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## Foreword

Dear Readers of the Journal of Contemporary Philosophical and Anthropological Studies (JCPAS),

With great pleasure, we present to you the first issue of the Journal of Contemporary Philosophical and Anthropological Studies for the year 2024. As we embark on this new chapter of scholarly exploration and interdisciplinary inquiry, it is our honor to introduce this collection of thought-provoking articles at the intersection of philosophy and anthropology.

In a world characterized by rapid social, cultural, and technological change, the need for critical reflection and nuanced understanding has never been more pressing. The JCPAS serves as a forum for engaging with complex questions about human existence, society, and culture, drawing on insights from both philosophical and anthropological perspectives.

Within these pages, you will encounter a rich tapestry of ideas and debates, ranging from theoretical explorations of the nature of reality and knowledge to empirical investigations of human behavior and cultural practices. Each article contributes to the ongoing dialogue surrounding contemporary issues and challenges, offering fresh perspectives, rigorous analysis, and innovative approaches to philosophical and anthropological inquiry.

As editors, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to the authors for their intellectual contributions and to the reviewers for their insightful feedback, which have ensured the scholarly rigor and quality of the published work.

To our esteemed readers, we invite you to engage with the articles in this issue with curiosity and critical reflection. May the insights and ideas presented here inspire new avenues of inquiry, foster interdisciplinary dialogue, and deepen our understanding of the human experience in all its complexity.

Thank you for embarking on this intellectual voyage with us.

Editor-in-Chief

Nataliya Bhinder

"Journal of Contemporary Philosophical and Anthropological Studies"

Research article

# Harnessing African Indigenous Knowledge Systems for Knowledge Production: A Redefinition of a Culture-Centric Epistemology

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**Abstract:** Evolving an appropriate theoretical model which has the capability of exploiting the wealth in African indigenous culture-centric knowledge systems towards knowledge production is the great challenge that prompted this research. The aim of this study therefore is to re-examine the definition of culture in order to provide the interpretative criteria for understanding the foundational role African cultures play in the determination of the nature, scope and sources of Knowledge Africans appreciate and pursue, which are exploitable for effective knowledge production. This research identifies the indigenous values which yield pertinent knowledge that has historically kept Africa stable prior to the advent of slave trade, colonization and even in the face of today's globalist agendas hence, the author projects the same for universal beneficence. However, this paper observes that the habitual reliance on Western interpretations of African realities is a gap created by Africans themselves by their over dependence on foreign epistemological structures with its strictures. The study in conclusion, suggests that Africa re-interprets her reality through a re-reading of her history, ideologies and the subsequent application of her knowledge systems through the lenses of her cultural uniqueness. The study adopts the content analysis and hermeneutical methods of enquiry.

**Keywords:** harnessing, indigenous knowledge, knowledge production, epistemology, culture

## 1. Introduction

Despite the dexterity and energies expended by the debates of trans-modernism and afro-constructivism schools in African philosophy including the romanticizing labours of afrocentrists and ethnocentrists, there is still a yawning gap of knowledge production, dissemination and appropriation in Africa. The consequence is the overdependence on foreign epistemologies that continue to define African realities according to their own logic. The instances of this dependence include: the prevalent theories, paradigms and methods whereby knowledge is sought and practiced in the social sciences, and the types of literature and scholarship found in various disciplines today (Okpanachi, 2014). Apparently, the foregoing is the reason the West has continued dictating the tunes Africa dances to politically, economically and even the direction of our research and ideological orientations. This regrettable fate historically undermines all facets of life in Africa. In any case, this paper does not intend to re-echo the litanies of African woes. It neither does not pretend to trade blames over the spilt milk of the backlashes of slavery, colonization, the incalculable evils of forced acculturation or even the present days' politico-economic cum cultural globalization championed by the hegemonic West nor does it intend to promote some pernicious patterns of primordialism and ethnocentrism. Instead, this research, aims at harnessing African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) for the purpose of its integration into African knowledge production projects and through a re-definition of our conception of culture in Africa's culture-centric epistemology. It could be recalled that the past projections of this culture-centric epistemology have made higher education in Africa seem too academic, distant and irrelevant to development alternatives within local African communities. In a bid to upturn this regrettable trend, this research seeks to provide the interpretative criteria for apprehending the foundational role a re-examined concept of culture can play in projecting the significance and wealth in African Indigenous Knowledge System.

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African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) as presently used in the context of this paper, encompass the various forms of knowledge, belief systems and practices which are founded on traditions, customs, cultures and spirituality of African communities. These systems are integral to the socio-economic, political and ecological fabric of African societies. However, there is a controversy surrounding what constitutes this indigenous knowledge in Africa. “Western worldview of knowledge has since its introduction in Africa and other non-African societies lacked the understanding of the holistic nature and approach of non-western ways of knowing and knowledge productions (Chavhunduka & Desderio, 2005). This misconception of African Indigenous Knowledge (as consisting in mere rituals and an endless circular practice devoid of definitive theories and any meaningful relevance) smacks of intellectual arrogance. Unfortunately, such arrogance will remain with us until Africans undertake an endogenous introspection that ceases her intellectual self-derision and helpless, wholesome and uncritical overdependence on foreign epistemologies that operate with logic of divisiveness, segmentations, categorizations and denigration of any value foreign to her. The science inspired by such epistemology has tended to celebrate dichotomies, dualisms, analogies, dismissing anything that does not make sense in their Cartesian or behaviourist terms, confining to religion and metaphysics what it cannot explain by disqualifying as nonscientific more inclusive epistemologies. Evidently, what is needed in the words of Okpanachi (2014), is to pursue a rededicated effort at creating epistemologies (knowledge), programmes and policies that are African context/reality relevant if Africa is to be relevant in the global scheme of things.

This paper is therefore an attempt in that direction hence, the research first examines the tapestry of culture and value as treasure chests for African Indigenous Knowledge system. The study further to explore African cognitive worldviews in order to establish what represents meaning making in-contradistinction to the Westerners’ epistemic and logical strictures. The research however proceeds to consider the nature, scope and subsequently, methods of indigenous knowledge acquisition and transmission in Africa. These penultimate segments serve as precursors to the re-examination of our culture conception thesis, which is the instrument this research employs to drive its recommendation of meaningful knowledge production that would be of universal beneficence.

## 2. Materials and Method

This study is a qualitative research which employs the hermeneutical and content analysis methods of enquiry within which the researcher consulted Textbooks, Commentaries and Journal Articles dealing respectively on African Traditional Indigenous Cultural Systems and Knowledge production. While the hermeneutical enables the researcher to analyse the meanings of our keywords, the content analysis method aided the explorative task involved in our re-examination and re-definition of the concept of culture and its’ implications for knowledge production purpose.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Culture and Value Tapestry as Treasure chests for African Indigenous Knowledge System (AKS)

The diversity displayed by African indigenous knowledge system reflects the differences in the cultures of communities in Africa. The uniqueness of these communities is found in their various values, practices, beliefs and general worldviews. This ranges from their medicinal knowledge of their traditional healers, their agronomic practices, ontology, economy, and their social organisation. The foregoing encompasses a wide range of domains that witness to how well or otherwise they have adapted to their immediate environments in other words, their general civilization. In spite of their many cultural divergences, Africans have shared principles and a great measure of interconnectedness as could be seen in the commonalities also noticed among African cultures. Some of these cultural commonalities include but are not limited to wholesome human relations, respect for elders, community fellow-feeling as reflected in their communal land tenure and ownership systems; their live and let live philosophy; their metaphysics of man, good sense of hospitality and brotherhood (Onwubiko & Okere, 1988).

