with our ancestors*”. These guests don't come empty handed. Depending on the sex of a child, if it's a boy, most guests usually bring a cock. Some bring soap, baby dresses while others bring food of various kinds especially Achu and yellow soup which is the Bafut traditional meal. At this point, there is a lot of celebration and dancing in the house. That is people converse and shower blessings, in the Bafut mother tongue, on the baby's.

3.2. Celebrating the newborn in culture

Health care is mainly based on traditional religion, which is a system of practices and beliefs whose objectives are to provide good health care for new babies. We believe that new babies are gifts from the ancestors given to us to reduce our workload, as we depend mainly on agriculture to survive. Most health practitioners in my village use the traditional system, while some combine traditional practices and beliefs from different faiths to improve health care for babies and others, and therefore social conditions. According to Pauline, 46, Bafut: *‘The childbirth ceremony has always existed. The way it's done nowadays has changed, with the addition of modern items (soap, baby pants, etc.), but the cultural basis of the ceremony remains - the songs, the dance, the traditional food to welcome the newborn.’* These traditional practices are carried out by either people chosen by the ancestors, having spiritual powers which may be inherited, learned or acquired through their own affliction and healing. The following paragraphs will expound on the practices of health care and celebration of new babies. In the same vein, Claudie Haxaire (2007:103) mentions that *‘Among the Gouro of Côte d'Ivoire, from birth and during the first three months of life, all newborn babies are subjected to bodily manipulations using decoctions, followed by medicinal baths, anointings and medicinal pastes. No mother can shirk her duty to provide this care. Those who consider themselves unskilled entrust this task to a more experienced woman, mother-in-law, sister-in-law or older co-wife’*.

In Bafut, pregnancy and motherhood are accompanied by myths and rituals, especially the birth of the first baby can have a particularly festive connotation. It is not enough to say that the arrival of a baby is a moment of joy and rejoicing in the family – house is well inscribed in the rituals. This is a ceremony held at the parents' home from the first days of the mother's discharge from the hospital. Food, drinks and other scenes of celebration accompany these moments. In the Bamileke region, among Bamegoum and Bafut communities, the first days after the birth of the child are subject to celebration. The noblest food should never be missing at the parents home. The logic, these should be ready at any time to serve every guest who would visit the child. This guest should present himself with gifts for the newborn. The process of cooking for the wife and bringing of gifts by the visitors is done continually for about a month until the wife can again be strong to cook and also during this period, one of the sisters of the child's father usually comes and stays in the house for about a month. In some cases, the child remains in the house for about a week without visitors seeing him/her, during which the baby is being trained spiritually by giving some extraordinary powers and in some cases, specific animals are being giving to the child.

3.3. Welcoming babies and traditional secret society

Usually, a welcoming song is sang titled “ya ya kam” in order to welcome the new baby and praise the ancestors and to tell the baby to enter peacefully into the home, not to be afraid, to be a good peanut seed and also a reminder that the baby was lost in slavery and was brought to the family by the ancestors. Then after the baby is passed round first to the father for special blessings and also first naming and later on passed to the other members individually for blessings.

In the case of twin, a member of the traditional secret society, Christopher, 51 years old, confirms the belief that: *“In our culture, they are special beings, of course with special powers”*. In reality, we learned from a notable that a set of twins brings happiness to

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the household, protects it, and brings good fortune and joy. On the other hand, twins are known to soothe or cure dislocations or fractures through massages. “Twins have a gentleness about them, healthy hands. They are God’s friends and as such, they can defy all traditional taboos; for example not sitting on the Chief’s chair”, proudly punctuates the notable, himself father to twins.

