

THE 'WORKING-DEAD' IN NYONGO OCCULT ECONOMY IN CAMEROONIAN SOCIETY

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1. Introduction

Since the late 1980s, following the economic crisis and the subsequent devaluation of the Communauté Financière Africaine (CFA) franc, there has been a sharp increase in nyongo accusations in Cameroon. Nyongo falls within the anthropological discourse of occult. The term shrouds a multiplicity of references, including that which is concealed, obscure, mysterious, secret, sinister or forbidden.¹ Nyongo has been identified in Pool's work as "national witchcraft."² It is no secret that the power of the occult is subject to some human manipulation; which is often practiced in secret, especially in nyongo where occult powers are used to enslave others. The desire to become rich suddenly has driven some Cameroonians to turn to nyongo. They benefit from the afflicted by using the abilities of the latter to slave for them as "living dead," an equivalent postmodern terminology – zombies, after their presumed death.³ It is believed that persons involve in nyongo are able to kill others, especially their own relatives, and to use their bodies to work for them in an invisible town on Mount Kupe in Bakossi country.⁴

Information about nyongo is spread through rumours about the secret sources of people's wealth. I am of the opinion that nyongo practice should be recognised as a well-established genre in Cameroonian society. On the basis of this and for the purposes of this article, I place nyongo discourse in its contemporary context in which the ethnography collected and the stories told are embedded. The ethnography consisted of interviews conducted among twenty Cameroonians.

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¹Kiernan J., *The Power of the Occult in Modern Africa: Continuity and Innovation in the Renewal of African Cosmologies*, Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006.

²Pool Robert, *Dialogue and Interpretation of Illness: Conversations in a Cameroonian Village*, Oxford: Berg, 1994.

³Nyamnjoh F., "Images of Nyongo amongst Bamenda Grassfielders in Whiteman Kontri," *Citizenship Studies* 9, 3 (2005), 241-691.

⁴Ardener E., "The Plantations and the People of Victoria Division" in S. Ardener, ed., *Kingdom on Mount Cameroon: Studies in the History of the Cameroon Coast 1500–1970*, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1960.

Nyongo is an emergent form of witchcraft whereby witches do not cannibalise victims but transform them to some form of zombie and use them in wealth creation. Commonly known as “the witchcraft of wealth”⁵ Geschiere has elaborated how these witchcraft entrepreneurs accumulate wealth (by occult means) through zombies’ unpaid labour.

The word “zombie”⁶ refers to the ‘living dead’. In folklore, zombies are portrayed as innocent victims who are raised in a comatose trance from their graves by malevolent sorcerers, and led to distant farms or villages where they toil indefinitely as slaves. Zombies are recognisable by their docile nature, their glassy, empty eyes, and by the evident absence of will, memory, and emotion. Part of their souls may also be captured by the sorcerers. Zombies can only return to the world of the living upon the death of their masters. Accounts are sometimes cited of actual people who have undergone this ordeal, were declared dead, and later turned up at the homes of their kin.

In Cameroonian society, there are two schools of thought on the aesthetics of wealth, power and success. There are those who believe that if anyone is diligent enough, no matter their background, they can become wealthy, powerful and successful, while the other school believe that only those from wealthy, powerful and successful families can actually succeed in life. Irrespective of the school of thought, it is generally believed that to achieve this status in Cameroonian society, one needs help. However, there are contestations as to where this help should come from. Some practice nyongo for financial power, others for social power while others engage in it for political power. Rumour holds that people in different regions in Cameroon practice nyongo for different reasons. The Bamileke practice it for economic power and success in business, while people from the coastal region practice it for social reasons.

Godwin, a 42 years old businessman in Durban, shared a story of the mysterious death of a famous literary scholar at the University of Buea on the 22 of November 2007, who supposedly died of nyongo and was seen in Nigeria a few months after his death. His death was associated with social nyongo because he was too intelligent (he received his PhD from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria within two years of registration, when three years is the norm).