According to Onwubiko and Okere (1988), these cultural expressions are founded on the shared values which range from the highly treasured sense of community life (communality), good human relations, sense of sacredness of life and of hospitality; sense of

the sacred and of religion, sense of time, sense of respect for authority and the elders to the sense of language and proverbs as cohesive of the community based on the truth. Given the forging, African cultures seem to have represented a coherent anatomy of standards and beliefs and a solid community body (Taiwo, 1971). But all that seems to be fading away but these have been the traditional indigenous culture proclivities that held sway and stabilized the African nation prior to the advent of slavery, colonization and globalization. These factors regrettably tear Africans between two worlds and end up isolating them from both. A situation in which these supersonic social changes occasioned by foreign accretions brought in its trail, a corresponding moral laxity, capitalistic, selfishness, mutual suspicion, tension, political recklessness, social decadence and unbridled violence and wars, in fact, it brought an upturned world which leaves Africans in a confused state of *aporia* created by the cultures of the West, which in African perceptive have only succeeded in normalizing the anomaly.

While this paper regrets the devastating disservices of forced acculturation, and the destruction of African humanistic system by massive influx of the Western sciento-technological ideologies, it nevertheless blames Africans for spending years to mourn a romanticized past but more, for letting go almost all indigenous values in an unquestioning embrace of anything foreign. The cases of the Chinese and Indians, who though colonized, tenaciously held to their value point to a lost opportunity Africa imposed on itself by its total embrace of foreign epistemologies which they fail to realize its full imports. In consequence, the African of today is no more their brothers' keepers. He lives in a world of luxury and plenty but endures abject poverty. Armed with the western sciento-technological mindset, he moves like a caterpillar devouring his cherished values, living inauthentic individualistic life and squandering foods his brothers need yet priding himself as sufficiently lettered civilized and modernized. Ihuah (2012) has it that the atomistic western techno-scientific culture with its reductionist view of reality encourages collective selfishness, class divides and reduces a segment of humanity to the culture of the ghetto with the attendant vulnerability to diseases, drug abuse and innumerable social vices and insanity of sorts. Truly, "this Western techno-scientific culture and civilization has led Africans to an improved means to an unimproved end" (Ihuah, 2012). We will now detour to examine the difference in meaning making, cognition and worldview of Africans with the westerners.

### *3.2 African Cognitive Worldview and Meaning-making vis a vis The West's Logical Structures*

To say that Western cultural epistemologies as canvassed by missionaries and colonizers were almost incomprehensible to the Africans is an understatement. Metu and Ojoade (1999) enthuse that Traditional African theory of knowledge conceives knowledge in terms of wisdom and insight into various individual and social problems. This is consequent upon the belief in practical utility of knowledge rather than knowledge for its own sake. Being knowledgeable the Igbo indigenous way, meant becoming sufficiently indoctrinated into the forms of Igbo knowledge system as Omenala encapsulates it (Ihejirika et al., 2023). By Omenala, the Africa Igbo means, the customs upheld in the land and these apply to any aspect of social and ritual life of their various communities. In Omenala (which is the charter of dos and don'ts and the values Igbo culture projects), is the realization of the culture and civilizations of the African Igbo hence, whatsoever practice that is not in concord with Omenala constitutes an affront to indigenous cultures (Ihejirika et al., 2023). According to Nwala (1985), this is the reason Omenala represents the body of law moral, etiquette along with their metaphysical foundations. By reason of their failure to understand the, Igbo culture in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the missionaries and colonizers were considered ignorant and this had dire consequences (Ezuma, 1989). "The Whitemen had brought a government, built a court, where the District commissioner judged cases in ignoramus. The courts messengers were foreigners, arrogant and high handed hence, the Africans stood by and watched the Whiteman's court award a person's land to a wrongman" (Achebe, 1980). This miscarriage of justice was one aspect of the Whiteman's advent into indigenous African Igbo land that angered the indigenous Africans hence, the author of the Novel accuses them of putting a knife in the things that held Africans together thus causing Africans to fall apart.

In this Indigenous African setting, the possession of critical judgement which consists in a secure sense of discerning intelligence, accurate assessment of a people and situations, a good sense of communalism, not excluding a good understanding of Igbo ontology and values as couched in indigenous cultures are glaring evidences of possession of knowledge (Ihejirika et al., 2023). When the foregoing is compared with the techno-scientific culture of the West, certain peculiarities come to the fore. These unique elements define both cultures

marking out their differences.

The Western conception of knowledge has truth, certainty as necessary condition for knowledge. At some other times, when belief in this system is founded on conclusive evidence, it gets justified and is considered as knowledge just like a sufficiently corroborated hypothesis turns into a theory having gained verisimilitude (Ihejirika, 2021). Now the perspectival differences between the foregoing Western epistemic system with that of indigenous African lies in its overemphasis on the justification, methodology and evaluation premise (Masaiti & Ndonyo, 2021).

For the Africans, any culturally destabilizing epistemology is considered abominable. The African identifies himself with the object, sympathizes with it and even dies as herself in order to be reborn to the other. His sense of community overrides his individual interest, the indigenous Africa thinker does not realize that he thinks, he feels that he feels, he feels his existence, he feels the other, he is drawn towards the other to be reborn in knowledge of the world” (Kaya & Seleti, 2013). Thus, for him, the act of knowledge is an agreement of conciliation with the world. It is an act of the simultaneous consciousness and creation of the world in its indivisible unity (Ihejirika, 2021). This wholistic African cultural worldview humanizes western epistemology and saves her from the scandal of metaphysics (Ijioma, 1996). When justification, methodology and evaluation are emphasized at the detriment of the realization that it is actually the nature of an object that determines its justification, we miss the point. African cultural knowledge demands erudition in the people’s ontology and does not exclude appreciation of a foreign worldview that does not deny her unique African identity. Knowledge among Africans, therefore, consists in a disposition that is behaviourally demonstrable in such a way that favours human welfare and aids in fashioning solutions to problems of man in his cultural environment. This is reason why the individual in African gets fulfilled in an organic complementary arrangement, where an individual’s wisdom must dovetail to problem solving within the community before it is recognised. The knowledgeable is not therefore the one variously certified in different discipline but one, who understands his culture and ably fuses same with techno-scientific knowledge in an application that solves problems identifiable within the same culture and even in the entire universal human society.

However, recent knowledge production activities unveil the fact that today’s cross hybridization of cultures via information technology challenges cultural epistemologies thereby questioning the projection of any culturally distinctive epistemology, which lacks universality.

Howbeit, it remains a truism that the cultural peculiarities of any people give them their distinct identities. It is therefore inappropriate, misleading and a mismatch of categories to subject African indigenous cultures to modern Western criteriology which regards folklores, myths and whatever does not appeal to Cartesianism as logically bankrupt, pre-scientific, barbaric and anachronistic. Bundling whatever does not yield to Western criteriology to metaphysics and religion is a skewed justificatory action which showcases the highest level of epistemic naivety. Such pejorative categorizations drive forced acculturation which is the process by which dominant hegemonic Western cultures completely undermine non-western cultures and belief systems.