The latter mentions one essential element which could explain these exceptional gifts: twins go through a traditional rite at birth (and also when they die). When twins are born, the women close to the mother cook Nkuii (a traditional meal) which they bring to the ancestors. They also cook “Haricot koki” and put a basket at the doorstep. Every person visiting the new born twins will have to throw in money representing the good fortune brought by the twins (even more if they are triplets or quadruplets). Twins also have special names in Bamileké: “Ngondja”, “Ntaa koungang”, “Soffo” (God’s friend) or names ending in “Fack” (such as Donfack, Sonfack) to indicate that one is a twin. Parents of twins are also honored. Their mother will be called “Magni” and the father “Tagni”

3.4. Carrying the new babies

Health care of the baby is usually done simply by methods like bathing, avoiding carrying the baby without being wrapped in a cloth. All of these processes are carried out especially when the baby is healthy in order to maintain this healthy state but a case might arise when the baby is sick. When the child is sick, he or she is being taken to the hospital for treatment and medications and if the sickness persists, even with the medications, they can now take the baby and treat with traditional systems. Different practitioners use different ways to know what exactly is wrong with the child and their diagnosis are usually correct. They usually do it by either communicating with the gods directly by providing sacrifices like cola nut, fowl, and oil, for the gods to give a listening ear to them and provide them with good diagnosis and to provide an everlasting treatment or they usually go to a sacred god’s house which is like a cave to seek good treatment. The traditional processes taken for good health care depends mainly on what is disturbing the child and may include; stomach ache with diarrhea, side pain which is usually diagnosed when the baby is crying as people carry him or her, and also when the baby becomes pale, having stunted growth. This usually can be as a result the baby being a twin in the stomach but some spiritual forces were fighting during pregnancy periods and resulted in a the delivery of just one child and is usually called a ‘one twin’. Furthermore, it can be from a twin and most especially the child that comes immediately after a set of twins. The ‘born house’ ceremony is not as simple as you might think. Informants admit that it is a difficult moment that requires attention and protection, because evil people can harm the newborn during this event. To avoid falling into the villain’s trap, parents place a plate containing ‘Ndong’ seeds at the doorway. Each visitor should take a few seeds with their own hands and eat them to signify their purity.

3.5. New baby diseases and cultural treatments

In many Bamileke cultures, new birth celebration has a name. In Bamougoum, the new birth celebration is called “nde mer” “nde” which means home or house and “mer” which means baby, therefore “nde mer” means the baby’s home. From the ecological perspectives, the people in the rural area merely succeed to adapt to environmental changes and disease through traditional medicine by curing and preventing some illness. Most of the people in this culture involve in externalizing belief systems as they associate most of the causes of illness to witchcraft, sorcery or evil eyes or supernatural world (gods, spirits, or ancestors). As the society is seen as a system of equilibrium just as the human body, the same way people belief in this culture that is very important to be in good terms with one another. To this, they see the importance of celebrating new birth purposely to inform all the family members and friends about the newborn baby so that they may bless the child and share the joy of the parents.

In the case of a new baby suffering from painful stomach ache and diarrhea, people of Bamegoum belief that it is caused by the grandfather of the baby in the fathers side either being angry or wanting them to come to the village and introduce the baby to him, so they usually take the baby to the fathers compound in the village carrying along a teen of palm oil, a fowl usually female, and salt. In my culture at first, when the father dies, we usually go and remove the head but nowadays we just take a stone to represent the father’s head which is usually placed at the head of the grave, so when the baby is taken to the village with the above mentioned requirements, the oil is spilled on the stone (representing the grandfathers head). They also rub around the stone and while doing so, the name of the child is called three times and also telling the grandfather to please welcome the child and protect him or her and after the salt is spread on the head of the grave and the fowl is giving to the grandfathers successor. All of these procedures do not usually need someone with spiritual powers but is usually done by the successor of the child grandfather’s compound. After all these have been done, in most cases that I observed, all the pains experienced by the child immediately stops and the treatment is usually everlasting.

In the case of one twin, it is believed that the one twin has three gods who are constantly fighting over the child, we usually call such person “mbou” meaning someone created by three gods and therefore the baby must be fixed and joined in order to belong to only one and only god. This joining process is usually done by female sorcerers where during the day they are being found around the market in most of the days and when at home they are usually seen singing and dancing around the compound and they are usually four in number. A goat, five litters of palm oil and salt is usually provided to each of the first three. The baby is usually passed to the first three sorcerers with the above mention items and each of them will have to use a razor blade to cut the baby at different locations of the body and applying some herbs on the cut area. They also apply a substance called “ndindim” (sweet pepper) to the same cuts. And after this process, the last sorcerer would come in and put a final cut on the baby’s jaw and the cut area is robe

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with a red powder with the red powder being put on the baby’s forehead. This final cut is presented as an indication that the baby belongs to one and only one god and also serves as protection from different spiritual forces that may influence the baby’s health. Immediately after all these must have been done, if the baby was already showing some symptoms of illness, the baby regains normal health and this health last forever. Generally, this is done immediately after birth to avoid the baby from suffering especially when you know the child is a one twin.