⁵Geschiere P., “Witchcraft and Modernity: Thoughts about a Strange Complicity” in Kiernan, *The Power of the Occult in Modern Africa*, 45-62.

⁶Colin Blakemore and Shelia Jennett, “zombie,” *The Oxford Companion to the Body*, 2001. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O128-zombie.html>, 13April 2012.

2. Informants’ Rationalisation of Nyongo

This article is based on fieldwork conducted in South Africa among Cameroonian migrants. The article probes through the use of the perception-based method to capture their perceptions and experiences of nyongo. Twenty people were interviewed for this research but the information used was based on the inclusion criteria which privileged the depth and richness of individual interviews. The snowball method of sampling was employed since the informants all come from the same country of origin. Ethnographically positioned, data was collected and analysed through the use of critical ethnography. The information collected shows the different types of nyongo as well as its manifestations. This feeds into the diverse perceptions as the paper will show. Below are excerpts from some of the informants, which attest to the complex nature and meaning of nyongo occult in Cameroonian society.

2.1. Beatrice

According to my understanding, it is a group that uses powers from the devil to get money and influence. The group has secrets and such secrets are only known to members. The sources of power vary for each group and the rules will be based on what the particular demon giving the group its powers demand. There are even Cameroonians who go to Nigeria to join different occult groups. It is said that even the president of the country and all the ministers and all those in different high positions belong to these occult groups. In the past when we were growing up there used to be fewer people than they are in nyongo today. In each society people could identify who is in nyongo and who is not. To the extent that they even made it a common talk: ‘if you can only know you are a rich man then you have been labelled a nyongo man.’ This was because some people would also out of jealousy label others in their community nyongo people. Recently, the issue of nyongo has increased enormously. You even find youths in their 30s and 20s who are said to be in nyongo groups; especially those youths who are in businesses. Some join these groups involuntarily as they do not even know that the groups that the groups they are joining are occult groups.

2.2. Agbor

Nyongo is widely practiced in Cameroon and has grown more popular recently, though it is said that it is more common in some ethnic groups than others. For example everyone generally knows

that Bamileke are more into occultism. And in Bamenda where I come from everyone say that Akum people also are involved in nyongo a lot. I wouldn't know if nyongo is practiced differently but all I know is that whether they do it this way or that way, it is still the same thing. They kill people for money. Many people I know have died through nyongo, from friends to family members.

2.3. Angeline

People who die through nyongo often appear as ghosts because their spirits are not at rest. They are crying for vengeance, for justice to be done. Though some people say that they go and appear in some places and work for the occult people but I'm not sure about this. There is a man who sells sifters in my village and they said that man is a 'die wokup.' That is, someone who had died through nyongo from somewhere else and appeared in my village and is selling and that all his money go to those people. He doesn't have any family or friend. No one has ever visited him. He just works every day. Yes I think they will eventually die. For, if they are living then they will die some day.

2.4. Valerie

Nyongo is commonly called an occult group of individuals who trade human soul for money, possessions and business purposes. Some people enter this group deliberately because they want a fast way of getting what they want out of life. Others go there unknowingly and once in, there's no turning back. It is either you join them or they kill you. Normally in Cameroon they believe people who die in nyongo do all the cheap jobs, harloting, labourers, farming, etc.

2.5. Melvis

Nyongo is a kind of secret society that people go into because they want to become rich. But they have to do bad things such as killing other people like friends and family members in order to use their blood to make money. Sometimes they even exchange people's destinies; that is, they may disguise themselves like beggars and go to the street, and anyone who helps them and gives them money they take it to their society and drag the person's wealth. The person will work very hard but will always be poor as all their money and luck will be disappearing spiritually and going to the nyongo people so they will become rich. Nyongo people are rich. And if they exchange

someone’s destiny that person will be poor while they are rich. They are also wicked. They do not want to help people for nothing, if a friend or family member asks for help they will keep promising and never give. Sometimes they will prefer to make that person who is asking them for help to join their society. Some groups do not make innocent people their victims. Except that you take their money or something of theirs they cannot kill you; but with others they will kill you whether or not you take their money or not.