In summation, African cultures necessarily require a different logic, which is comparatively less stringent and argumentative than those of natural sciences and western epistemologies. Such logic needs to recognize diversity in cultures including the polysemy of linguistic expressions. Only such culture-centric epistemology can resolve western designative tendencies towards African cultures.

### *3.3 Nature and Scope of Knowledge transmission in Indigenous Africa*

The embeddedness of African indigenous knowledge system in local cultures and its’ holistic encompassing of the physical, social and spiritual aspects of life shows that knowledge in Africa is naturally context and environmentally based. Consequently, knowledge in this indigenous setting, emphasizes the interconnection of all phenomena. This comprises of practical techniques, profound philosophical insights that promote harmony, reciprocity and the well-being of the African community. However, Uduigwomen (1995), this ontological setting of African mode of knowing blurs the lines of any distinction between the epistemic subject and object. Africans cannot conceive of the world in isolation of the self or ego nor can they separate mind from matter rather, knowledge, in this traditional context involves the entirety of man’s faculties which are brought to bear on the object of experience. This co-operation of all human faculties and experiences gives birth to knowledge. Conversely put,

the African who is in need of achieving knowledge instead employs the aid of concepts by inspection, intuition and imagination. He is domiciled in a cultural environment enriched by great art, synthesis and continuum in which he receives vital experience, feels, imagines and sympathizes with that environment. The African within this cultural enclave, sees, feels, imagines, reasons, thinks and intuits all at the same time. His trustworthy knowledge is a function of his intuition and personal experience informed by the culture of the community, where he lives, interacts with others, feeds and procreates. No strict lines are therefore drawn (except through the guidance of culture) for the realization of trustworthy knowledge. When actions are in tandem with the community's well-being and the cultural values, man consequent upon his existing in a spacio-temporal arrangement and by his position at the centre of the world, he arrives at knowledge of reality by mere holistic grasping of the complex vital experience. His approach to knowing through his cultural worldview renders ridiculous the question whether man is mind or matter (Uduigwomen, 1995).

In any case, it is pertinent to note that African indigenous knowledge is and often derive from multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary, routes hence, archeology; agronomy; history; philosophy; the arts; languages; sciences; religion; technology; mathematics; music; geography; sociology; literature; biology; agronomy, engineering; wisdom of the elders/traditional rulers; land use system; traditional governance; proverbs; folktales; myths; experience; observation; supernaturalism; calendar and concept of time; witchcraft theories and African metaphysics all represent possible sources of Indigenous African Knowledge system. Howbeit, Acheampong & Gordon (2015), say that the transformation of knowledge into social action for the greater good is the very consummation of the indigenous knowledge production in Africa.

The transmission of knowledge in traditional indigenous African is chiefly undertaken through the means of oral tradition. The cultural values in this indigenous setting are passed down to succeeding generations by way of narrativity, assumes the forms of retelling of myths, legends, folklores, pithy sayings, riddles and adages. From the elders (who are considered as repositories of this knowledge system) to younger generation. In this closely knit communities, elders gather the young and indoctrinate them into their culture by storytelling, proverbs sharing and explanations, ritual dances and initiatory and coming of age ceremonies. In the later cases, the young learn through observations and participation in cultural practices of their community. This is part of the reason Africans revere their aged, who only ranks next to ancestors in wisdom. In Achebe's *Arrow of God*, the chief priest confided in the son that a man does not speak a lie to his son. Remember that always, to say my father told me is to swear the greatest oath (Achebe, 1964). The premium placed on this truth of oral tradition in African society is overbearing. A society where oral tradition remained for centuries, the main if not the only source of knowledge of the past, necessarily passes family history including accounts of ownership of land truthfully from father to son as only fathers who excel in lived wisdom of the community are considered erudite and wise.

Howbeit, the weakness of memory of the elderly could not have left these oral histories undistorted because of the passage of time. Again, the histories of land ownership, their original descent as a people must have stretched further than any elder could comprehensively recall.

Besides, by the fact that different fathers told their children different versions according to the recalling abilities of their memories meant that certainty in these versions were evidently lacking. Hence, citizens of such indigenous society were at liberty in holding conflicting viewpoints occasioned by the weaknesses of oral tradition. Yet, comforting enough is the fact that the body of the elders led by the Chief Priest of the coming constituted the judiciary, which weighs the different versions of oral traditions and decides on that which is considered as true after the republican and democratic nature of the African Igbo, which allows all to air their views before a wise decision is reached.

In Elechi Amadi's *The Great Ponds*, we also find an element of supernaturalism in the dispensation of justice. This factor of Divine justice becomes relevant should the elders fail to reach a reasonable consensus regarding any matter. Hence, in the case of the ownership of Wagaba pound (Nnolim, 2009), which defied the ability of the judgement of the 7 kings of Erekwu land retributive justice was therefore served by Ogunabali, who sent Wang-small pox which visited the Aliakoro/Asiali people with punishment over their kidnap of Chiolu women and the rape of Chisa one of their war captives. Also, the Rikwo people, who bought Chiolu women as slaves. For all these atrocious acts, Wang, the deadly disease was visited on all the



offending lands. Similarly, in *The Concubine*, Elechi Amadi showcases this note of Divine justice by affirming that it is impossible for the wicked to go unpunished since the ever-watchful gods of retribution, Ofo and Ogu always ensured that justice is served (Udoidem, 2012). In all, whatsoever knowledge the gods are incapable of providing remains unknown in African just the same way the absence of mnemonic devices in oral tradition leads men into forgetfulness thereby turning facts into fantasies. By so doing, such knowledge is lost without any hope of their retrieval. We can say that oral tradition as a vehicle of knowledge transmission suffers incurable disease of forgetfulness in the societies that have them as their Hobson's choice for knowledge transmission.

### *3.4 Some Sources and Methods of Indigenous Knowledge Acquisition in Africa*

The questions that need to be resolved here include the following: (1) What constitutes the wellspring through which Africans derive their knowledge in the traditional indigenous setting? And (2) How do they go about the cognitive challenge of arriving at such knowledge from the identified sources? An attempt to proffer an answer to the former question leads us to acknowledge that there is no definitively defined uniformity regarding the sources of knowledge among the different indigenous people of Africa.

However, this study rather discusses the sources of knowledge that command majoritarian recognition in Africa. These include but are not limited to: Anamnesis/Reincarnation; Supernatural Revelations/ Divination; Extra Sensory Perception (ESP); Longevity; Rituals, Songs, Dances and Proverbs; Moonlight stories, Myths and legends and signs/symbols. A brief discussion of each of these identified sources will further clarify what makes up the sources Africans in their traditional indigenous setting arrive at knowledge.

#### *3.4.1 Anamnesis/Reincarnation*

The Africans' strong belief in reincarnation informs this source of knowledge. A reincarnated person is believed to be capable of experiences of his or her former existence. This is identified as an idea of innatism, the type Hindus' doctrine of Samsara upholds. The remembrance from previous existence due to its unverifiability is philosophically dubitable to the West but so authentic to the African who has the experience (Ihejirika & Edodi, 2005). A case where a young person is able to recall historical facts and names of dead ancestors remains an unresolved mystery. It is believed that those who led holy and righteous lives in strict obedience to their customs become spirits so close to the gods who communicate with them on matters of administration of human welfare.