Similarly for the case of two twin, it is believed that each one has powers and each one is fighting against each other and if they are not “fixed”, they can make a deformity on each other and can consequently lead to death if not. The processes taken are the same as that of a one twin but a neglect is usually given to them and is tied around the pelvic region continuously for a month in order to separate them and their different gods. In the case of a baby being attacked by witches and demons, there is a specific house (god place) found in majority of compounds in the village where the great grandmother planted a tree and referred to the tree as “nsop” meaning the tree of my great grandchildren. This tree is never cut and a fruit cannot be harvested from this tree. Usually a fowl is sacrificed and the blood is spilled on this tree with salt alongside with some incantations and praises and after a bangle is tied on the baby’s wrist to avoid attacks from the demons

The most serious and most dangerous case is that of the child that came immediately after the birth of twins and must be “fixed”. It is believed that this baby usually possesses strong spiritual powers that is even stronger than that of twins and a one twin since it is a fight between gods, that is the gods of the twin and the gods of the baby that comes immediately after the birth of the twin. It is believed that they have powers to cause harm to family members if not fixed or be followed by demons and witches. The name “Nkengne” is usually given to this types of babies meaning “someone with great powers” and this name plays an important role in the babies health and if not given, the baby might experience an ill-health since the name plays a role in chasing away demons each time when it’s being pronounced. The name is usually giving to babies following twins and the name is never changed and the name “tchoffo” is usually given to children that follows the birth of a twin irrespective of the child coming from a different family or another village, the name means “star of chiefs” and also affect the spiritual wellbeing of the child. The process of treatment is the same as that of one twin but a peace plant “nkeng” is used round the head of the child to signify peace between inter gods. Since the people possessing these spirituals powers always regard their powers as a special gift from the gods, they don’t ask for money from their health seekers, usually is the people that come to seek health decide voluntarily to give them anything in the form of a gifts (money, goat, fowl etc.).

3.6. Ritual practices to celebrate and protect the newborn child

At the time of birth, the umbilical cord linking the child to its mother is cut and buried in the mother's plot in a place kept secret so that if any misfortune befalls the child in the future, rites are performed in this place for its protection. This practice is accompanied by meals that also have a ritual connotation. This practice is accompanied by meals that also have a ritual connotation. These rituals serve to protect the child against all forms of illness or attack by evil spirits. Alexis Tagueu Kakeu (2022:31) points out that *‘the relationship between the dead and the living, the contribution of the dead to the living, is not limited to promises.’* For example, in exchange for providing part of the family's prosperity in the form of cult offerings (food, drink, clothing, etc.), the head of a deceased household could ensure the protection of his descendants from beyond the grave. He could also promote harmony within the household and the birth of new male heirs.

In fact, it is forbidden for any outsider to carry the newborn. Some families take steps to protect the baby by providing visitors with ‘dong’ seeds, which must be eaten at all costs if they hope to carry the newborn. Anyone who consumes this seed and carries the baby with bad intentions will suffer curses. Claudine Brelet-Rueff (1975:202) has this to say about the umbilical cord: *‘The umbilical cord is almost the object of a cult.’* After it has been severed, it is buried near the home if it belongs to a girl, as if to sanctify her future family and domestic duties. If it belongs to a boy, the most valiant of the warriors among whom the child was born bury the cord in a high battlefield. The placenta remains in the house, buried in a corner. All these rituals are accompanied by incantations. At the same time as the diviner draws his horoscope, the child is given his secular name and his totemic name (that of his double, animal or plant).

For the celebration of the new birth to take place, the mother's child prepares. She organizes the things needed for the celebration to take place. In the Bamegoum culture, what is needed to prepare the food is maize flour, njamajama, nkui and its ingredients. They also buy drinks. Family members and friends of the mother's baby all take part in preparing the food. Alexis Tagueu kakeu (2022:14) points out that: *‘Solidarity implies a feeling of responsibility (...) reciprocal between people who feel morally obliged to one another. It is the manifest sign of a bond of belonging to a conscious community of interests within a group, and thus leads one person to act as if he were directly concerned by the problem affecting the other’.* For the cooking procedure, water is boiled in a pot; once the water has boiled, it is removed from the pot and corn flour drowned in water is introduced into the remaining water; when this mixture has boiled for about 20 minutes, corn flour is added and stirred until it boils into a fufu.