3. Types of Nyongu

There are different kinds of nyongu as far as the Cameroonian society is concerned. In as much as wealth, success and power are the main reasons why people engage in nyongu practices, there are some kinds of nyongu associated specifically with some of these aspects while others are associated with other concepts which will be examined below.

The Bamenda Grassfields people differentiate between various categories of nyongu or witchcraft. There, witchcraft is as much a source and resource of personal and collective power or powerlessness as it is a call for “domesticated agency” against various forms of exploitation, marginalization, inequality and individualism⁷ In Bum, a village in the North West region of Cameroon there are two kinds of nyongu: the Awung and the Msa. Awung is identifiable mainly through words and actions. Members are seen as jealous and destructive, as they eat rather than slave their victims mysteriously and their victims must be kin, as they are expected to prove intimacy, and it is dangerous to victimize strangers. Members can enhance their power through this and also protect themselves against other nyongu practitioners with whom relations are of mutual fear and distrust. Nyamnjuh continues that Msa on its part is an omnipresent mysterious world of beauty, abundance, marvels and infinite possibilities, inhabited by very wicked, hostile and vicious people. It is visible only to the members who alone can visit it anytime, anywhere, and who can conjure it up to appear for the innocent or non members to glimpse. Everywhere in this community Msa is above all, an ambivalent place where good and bad, pleasure and pain are all intertwined. Its inhabitants are both the source of admiration and envy, especially for their material abundance. Msa is like a market, complete with traders and buyers, a bazaar where many come but where, unfortunately, few are rewarded with

⁷Nyamnjuh F., “Images of Nyongu amongst Bamenda Grassfielders in Whiteman Kontri,” *Citizenship Studies* 9, 3 (2005), 241-691.

clear-cut choices. To get what one wants, one must bargain and pay for it. But the only currency in Msa is the human being, euphemistically known as “goat” or “fowl.” Villains tether their victims at Msa like goats or fowl, hoping for the best while risking the worst, as everything good or bad from Msa is believed to proliferate like a virus once acquired.

In other parts of Cameroon as described by Harries,⁸ Ekong is the most widespread form of nyongo today. It is performed by members, who accept money from their clients and then provide them with slaves. Their victims can be seen to weaken and finally die, while others get rich without apparent reason. But even before they are dead, the Ekong victims can be used. For the Douala, every person has an invisible double, which can be bewitched and transported to work for his or her owner even as the person is lying visibly on his bed. The connection between those that die and those that accumulate wealth is one of cause and effect, proof being provided by people being returned from the dead by nganga (healers) who can see the occult slave trade.

To add to this, according to some participants of the research, there are many kinds of nyongo with names unknown but which can be identified through their activities. In some places, for example, village local champions belong to nyongo houses as a thing of pride, while in other societies in the stakes of each nyongo house or group, identifies it. There are nyongo groups for poor or seemingly poor people, for the average in the society and some for the elite class. For some membership is restricted to the kind of influence you have in the society. One thing stands out clear as far as nyongo is concerned, no matter the kind that its members or practitioners seek to sever links with kin as far as their wealth is concerned but mend things with them in relation to family ties. Indeed, the fact that witchcraft accusations usually occur among kins is indicative of how much people in the region are bound up in issues of solidarity, intimacy, trust and the extent to which they are implicated in anxieties surrounding social reproduction.

4. The State of Death

Generally speaking, death is considered to be accompanied by a change of form or external appearance, but with some part of the original essence surviving. Nyongo is a typical example of how the self can be transformed through death. Ethnographic examples used in this article of living

⁸Harries P., *Dead Men Working: A Historical-Anthropological Look at the Modern Zombie Phenomenon in Africa*, Basel: University of Basel, 2005.

relatives who have come across their dead relatives (those perceived to have died through nyongu) suggest that the people are different from their previous selves since they fail to interact with family members in the way they did when they were alive and live lonely lives.