#### *3.4.2 Supernatural Revelation/Divination*

The gods are the custodians of all knowledge and truth in African hence, the belief that when the ways of a man is pleasing to the gods, they reveal a whole lot of truth - bearing information to man. It is in this regard that the deceased musicians: Chief Osita Osadebe and Oliver dé Coque could respectively claim that *Muomiriziri m egwu* (Igbo words meaning the river goddess taught me to sing) and *Egwuomasinanmiri* (another Igbo words meaning good music is from the river). Besides, there is also this widespread belief in supernaturalism in its form of divination among Africans. This dependence on getting information from discarnated spirits through Ouja boards, etc. is so overwhelming in Africa such that even converts of Christianity and Islam secretly fall back on divination, when indeterminate situations defy their abilities and understanding.

#### *3.4.3 Extra Sensory Perception (ESP)*

Clairvoyance, telepathy hold sway among Africans. Many research carried out on this often prove that this secret source of knowing seems to be a reliable source of knowledge among indigenous Africans. These are knowledge gained without a medium.

#### *3.4.4 Longevity*

Africans relate old age to exposure and accumulation of time-honoured experience hence, the saying that "old brooms know the corners of the house". However, not every grey hair is counted wise. Among the Igbos of Nigeria, an aged fool is called *Efulufu* or *OkenyeIberibe* (which means a stupid old man/fool). Conversely, the young who washes his or her hands clean, walks circumspectly and behaves well dines with the elders. Hence, the chieftaincy title among the Igbo's *Nwatakwochaka* (meaning a child who washes his/her hand clean). This title is given to the young who distinguishes themselves in pertinent understanding of his /her peoples' culture and the virtues and values it embeds.

#### *3.4.5 Rituals, Songs, Dances and Proverbs*

Among the Africans, the re-enactment of rituals is meant to be didactic. Also woven into songs, dances, proverbs and pithy sayings are tribal wisdom of the indigenous Africans, which the young must by socialization come to terms with in order to be responsible citizens of the African traditional indigenous society.

#### *3.4.6 A Moonlight Stories, Myths, Legends*

The aforementioned sources fall under oral traditions. The true wisdom of this traditional society is embodied in these stories and its related sources. Informal education of the child is conducted by the parents using these as tools that teach the African child the dos and don'ts of his society, this type of folk education engrains a good sense of morality into the child and this is enriched by the retelling of these myths, legends and stories.

#### *3.4.7 Signs/Symbols*

Several signs hold meanings deeper than mere superstition among indigenous African communities. For instance, it is believed that certain signs like the shaking of one's palms or fingers are always a precursor to an imminent occurrence which may entail much expenses. Similarly, the shaking of one's left thumb is also seen as a bad omen. At other times, the sudden appearance of certain totem animals in unusual places such as seeing the green snake in a closed pot is indicative of the displeasure of the earth goddess. While a foreigner to this custom may think that such belief is akin to those of the early mythic and pre-scientific period of philosophy, the indigenous Africans know what will befall him/her should certain appeasement not follow such signs in order to avert the imminent calamity.

It is interesting to remark here that all the sources of indigenous knowing system discussed above are simply the customs of the people. These customs form part of African culture but does not represent the entire cultures of all indigenous Africans as would be seen in the section that re-examines our conception of culture

Howbeit, to answer the second question posed at the beginning of this sub-section, which has to do with how Africans come to knowledge, we must as a matter of necessity point out that Africans learn perceptually, (by this, is meant knowledge gained by observation throughout senses). We learn, inferentially (from conclusions arrived at through reasoning). Africans more importantly learn wholistically. Here, there is a unity of experience where there is no gap between the subject and object (Ihejirika & Edodi, 2005). This is described as a felt totality, where a life-force is an active participant (not a passive spectator of the West). Hence, the African operates in Anyanwu & Ruch's (1981), parlance with the logic of aesthetics, which holds that the whole is real. With this logic, he arrives at knowledge.

Additionally, African Epistemology is also discernible from mystical knowledge, the interplay of premonitive and ontological knowledge sign knowledge from signs as previously discussed combines with the right understanding of the balance of life forces where God is at the top of the hierarchy before the deities, ancestors and elders follow in that top to bottom order (Uduigwomen, 1995). There is no need re-emphasizing the fact that as we previously identified that African's cultural continuity is propelled by the wheels of oral tradition, therefore any discussion of how Africans gain insights into realities in their traditional indigenous setting must make reference to it.

Be that as it may, we observe from our discourse thus far, that knowledge in African is a function of a wholistic co-operation of all faculties of man and the totality of his supernatural and natural experiences not excluding his rationality as informed by his culture-centric indigenous setting. If culture has such an overwhelming hold on Africans, it therefore qualifies to receive our special attention hence, this study takes up the challenge of rethinking culture in African context. This is hoped to bring about a more progressive paradigmatic shift that cures African culture-centric epistemology from both the anachronism of ethno-philosophy and the pride philosophic sagacity, a product of the orientation by the West.

## **4. A Re-definition of the Concept of Culture as a Precursor to Enhanced Knowledge Production in Africa**

The question of what constitutes the root of African cultural identity as couched in the behavioural patterns of African people and their many symbolismisms is one which when successfully answered, will occasion the emergence of a re-defined and easily comprehensible African personality. Granted that every society has its own cherished culture and values, what significant distinction makes the African think that his society has a superior culture that was

devastated by the coming of foreigners into their soil? Centuries of lamentations have been spent bemoaning and regretting what NgugiWaThiongo cited in Ihua (2012), describes as a cultural bomb. The cultural bomb, he explains, has the effect of annihilating peoples' belief in their cultural heritage and in themselves. For him, it is the cultural bomb that annihilates a person from belief in their names, language, heritages and their unity, denying them self-confidence and an independent thought process. As Efemini (2002) observes, the West has fanned their notion of development and it has enabled them to canvass western values and experience as being coeval with development Ihejirika observes "that in today's Africa to be scientifically aware has come to mean the rejection of our cultural and ethical values and their replacement with western exhibition in dressing codes, Christianity and Islam in religion, capitalism in economy, pop and rap in entertainment" (Ihejirika, 2013). The writings go on and on and my questions is, till when? This tenacious nostalgic remembrance of the pre-colonial ways of living of indigenous Africans seems to have created a heaven out of a past where human sacrifice was rife and crude ways of life was the order of the day. This research conceives such inclinations as akin to the infantile behaviours of a newly weaned baby and attributes it to a sense of lazy romanticization of ethnocentricism in that is so backward looking that the more sophisticated man of 21st century cannot help jettisoning in order to relevantly live in a world already turned a global hamlet by information technology.

This research maintains that Africans glorification of a false conception of culture is chiefly responsible for his retrogressive ideologies. If our forefathers were the champions of the old order, why did the West defeat them with their highly efficient armaments, skills and an epistemology that denigrate anything foreign? Suffice it then that we ought to confidently face our fears, confronting them head on with a rational solidarity that seeks to unveil both the rhetoric of the West and the internal perception altering drug called our idea of old culture is necessary at this point. It was Machiavelli, who observed that nothing is more difficult to carry out, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle than the imitation of new order of things. This is because the former has enemies in all those that profit from the old order and only lukewarm defenders in all those who could potentially gain from the new order (Utomi, 2011).