After the *fufu* is ready, it is folded in banana leaves then the pot for *njamajama* is placed on fire with oil inside. When the oil has heated, pepper, Onion, tomatoes and dry fish is added in the oil when these are fried, the vegetables are added to it together with salt and magi. Some times *egossi* is added to the *njamajama*. After this, *nkui* is prepared inside a pot and its ingredients have been

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added. The guests are welcomed for the celebration each of them bringing something for the baby like soap, oil, maize, *nkui* etc... and they offer them to the mother. They may also contribute money to buy soap for the baby. After they have all eaten, women assemble and play what we call "*Ngoa*". They dance round while playing their traditional instruments with the baby at hand expressing their joy.

3.7. Health care and bath of new baby

Taking care of the baby in Bafut land as in Bamegoum is as important as bringing the baby to life. That is, when it comes to taking care of the baby, the Bafut and Bamegoum communities do not joke. The parents of the baby are well aware of the various baby sicknesses especially side pains as it is termed. Once noticed the baby does not feed properly and cries a lot especially at night, the parents seek the help of a traditional doctor specialized for baby health care. This herbalist uses different herbs to cure the baby of his/ her pains. The parents also pay attention to the vaccination dates of the baby in order to avoid sicknesses in future. Thus, the Bafut community is highly admired for its special tradition as concerning the welcoming of a new born into the world and most importantly, into the Bafut soil. According to Claudine Haxaire (2007 :105) : *“This care is said to be absolutely necessary for the infant's proper growth, and must be given twice a day until, it is said, the fontanel is closed (about three months). If this is not done, or if a young mother does not dare to devote sufficient energy to it, the child will remain gracile if not malingering, or will not have, in adulthood, the flexibility and bodily ease so appreciated by the Gouro, excellent dancers. This could, for example, hamper a young person's chances of success in love. For the women interviewed, these treatments are generally intended to “make the child bigger”.* That's what they call it. Pressure on the joints is literally intended to “put them together”, and to weld the bones of the skull together. In the same way, the flesh is brought together and the bones made stronger. What's more, according to the matrons, the manipulations are explicitly aimed at strengthening, but in a subtle way, those “vessels-nerve-tendons” that the Gouro call *mii*. It is at the level of the joints that these “nerves” gather, and it is these that need to be softened”.

Regarding the healthcare point of view, as the child grows, he or she faces some health challenges such as spleen dysfunction, cold and cough. The spleen is an internal organ that contributes to the elimination of bacteria and some infections that penetrate the blood. The dysfunction may be due to the fact that the baby was born without spleen or his spleen was removed or his spleen do not function normally. Antibacterial vaccines and antibiotics are given in the hospital to manage the disease but it does not completely cure it. In my culture, women use what we call "*nshum*" to treat it completely. To this most of them will prefer herbs to the disease as it is effective and cheap. Susan Mbong, 35 years old mother in Bafut assert that: *“ When a child has cold and cough, we use what we call " Ndé damssi" this herb are harvested, well washed and folded into banana leaves then are placed inside hot word arch for it to get ready. After sometimes, it is removed and the liquid in it is pressed in the baby's mouth and nostrils if the baby's nostrils are blocked. When a child cry navel pains, we use what we called "né 'kendem'kontou" the herb is also folded inside leaves and placed into hot word arch and the liquid from the herb is squeezed on the baby's navel.”* The water that has been used to bath a baby is cherished. Though it might be dirty, this water signifies regeneration for an adult who bathes with it. Women who a seeking to conceive drink it with the hope of conceiving. It is believed that this water purifies the one who drinks of it.