Melvis (a 32 years businesswoman in Durban) explained that her aunt came home one day from her shop panting and stressed because, according to her, her late second cousin’s daughter who had died as a result of nyongu had come to her looking for a job. It seemed that she did not know that her aunt knew that she was dead. When she introduced herself, her aunt was so shocked that she gave her a seat and asked her maid to watch her while she went to call her sister to come and check if she was the same person who had died. When they returned to the shop, they found the maid screaming because the ghost had seen them coming and, knowing that her other aunt would recognize her, had disappeared.

Elizabeth, a 36 years old PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, narrated the following story:

In Pinyin, my village, a young girl died. The death was so mysterious that family members and friends were concerned actually to know what took this young girl’s life. A witch doctor was being consulted and he testified that the girl has been sold in to ‘Nyongu’ by her mother’s sister. People could not believe what this man said, but after this girl was buried, three years later, she was found in a different town selling in the market. During these years, her aunt had flourished and had two new cars and three houses. The person who saw this little girl, called her by her name, and at that same spot, she disappeared and has never been seen again.

In contemporary Cameroonian society, nyongu has become so real that it cannot be omitted from any ontological conception of belief. Beliefs and views about nyongu pose serious hermeneutical and epistemological questions of whether or not those dead through nyongu practices are still living and working and, if so, what the implications are for the living as well as the dead. When I asked respondents whether it is possible for someone to be dead yet alive, there were various responses. Valerie, a 30 year old man, said, “practically no, but in terms of Nyongu, yes.” According to Melvis, spirits of people who do not die a natural death linger until such time that they were supposed to die. Emmanuel, a 34 year old man, said “I am not really sure but from the stories I have heard, people who die from nyongu are seen elsewhere. So I can say that if witchcraft does exist then it is possible.”

5. Appropriations of Nyongo

This form of witchcraft was first observed among the Bakweri of West Cameroon and reported by Ardener in the 1950s. According to him, a person possessing nyongo spirit is able to kill others, especially his/her own relatives, and use their bodies to work for him/her in an invisible town on Mount Kupe. Some people enter this occult group deliberately because they are looking for a quick way of getting what they want out of life. Others go there unknowingly and once in, there is no turning back. They have the option of either joining or being killed by those in the nyongo occult group. It is an easy option for those who love money and also people who are impatient, who want to become rich at all costs because their friends are rich.

When nyongo originally appeared in the 1950s, as Edwin Ardener observed when he first encountered this form of witchcraft among the Bakweri,⁹ it was believed that only family members could be sold. This is still largely the case, but of late non-family members have also been sold to nyongo. According to the informants in the study, anyone can be sold to nyongo. Bongmba notes that all the practitioner needs is some link with the intended victim – a gift of money, for example, or even something as simple as dropping money for the innocent victim to pick up.

6. Death through Nyongo and Transformation of Self

Death through nyongo is a type of rebirth because it ushers the individual into a new life with new experiences and a new existence. This is because the person dies when sold and is ‘reborn’ into a new category. The question is whether people who die through nyongo should be given a new name since they are still living and working in an invisible economy. This is debatable since technically, they are the same people but at the same time different because they cannot fit into their previous roles in life. Stephen Ellis and Gerrie Ter Haar believe that “anything that ceases to exist in one category, and which may more appropriately be assigned to another category as a result of changes it has undergone, may thus be considered to have “died” in the first category, even while some elements of its previous nature is transferred to its new existence.”¹⁰ These elements enable some continuity of life to be experienced, rather than life consisting

⁹Ardener E., “The Plantations and the People of Victoria Division” in S. Ardener *Kingdom on Mount Cameroon*, 151-226.