Before now, at the mention of the word culture, the African readily reminisces about ritual dances, festivities and communal lifestyles of their past. Granted that African values were intact and held the society in closely-knit ties in which palpable safety and social cohesion held sway, yet, it was not the best possible world. This researcher dare say this cognizant of the ease to life the services of techno-scientific adventure has brought, thus, far and not overlooking its many shortcomings too, which apparently, tempts many an African to think that the best is in the past and the past is the era of African indigenous culture. The question arises: what then has been our definition of culture in the traditional setting? Understood properly as the totality of a people's worldview, practices and actions, ways of life with which their society is ordered not excluding the norms, laws, culture. This has always been considered (in the African context) as a reference to the customs of the land hence, on cultural days, we see even students in higher institutions of learning running back to their villages to bring their masquerades and ritual dancers to the school environment. For these ones, they are celebrating their culture. You need to see their awkward dressing, a typology of what Nollywood movies and Ghallywood project as the African past yet, these so-called ordering practices belong to the ways we lived, which have no relevance to how society is ordered today. What social control can masquerade societies bring about today? If the truth is to be told, some of them are functioning as the direct opposite of what they used to do in the past.

Udoidem (2014), observes that this is because the notion of culture circumferences around the irrelevant, static and non-function past, whereas it is in the way we presently do our things, the way our lived life is ordered today that is culture. "A redefinition of culture entails our abandonment of this misconstrued celebration of the past as opposed to a lived way of life" (Udoidem, 2014). Culture in the context of this paper therefore becomes the complex, multi-faceted concept that consists in our present social, historical and psychological ways of living. It embeds our current shared beliefs, values, norms, behaviours, customs, traditions and language, songs, dances, food, science and technology. In other words, it is the way we live today and not the way life was lived in the past. This understanding of culture recognizes the dynamism of man and life thereby bringing out the relevance and currency of culture. For instance, the use of cell phones, ear phones, including the embrace of the merits of science and technology and rejection of any epistemic element that retards our progress in knowledge production, problem-solving and total development are all part of

the culture we seek today. Besides, being a product of nature and nurture, culture, therefore derives from a peoples' fundamental principles and values for understanding their contexts. It has its theoretical imports by its ability to direct our perceptions and thinking. Similarly, its practical imports lie in its dictating the tune we dance to on daily basis in our day-to-day activities (Udoidem, 2014).

With this re-defined concept of culture, Africans can now better able shape our individual and collective identity since it makes provision for individuals' and groups to interpret and understand their place in their society. It challenges us to hold firm to the norms and values that will enhance social integrations rather than banish us from the rest of the world dumping us in the dust bin of time as the remote village of the world. While being mindful of our African identity, this new conception of culture creates in the African the cultural diversity consciousness which challenges ethnocentric prejudices and biases while broadening our epistemic horizons in readiness for effective knowledge production. A skewed perception of the meaning of culture will only leave us cap in hand to the rest of the world as the wretched of the earth while Africa, as even acknowledged by the West is the most naturally endowed of all continents.

## 5. Pathways to the universal beneficence of African Indigenous Culture-Centric knowledge System

Articulating the way forward for the employment of African culture-centric epistemology towards knowledge production is a task that must be done. This challenge heavily relies on the strength and capabilities of higher institutions within Africa. It is high time Africa looked inward for focused and coordinated formulae that will bridge the knowledge production gap as well as aid our decolonizing our development projects. This knowledge gap multiplies the existing inequalities between Africa and the rest of the world. It impedes progress, stalls and dwarfs' techno-scientific development and perpetuates the cycle of dependence on external knowledge sources. This attitude thereby stifles local innovation and emasculates African scholars from harnessing their own intellectual resources. Bridging the knowledge production gap therefore requires a pragmatic and action-oriented approach, which first identifies the challenges to knowledge production in Africa and subsequently, addresses them by articulating solution armed with our redefined concept of culture. In this direction therefore, the following are found by the researcher as consisting major affronts to African knowledge production projects. These are namely:

### *5.1 The Challenges of Globalization, Urbanization, Cultural Assimilation, Banking System of Education and Religion*

These are instruments as (previously noted), that the hegemonic West daily employs to continually keep Africa dependent on them for almost everything. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund are their economic institutions that spread neo-colonization ideologies and perpetually keep African going cap-in-hand to them. Politically, the rhetoric of democracy and recently, modernism which has assumed the form of westernization in full gear are their ideological springboards infecting Africans with bias that cost them their personal identity and self-confidence. If for years, you tell a child that he is just worthless and good for nothing, his tendencies of internalizing such inferiority complex will approximate to a hundred percent. Yet, the worry continues. Why must Africa allow itself to be that newly weaned child that clamours for the mother's breast milk in order to live? Is it that Africans are not rational enough as the West would have us believe or is there something ontologically wrong with Africa? These are akin to the concerns that had Chinua Achebe describes Africa as a country that suffers from a 'cargo-cult' mentality.

At this juncture, this paper blames Africa for allowing herself to be repeatedly raped and used. A look at Africans' derision of their indigenous values, adoption of near meaningless foreign names and labeling of our languages are mere vernaculars and dialects while French, English and Portuguese just to mention a few, are considered as languages and even given recognition as a lingua franca in some African countries. It should be noted that our identities, histories, worldviews are couched in our languages, which are part of our culture. Any denigration in this direction, is the denigration of our cooperate identity. Therefore, the failure to articulate or adopt an African language or the failure to promote our local languages (in which we think, reason, discern and judge reality and the failure to divest ourselves of these borrowed foreign robes) leave us as perpetual servile servants to the rest of the world. In



Nigeria for instance, this problem surfaces as the problem of language barrier, which arose after the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates by the British colonial governor, Lord Lugard Frederick, who in 1914 bundled together in a single country, 625 different linguistic groups<sup>38</sup>. Up till date our terminology developers and linguists are yet to be able give us a lingua franca using any of our local languages of African or Nigeria origin. Rather, we still regrettably conceive a foreign language, as the measure and criterion of intelligence and rationality in our educational system. Is it not shameful that this promotion of foreign languages gradually occasion the demise of our local languages alongside the values they embed?

Besides, imbalances in the policies made and pursued by African governments and her leaders, which cart away every African wealth both material and ideological to foreign lands is another factor which alongside imbalances in the research direction of African scholars promote West worldviews to the detriment of Africa. These factors terminate in the internalization of an infectious inferiority complex among Africans. This ugly development gets glaringly manifested in the lack of endogenous epistemic liberty novelties hence, most of the philosophy departments in Nigeria encourage a very negligible number of projects, thesis and dissertations, which focus on African science, African epistemology, African culture. This factor tells the entire tale of value misplacement. What then is the way out of this politico-economic ideological quagmire?

This research armed with our new understanding of Africa culture-centric epistemology, considers decolonizing our knowledge systems, right understanding of our African cultural specificity and adoption of the wholistic worldview of our African indigenous knowledge system (AIKS) and a collaborative approach to knowledge production as the panacea needed for effective knowledge production system that fills the lacunae created by the gap in knowledge production. A brief discussion on the above identified pathways to knowledge production will now be undertaken before, a further submission of our findings and conclusion.