3.8. Social media and social support related to born house phenomenon

Social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram have become a powerful tool for sharing information concerning families issues, particularly on health and families events. In the past, people use folk media to inform their love one on any issue related to the family, but the folk media has limited audiences while social media have a large range of disseminating informations. When there is a new born in a family, people use social media to inform, but also to call for social support. Rajshri Roy and Jessica Malloy (2023) argued that: *“Social support refers to the emotional and practical support individuals receive from their social networks. Social media can be a powerful tool for providing social support, particularly for individuals to connect with others who are going through similar experiences, providing a sense of community and shared understanding. Social media can also be used to connect individuals with health professionals or other resources that can provide additional support”.* When a woman put to birth, health informtions are provided many people around her, some people will come and propose traditional healing against common diseases concerning a new born, others may thing about rituals that related the baby to his ancestors. Health information according to Rajshri Roy and Jessica Malloy (2023) refers to any content related to health or healthcare. This can include information about medical conditions, treatments, medications, and preventive health measures. Social media platforms like Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook are often used to share health information, and many health organizations have established a social media presence to disseminate accurate and up-to-date health information to their followers. Individual may also share health information on their personal social media accounts, either to raise awareness about a particular health issue or to seek advice from their social networks” When there is new born baby, many health behavior are taken to care about the new born and the mother. Health behaviors refer to the actions individuals take to maintain or improve their health, it include healthy eating and getting enough sleep.

4. DISCUSSION

Nowadays, childbirth ceremonies raise many questions for couples and families. By inviting people to come and celebrate the birth of a child, there may be some disgruntled, childless people (men and women), and their view of the event would be as if they were

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invited to be mocked for their infertility. Today, people celebrate events that have nothing to do with the individual, like the duration of a festival or the opening of a business. We are against traditional treatment of some diseases encountered among Bafut and Bamegoum by babies because since the treatments are done without any diagnosis of the baby, basing ourselves only on observable signs and symptoms may lead to wrong diagnosis and consequently wrong treatment. Also treating the baby with herbs of incomplete known effects may expose the baby to some illness. Also proper hygiene involve in the herb preparation is sometimes a problem which may result to other bacterial infections exposing the baby the more. The traditional method of health care as one of the best methods of health since it is less expensive, cases which we observed are everlasting treatment and less side effects but as a disadvantage which can be managed, it is time consuming since there is movement from place to place and some do not usually work on some specific days like “contry Sunday”. New birth celebration originated from our former ancestors who decided to do this celebration to bless the child and protect him/her from any wicked person. The celebration is essentially done because the people belief that wicked people may cause harm to the baby or curse the baby so they belief that celebrating and inviting all the relatives will protect the child from evil eyes because if somebody had planned to harm the child, remembering the baby's food he ate will stop him from doing that.

CONCLUSION

Caring for newborns and the ceremonies that accompany their birth are deeply rooted in the cultural representations and practices of the Bamegoum populations of western Cameroon and the Bafut of north-western Cameroon. We have shown in this study that the birth of a child is accompanied by rites, prohibitions and symbols that give the individual an identity. The festive ceremonies that surround these major events in a family's life enable additional provision to be made for the child than in the past. The functions they take on have a primordial importance that conditions their existence and compels the social sciences to make them a subject of major concern. Doris Bonnet (2002: 118) reiterates that birth care and cleansing also have the function of cleansing the child of bodily waste (from its own body and that of its mother, deemed impure during childbirth and the post-partum period), protecting it from danger (genies, sorcerers, various infections) and marking a socializing separation between mother and child (generally verbalized by the metaphor of two spaces: the hereafter and the here-below). This logic of rupture is maintained until the child achieves autonomy (access to language, walking, consumption of solid foods). Today, more than ever before, the birth of a child tends towards a social institution, accompanied by a social mobilization to collect donations (soaps, cooking oil...). These gifts help the family to bear the burdens of the birth and to rebuild. In the exchange of gifts that takes place during this ceremony, there is a kind of reciprocity and solidarity through the gift. Marcel Mauss (1997) shows that a gift is necessarily followed by a counter-gift, according to pre-established codes. Gifts and counter-gifts based on the triple obligation of “giving-receiving-giving back” are a form of social contract based on reciprocity, creating a state of dependence that enables the permanent recreation of the social bond. The gratuity of a good, and even more so of a service, exerts a fascinating influence on individuals. Ceremonies provide an opportunity to consolidate special relationships. Is gratuity really free?

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