¹⁰Ellis Stephen and Haar G. T., *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice*, Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2001.

of phases completely unrelated to one another. This would mean that there are some boundaries of identity that are crossed. The question then arises: do these people actually cross boundaries? There may not be any straightforward answer to this question but it would appear that, such a person is a boundary crosser, who is both human and spirit (in the sense that they have a human appearance but also have the ability to appear and disappear, which is not human. These people temporarily cross the boundaries of life and death. Van Gennep¹¹ and Victor Turner¹² both described this type of dwelling on the margins as “liminality.” This is a subjective state of being on the threshold of ‘betwixt’ and between two different existential positions.

To be in this space is to be caught up in intense “boundary work.”¹³ Waiting in the grave or mortuary for the nyongu people can be considered a rite of passage, where the bodies of those who will be used in slave labour are in a liminal space, waiting for something to happen.¹⁴ In this case, they are waiting to be deployed to their work destination. Such a space is embedded with secrecy (since this activity is carried out at night and only nyongu people are privileged with such information. In the case of nyongu, waiting is an undesirable state where the victims wait to begin a new life of oppression and loss of self. Such a space places them in liminality. A distinction is made here between transitional and perpetual liminality. Being in transitional liminality is the state of waiting to be abducted from the grave into forced slave labour, but perpetual liminality is a state of being in continuous loyalty to the owner until he/she dies, when the person is freed to die. This type of liminality appears to be mandatory and is at the centre of nyongu economies.

7. The State of the Working Dead

Nyongu seems to freeze the distance between life and death, causing a grey area between the living and the dead. Through nyongu discourse, it is becoming increasingly difficult to discuss life and death in absolutist terms. It would appear that those sold to slave labour are not dead but are ‘living people’ waiting for real death. The debate about when a person is

¹¹Van Gennep A., *Les Rites de Passage: Etudes Systematiques des Rites*, Paris: E. Noury, 1981.

¹²Turner V., *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*, New York: De Gruyter, 1969.

¹³Hernes T. and Paulsen N., ed., *Managing Boundaries in Organisations: Multiple Perspectives*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 1-5.

¹⁴Crapanzano V., *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa*, London: Granada, 1985.

really considered dead began in 1975 and the conclusion was that a person should be declared dead once they have lost the ability to meaningfully interact with others. Such thinkers¹⁵ argued that the legal boundary of death should be the state of permanent unconsciousness, which marks the death of a person.

Based on the interviews and the general perception that those who have been enslaved by nyongo labour are not really dead, they should be reconceptualised as living people because they are actively involved in wealth creation economies. They are seen in the market places, shops, plantations and so on. They should be considered living on the basis of their contribution to the economy. The main question is whether these people can be reintegrated into society by any means. The interviews revealed that, if the person had been sold and had not died the 'first death' (that is, before being buried and working in the nyongo economy), the person can lead a normal life. The story below by Audin, a 28 year old female, exemplifies the above point.

It is common practice in Cameroon for people to join njangi, fund raising groups. When these youth go to the markets they join these small njangi groups and they do not know that most of these groups are nyongo societies. They contribute all their money all the time knowing that they will benefit from it and plough back the money into their business to make it grow. When it is their turn to benefit, only then they are told how much money they will be getting and what they need to bring which is usually some family member.