#### *5.2 Decolonizing Knowledge Production:*

The African culture-centric epistemology challenges the colonial structures and frameworks that dominate mainstream knowledge production. By integrating techno-scientificism with local wisdom embedded in our values and mores in a forward looking and dynamic stance towards her development, Africa produces an alternative perspective that plays down and dismantles hierarchies within knowledge systems while enhancing the decolonization of knowledge production. Although the reality of brain-drain, brought about by the emigration of highly skilled scholars and African professionals in search of greener pastures and opportunities in foreign lands, yet, the available ones through their research into African realities have proved that African epistemology makes allowance for the new horizons by granting recognition to domesticated knowledge, which has been devalued over the years. African values have the potentials of universal beneficence when fused with the advantages of the worldviews of science and technology.

#### *5.3 Promotion of African Cultural Specificity*

The awareness that in African cultures resides the entirety of their religious, economic and political worldviews shows that there is blurring of classes in Africa. This gives Africa an entirely unique cultural identity since her their culture vestiges, folklores, myths, dances, pithy sayings, defy western logic and rationalism. It is therefore inappropriate and a mismatch of categories to subject such African cultures (Which is characterized by a wholistic understanding of all realities), to the modern western criteriology of Carterianism and her dichotomizing logic. African cultures require a logic which is less stringent and argumentative than those of science and technology. The African herself should be conscious of the specificity of this culture-centric worldview and should realize that this uniqueness in African indigenous knowledge system (AIKS) bestows on his personality, (not as a less rational being but as one that has a descent that expresses itself in a polysemy of linguistic expression and recognizes diversities in cultures. The African must not go about it with peacockish pride but with an open-minded mindset that will enrich what he already has in his culture. This dynamic epistemology is what our present redefinition of culture canvasses.

#### *5.4 Adoption of Collaborative Approach to Knowledge Production*

The culture-centric African indigenous knowledge system must encourage collaborative knowledge production by welcoming the contributions of all disciplines and stakeholders in

the knowledge production process. This is made possible by ensuring that their voices and viewpoints are heard and respected. The referred stakeholders include: presently marginalized local communities considered as minorities, interdisciplinary scholars who through enhanced interaction enables cross disciplinary collaboration and cross breeding of ideas. Africans can harness the knowledge of her local herbalists in medicine, exploit its local talents in arts and crafts, recognize its diverse intellectual endowments by cultivation of a pool of her university experts in all fields, who are already equipped with the know-how to conduct quality research. This arrangement makes provision for them to contribute their insights. When these different groups are allowed to co-intent on African challenges and realities; there will result a co-creation of knowledge in other words, a generation, validation and dissemination of knowledge produced by Africa, for Africa and for universal beneficence. That way, the knowledge production potentials in Africa will get fully unlocked and harnessed such that the knowledge production gap gets bridged. Also, welcoming the advantages of Western alternative epistemologies will help in the boosting of techno-scientific endeavours in Nigeria. It will as well strengthen our higher institutions by its entrepreneurship bent and innovativeness. Such framework of knowledge exchange and collaborations brings multiple perspectives that generate new insights. It encourages cross-cultural dialogue, which is necessary in the making of relevant, and dynamic and balanced worldview that drives innovations without the denigration of any culture.

## 6. Conclusion

In summing up this research, it is expedient that this study unveils the fact that knowledge production pursued philosophically and through the lenses of a culture-centric African epistemology requires the systemic exploration of the fundamental questions about African reality, existence, morality and the nature of knowledge Africans value and pursue. In this research therefore, it is observed that for an effective integration of African indigenous knowledge system for knowledge production, there is need for the interplay of several factors that include: collaboration with other disciplines, recognition of uncertainty and the constant pursuit of intellectual growth, which necessarily demands openness to challenges of one's previous beliefs and the re-thinking of one's perspectives (if need be). That includes, the recognition that knowledge is personal and subject to revision based on new evidences of balanced logical developments. The research also underscores the fact that knowledge production in African indigenous epistemic system does not emphasize mere theoretical abstractions hence, an integration of insights from various disciplines is found to enrich insights and analysis such that a further and better understanding of such complex phenomenon as culture in Africa is achieved. This research exemplifies that commitment to theoretical inquiry has a way of fostering intellectual humility and a rededication to the pursuit of relevant knowledge rather than a tenacious holding of retrogressive concepts, and preconceived notions/biases. Informed by our redefinition of culture and its relatedness to knowledge production in Africa through the indigenous knowledge system, the truth becomes clear that the Western epistemic criteria of literacy as consisting only in formal schooling, respect for colonial authorities and belief in their religion is erroneous. African cultures therefore represent an alternative perspective to understanding African reality and could by extension, be of universal beneficence.

The study concludes by considering our re-definition of the culture project as one that solidly places African culture-centric indigenous knowledge system in a proper position to achieve effective knowledge production that bridges almost all gaps that stifle development. This suggestion, fends off any tincture of primordialism and ethnocentric prejudices while maintaining the unfixed nature of ethnic groups and their cultures due to the dynamism of man and society. This contribution similarly recognizes that every society has values that could be universalized for the multi-cultural enrichment of insights and perspectives. When the multi-culturalist African philosophers must have sieved away the retrogressive elements in culture (African or foreign), what remains will be a synthesis of culture that could be adapted to the specific needs of particular societies. This is different from the cultural globalism approach, which imposes dominant cultures on others in a manner of forced assimilation. Our recommended approach is akin to a philosophical interculturalism idea, which safeguards the integrity and values in our individual cultures while being sensitive to other cultures' progressive and forward-looking values. This is what our present redefinition

of African's culture-centric indigenous knowledge system's conception of culture targets. It is then the position of this paper that this approach places African Indigenous Knowledge System on a better pedestal for more meaningful and relevant knowledge production purposes that will drive African development despite the challenges of all forms of globalization.

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Book Review

## ***Book Review:* Organizing Democracy: How International Organizations Assist New Democracies (by Paul Poast and Johannes Urpelainen)**

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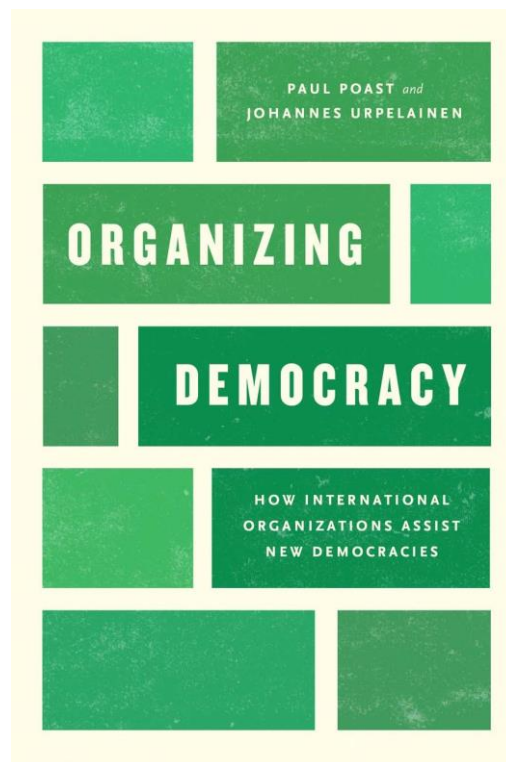
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Poast, P., & Urpelainen, J. (2018). *Organizing Democracy: How International Organizations Assist New Democracies*. University of Chicago Press.

<https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/O/bo27949329.html>

Poast and Urpelainen's book is comprehensive guide for scholars, policy analyst and a democratic consolidation practitioner who has provided empirical cases from Europe, America and Africa in a one read. In the ongoing system where liberalism is under threat keeping in view post Brexit scenario, this read is a great hope for rising democracies to nurture creating their own IOs with the assistance of established democracies. This provides a great deal of knowledge about domestic governance and the role of international organizations in strengthening it. The issue author describe is there is non-clarity in mechanism - either



democratization encourages the formation of IOs or increased global substantiation in form of IOs enhances democratic norms in society? The basic aim of the study is to investigate the unclear mechanism so far as the association between emerging number of democracies and IOs is concerned; and the general idea of the book also revolve around the links between IOs and democratizing states and between IOs and democratic consolidation and also explaining the

major role performed by democratizing states in creation of innumerable IOs. (Poast & Urpelainen, 2018.p.5)

So far as the structure of the Poast and Urpelainen's writing is concerned the first part consists of theory regarding why transitional democracies create own IOs? Furthermore, it also include the IOs membership help such democracies strengthen their democratic consolidation process over time which ultimately itself cause reversal of military coups. However, the part two consists of quantitative analysis of aforementioned assertions at first hand asserting democratization is associated with state forming new IOs not joining the old ones and how IO's affect democratic consolidation in a positive or negative manner. As the research strategy is mainly based on a mixed method approach therefore, part three contains qualitative analysis about author's quantitative claims in previous part. The authors found the relationship between democratization and state creating new IOs in the quantitative analysis based on two tests. On the other hand, for the sake of deep down analysis and mechanism of aforementioned association they looked into qualitative analysis of an empirical case. The Baltic state experience with IOs membership and forming new IO is included for the sake of democratic consolidation and some Sub-Saharan African and American case studies are also included. Finally, the concluding part describes the relationship between global governance and the spread of democracy where IOs perform a role of technical assistance and tools to democratic consolidation process over time. (Poast & Urpelainen, 2018.p.18).

since the claims and arguments of the authors are analyzed through statistical analysis of whether there is an association or not between old or new IOs and democratic association and these statistical tests are also verified with the help of qualitative analysis studying some case studies consequently, it seems there is a huge similarity and synergy of thoughts in text no matter it is start, middle part or end. This is to say as every evidence is aimed at proving one truth and demonstrate clarity. According to the author's argument although institutions have a minimal influence on state behavior and not a panacea but they assist in democratic consolidation process with the passage of time. They assert IOs assist transitional democracies in the form of technical assistance and public goods to establish and strengthen democratic consolidation process. However, these may not prevent forceful democratic instability and military coups. How IOs assist in democratic consolidations the question is answered in this way.

The authors explain the Russian external threat to Baltic States post independence as a major obstacle to their democratic consolidation process. They therefore, formed their own peacekeeping-oriented and regional security IO, Baltic Batalian (BALTBAT) with Nordic cooperation. (Poast & Urpelainen, 2018.p.129) these states improved their security situation with the help of this new IO as NATO was not geographically suitable at that time to support such action more than Nordic states. (Poast & Urpelainen, 2018.p.136). Poast and Urpelainen explained three benefits of forming BALTBAT as an organization through which technical assistance has been given to Baltic States, an economical way of getting assistance from western established democracies and a smooth path to enter into a lucrative NATO. Hence Baltic experience proved the theory of the authors in terms of democratizing state forming new IO to solve internal governance and international cooperation and they form it to demonstrate established IOs they are eligible and worthy to participate. (Poast & Urpelainen, 2018.p.157). However, merely security situation does not fall under the category of democratic consolidation process of a democratizing state. There are some other factors as well which need attention of the writers.

The authors have well provided with a basic step towards the inauguration of democratic consolidation covering two distinct geographical regions and comparing different cases in both regions and not the deeper root growth of such consolidation for that matter. Undoubtedly, this may be utilized in contemporary context yet there is a small shortcoming in regards to various issues the contemporary democracies face in terms of migration issues and managing different ethnicities. It needs a more holistic and deeper down approach known democratic consociationalism. No matter how deeper and accurate analysis is keeping in view empirical evidence it does not demonstrate to be a one-fits-all formula in terms of



generalisability as the environment and political culture varies from state to state and region to region.

In conclusion finding out the results of the authors, Poast and Urpelainen asserted a noticeable connection between growth of democracies and the growth of IOs which they proved very well through quantitative and qualitative analysis simultaneously using mixed method approach. They also lay stress on issue the lack of institutional capacity as an obstacle in the way of joining lucrative IOs based on their conditions which was so precise in case of Baltic States geographically adjacent to Nordic states and they sought assistance from them in making BALTBAT. According to them Unique government issues require unique IOs and forming new IOs have internal and external incentives for a transitional democracy e.g. a stepping stone towards membership in established IOs in terms of Baltic experience as an empirical instance from BALTBAT to NATO within ten years. For this reason, IOs does matter a lot keeping view varied circumstances of various states and leaders as per their structure and nature of democracy. (Poast & Urpelainen, 2018.p.188)

Poast and Urpelainen show that IO might have a positive effect on member states in terms of reputation and legitimization. Their Baltic experience evidence supports this view. Democratic consolidation requires institutional transformation and institutional transformation takes time especially for autocratic democratizing states which might be done with socialization one element of underlying mechanism of democratization provided by Pevehouse. However, the author's argument is against this element; and considers IOs as product of democratization. (Poast & Urpelainen, 2018.p.193)

They suggested established democracies must support the democratization of new democracies in supporting and encouraging those forming new IOs and providing them with technical assistance. For instance, EU may support democratic consolidation in countries Ukraine and Serbia. Additionally, they guide IOs might support democratic consolidation but this is the one way and there is still need to know more ways. (Poast & Urpelainen, 2018.p.200). Another option might be consociational theory which empirically grounded normative theory aimed at providing a democratic solution to confronted and diverse – political and democratizing system sometimes emerged out of autocracies or colonial subjugations. Despite of varied concerns due to consociational aspects they interact equally in a plural society in terms of coalition, mutual veto for minority rights and a high degree of autonomy for each department. Netherland, Austria, Balgium and Switzerland are experienced example of such stance. However, it is also not feasible and suitable for every case and might not be generalized its applicability without research on other cases. (Mushtaq, Muhammad, & Alqama, 2011) As has been mentioned before, there has been a synergy in writing of authors, they have described the issue in the start, tested it quantitatively and qualitative in the middle and guided the relevant accurate conclusion in the end well.