A cousin of mine has been a victim of such groups. He was trading in 'nchang shoes.' He would live from Bamenda and go to all the bush markets surrounding the North West to sell his goods and he was doing well until his friend told him of the njangi they were doing in Pinyin market and how beneficial it is. The friend lured and cajoled him to join the group and he did. Pinyin market is once a week so each time they went to that market, the friend would come to his shed to collect his money for the njangi. That went on every week until one day his friend came and told him that he is the one benefitting from the njangi the following week and as such he needs to be present at the meeting this week so that they'll tell him about what he needs to do. He agreed and went to the meeting that week and they told him that he will be getting five million francs CFC. He

¹⁵Gervais K. G., *Redefining Death*, New York: Yale University Press, 1986.

was surprised and asked them how it was possible since he thought he would be getting only 500 000 CFA. It is only then that they explained things to him. And they told him he had to sacrifice his mother to get that money. He loved his mother so much and his father had died a long time ago and their mother single raised him and his two younger sisters up. He begged and pleaded with them that he didn't know that is what it entailed but they wouldn't listen. He said he is not interested in the money anymore and that they should keep it and let it go but they wouldn't listen. He ran out of the place and went to his shed. Packed his things and left the market that day. He didn't go to that particular market again just to keep away from them. But still they wouldn't live him alone. They would appear to him and taunt him, threaten him. Things became worse and his friend came to him and told him to pay ten million in exchange for his life and that of his mother. He decided to stop his njangi business. Borrowed money from money lenders and bought two taxis thinking this would make money faster. The taxis worked only for a day and he parked the one he was driving in front of the house and it mysteriously caught fire and was burnt to ashes. Two days later the other one also caught fire. Both the occult people and the money lenders were after him for the money. The occult people told him the only way out for him is to sacrifice his mother and he will get back everything and they'll also make him rich.

To cut the long story short, he finally ran away from Bamenda and went to Yaoundé. There the people were still after him to the extent that they asked him to remove his cloths and go naked. He was going around only in underwear. He entered the taxi and a lady sitting next to him asked him why he is going around naked. He explained to the lady. She felt sorry for him and told him that the same thing had happened to his sister. The lady took him far away to the land of the pigmies and showed him where they delivered his sister from the occult powers. He didn't have money to pay. So the pigmies decided after the women pleaded to heal him and he would come back and pay and finally they delivered him using their own powers. They told him that he should come back and pay and that if he doesn't they will cast a spell on him and that theirs will be worse than that of the njangi.

It is possible for someone to be dead but alive. This is not only with nyongi but even some groups in Cameroon believe that people

die and come back. For example, the Bayangis believe that a person would die and come back to life so they will pack the person's things and keep them somewhere believing that the person will come to collect the things so that they can use it in their next life.

The above scenario, according to the interviews, is the only possible way people can easily reintegrate. However to consider reintegration after burial would depend on two factors: 1. the ability of the person to return to their previous self and 2. the ability of society to accept the person as a living person. This would probably depend on how we reconceptualise nyongo death. If we redefine nyongo dead as a 'type of migrant worker' who has travelled, their reintegration might be possible and easier. It is important to note that nyongo death creates a situation where people may or may not return. Families who have lost people through nyongo death will continue to live in limbo, especially in instances where people have claimed that, that person has been seen working somewhere. One major challenge here is the lack of appropriate research to support the assertion that forced slave nyongo labourers are not dead. Pronouncing these people dead shows society's inability to deal with the possibilities of treating them as living and accepting them in the normal routines of life.

Contemplating reintegration poses serious methodological and epistemological challenges to the current discourse. Firstly, will that person be conscious enough to remember their role and status in the family and society at large? Secondly, if that person has lost all consciousness of their previous self, but the living are able to recognise them; how will the person be reintegrated? Will he/she be given a new identity and birth certificate, be assigned to a neighbourhood, etc.? These are practical questions but difficult to answer since more research is needed. It is an area that is not currently under investigation.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, there are two views on the issue of life after death through nyongo; on the one hand there are those who ontologically believe that there is a site of life and economic activity beyond the world that we know. This group, on the basis of their perceived choice to believe in its existence, (as the interviews show) live and interact with others bearing in mind the existence and dangers of nyongo. For this group, it is becoming increasingly difficult to accept a gift from friends or family members without envisaging a nyongo transaction. Nyongo is so enshrined in their minds that acts of goodwill and reciprocity are misjudged or

misinterpreted. It has also become difficult for them to recognise genuine success without the tendency to relate it to nyongu. This is because every successful, powerful and rich person is often thought of being associated with nyongu economies. There is also the other view (not elaborated in this paper because discussions and suspicions of nyongu was only discovered in Cameroon in the early 1950s) that beliefs are located in people’s belief system regarding life after death. In Cameroonian society, death through nyongu is not rooted in the belief system but was introduced through modernity and industrialisation.

Despite the fact that accusations and suspicions of nyongu have increased over the years, there is still no substantial evidence that nyongu can be used as a means to increase one’s wealth and socio-political position. Because of its popularity, one would assume that it is easily accessible for anyone who wants to get rich, be politically connected or socially recognised, but paradoxically, although it creates a window of opportunities, it still remains a mystery.

In conceptualising the boundaries between the living and the dead, nyongu poses a dilemma, because several possibilities of identity present themselves. One is to consider nyongu as people on a journey who can be reintegrated and the second is to concentrate on societal perceptions of these people. If we consider them as people on a journey, it therefore implies that we should await their return. One of the problems with their return is that, from the stories and rumours in Cameroonian society, people who have been killed through nyongu and mystically brought back to life lack the consciousness of their previous lives and identities but are able to live, trade and work in their current state. In this state, they have no self-will and live at the mercy and instruction of their owner. This is unsettling for families who find it difficult to find closure at the death of their loved ones who they believe are alive and working in some invisible economy. Focusing on societal perceptions insinuates new areas for research and scholarship. Because of the claims made by some people about seeing dead people working, it creates an opportunity for new forms of mobility and the crossing of boundaries; with its implications on the concept of liminality. Through the claims and accusations of nyongu, the boundary of life and death is being stretched. This creates possibilities of new forms of identity as nyongu technologies seem to undermine any idea on being strictly predicated on what is understood and validated.

This second possibility seems more appealing, since it offers a suitable structure to elaborate on previous research and popular

perceptions. This approach also appealed to me since it focuses on the eliciting peoples' assessment of the nyongo phenomenon through interviews and conversations. After seriously considering the two possibilities that presented themselves for this study, I decided to pursue both for the following reasons: firstly, my belief that perceptions and rumors carry a form of truth, when data is collected through the use of critical ethnography and analyzed; and secondly, to avoid interrogating what would happen if the possibilities for reintegration were opened up. The findings would, however, have been enriched by an interview with someone who has retired from 'nyongo work'. This is not currently possible; hence my reliance on stories told by people and family members who have lost loved ones, friends and community members to nyongo wealth economies.

The article has shown that nyongo is a very flexible and common type of occult practice; occasioning the possible co-existence of suffering (the working dead) and affluence (witchcraft entrepreneurs). These two groups in my opinion seem to be caught in a 'hard place' where they are trapped in the culture of 'either ... or,' and a society that does the labelling. Whether they engage in making sense of these 'labelled' identities or not in what Giddens¹⁶ calls 'discursive consciousness,' or are aware of the embeddedness of their identities in the occult economies conceptualised by Giddens as 'practical consciousness,' is part of what was interrogated in this article. The interviews revealed that there is a possibility (based on the stories and perceptions) of dead people working in an invisible economy to enrich a few people who appear to be diligent enough to know what it takes to become wealthy and powerful. Through nyongo, a new discourse of consciousness is being insinuated with possibilities and implications for life after death, as well as reintegration into society.

Since no individual is happy for his or her social location to be associated with nyongo, it is still surrounded by secrecy, thus allowing pleasure and pain in life and life after death to be intertwined. To what extent the dead people actually work, can retire and be re-integrated into society is doubtful, on a rational level, especially because there is no evidence at the moment to substantiate claims of nyongo made by people. However, no amount of rationality can be compelling enough to persuade Cameroonians that nyongo does not exist.

¹⁶Giddens A., *The Construction of Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984.