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Research article

# The Factors of the Fall of the Republic Government and Political Crisis in Afghanistan: A Survey of Public Attitudes

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**Abstract:** Afghanistan, a nation marked by longitudinal internal conflict and a field of rivalry among global and regional powers for many decades, grapples with a deeply intricate and multifaceted political predicament. This complexity arises from a duality of issues: the pervasive intra-ethnic and intra-group tensions within Afghanistan and the intricate interplay of neighbouring states, regional dynamics, and global interests that have transformed the country into a quagmire of conflict and terrorism. This research adopts a quantitative, applied research approach utilizing questionnaires as its primary data collection method. Its core objective is to systematically investigate and unearth the underlying causes contributing to the collapse of the Afghan republic. The research reveals that ethnic politics have dominated Afghanistan, exerting substantial, irreparable damage upon the democratic framework. This dominance manifests through ethnic-centric political manoeuvres that undermine the democratic system's foundations. The downfall of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan can be attributed to a multitude of factors, including widespread administrative and financial corruption, the managerial inadequacies of top-tier officials, the monopolization of power, ethnocentrism and discriminatory practices, political dependency on foreign nations, the self-interest and ambitions of political leaders, the dearth of rule of law, economic reliance on foreign entities, a conspicuous absence of merit-based governance, a crisis of political legitimacy, and the inefficacy of the judiciary. Ultimately, the republic's governance disintegrated when President Ashraf Ghani fled Afghanistan, facilitating the scaling of the Taliban to power.

**Keywords:** democracy; republic; ethnic politics; crisis of political legitimacy; administrative corruption; ethnicism and discrimination; exclusivism and ethnic Domination.

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## 1. Introduction

Since 1880, that is, since the establishment of Afghanistan until now, the governments and rulers of Afghanistan, like Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, have faced rebellion. Among the kings and rulers of Afghanistan, Habibullah son of Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, Habibullah Kalkani, Nader Khan, Sardar Mohammad Dawood, Noor Mohammad Taraki, Hafizullah Amin, Dr. Najibullah and Burhanuddin Rabbani had a bloody end. Amanullah Khan and Ashraf Ghani managed to escape from the country. Mohammad Zaher Shah was out of the country when the regime change took place, and that is why his fate was not the same as his past and future ones. In the meantime, only Babrak Karmel and Sebghatullah Mujadadi died of natural causes. From this point of view, the geography of Afghanistan has been a bad political state for its rulers. Afghanistan has always been rebellious and insurgent. The history of Afghanistan is the history of tribal wars and rebellions.

## 2. Review of the Republican System in Afghanistan

The republican system is a system in which the president of the country is elected by direct or indirect vote of the people and the term of the presidency is limited. In the general definition, a republic is a form of government that, based on democracy or non-democracy, its people determine the right to rule over their own destiny directly or indirectly in such a way that inheritance does not interfere with it. They also exercise their legal powers within a

limited period and under their supervision. The discussion here is more about the republican system based on democracy. Politically, democracy means the establishment of an electoral and responsible government through free and fair competition among all existing political forces. On the other hand, socially, it means the enjoyment of civil and political freedoms and rights by public and the emergence of associations and institutions (Amiri, 2010).

Dacey defined democracy as follows: “In a democracy, a large part of the whole nation is the governing body”. According to Abraham Lincoln, democracy is: “Government of the people, by the people, for the people, by all, for all”. Brace definition of democracy states: “That form of government in which the power of governing the government is legally delegated, not only to a class or to certain classes, but to all members of society as a whole. That is, in a society where elections. There is rule belongs to the majority” (Alam, 2012). Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the book ‘The Social Contract’ stated that the general will or common good can be fulfilled through direct participatory and the laws that express the general will must be obeyed (Rush, 2014). The principles and foundations of democracy are: the principle of popular consent and acceptance, the principle of participation in political decision-making, the principle of freedom, the principle of humanism or the originality of man, the principle of equality, the principle of civil society, the principle of human rights, the principle of citizenship, the principle of the rule of law, The principle of separation of powers, the principle of pluralism, the principle of secularism, the principle of elections and the principle of individualism (Amiri, 2010).

There is no doubt that constitution is the backbone of a republican system. The government of the republic is constitutional, which means that everything that happens inside the country is done according to the principles of the constitution. On the other hand, when citizens delegate their powers through representatives, they are sure of how their government is run. The republican style of government is a democratic style. Because political power is granted to rulers and officials through elections, and representatives are accountable to the people. The republican system ensures that the rights and freedoms of citizens are protected by law and order. The republican form of government is more than a democratic government. In contrast to democratic government, which is the rule of the majority, the republican model is the rule of the majority, but the majority that rules based on laws.

In relation to Afghanistan, it can be said that the Constitution of Afghanistan in 2004 created a form of republican government which is “belongs to the nation, which is manifested through their elected representatives. The nation of Afghanistan consists of all people who have the citizenship of Afghanistan” (Constitution of Afghanistan, 2003). This means that all the citizens of Afghanistan have been given the power and responsibility to choose their representatives to govern and these representatives are accountable to the people. The key features of the “Republic” in the 2004 Constitution are: (1) Sovereignty is manifested through the people and citizens of the country. (2) Citizens choose their leaders through universal suffrage. (3) No one is above the law that is passed through an elected parliament. (4) The three independent branches of the government check and monitor each other’s power. And finally, (5) all citizens have basic rights that cannot be violated (Thier, 2020). According to Duverger (2012), democracy in Afghanistan was a type of direct democracy where the voters themselves actually choose the head of government.

The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was one of the best constitutions in the region, which protected the rights of all citizens in the Afghan society equally. Unfortunately, this constitution was not implemented by the rulers and most of the articles of the law were violated. And the non-compliance of the citizen’s rights caused the republican system to be shaken and the distance between the nation and the government increased and eventually the government collapsed.

### **3. Factors of the Collapse of the Democratic System in Afghanistan**

During the first half of August 2021, the Taliban stunned the world with its impressive advances in Afghanistan, as it took almost all of Afghanistan out of the control of the Afghan National Defense Security Forces which caused President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani flee the country.

Experts believe that for this incident in Afghanistan, there were two main reasons: internal and external. Regardless of whether these reasons are internal or external and their dimensions, certainly none of them alone could have caused this incident with its wide-ranging effects.

### *3.1 Ethnic and Tribal Structure in Afghanistan*

Ethnocentrism shows a kind of tendency towards the nation. Considering one's nation as the center of the world or considering the cultural norms of one's society as absolute and unquestionable and looking down on other societies that have different norms (Yazdan Panah & Ahmadi, 2021). Ethnocentrism is considered as the most important component of political culture in Afghanistan and can be prominently displayed in all social, cultural and political relations of Afghanistan (Irfan, 2020).

One of the characteristics of the Afghan society is its ethnic and tribal structure, which are very scattered and incompatible with each other. As a result, one factor of the failure of the Afghan government was its weakness in managing this ethnic and tribal structure of the country. Because each tribe demand its share of power, and each of them has had and still has its own warlords. On the other hand, the same ethnic and tribal differences have and still have external incentives and stimuli. That is, the regional and extra-regional powers tried to encourage one of these ethnics with specific goals. For example, the government of Pakistan has been supporting the Pashtuns for years and has kept them at the head of the political developments so that can seek its own interests. Taliban group also emerged from the hearts of Pashtuns, and they mainly received political and ideological education from the Haqqani school in Islamabad and religious schools in Peshawar, Pakistan (Nasiri, 2021).

### *3.2 Centralized System*

In the administrative structure of the centralized system, the decision-making power and planning of programs are practically in the hands of the central administration, which is finalized by one person in the hierarchy. In this administrative structure, other than the central administration, the rest of the institutions, especially the local administrations, are completely deprived of the decision-making power and initiative authority (Rezai Zadeh, 2006). The political system that came into being in Afghanistan after 2001 was established in a hurry and without considering all aspects and internal-national needs of Afghanistan. In the presidential system, the political crisis leads to the crisis of the system due to the inflexibility of the system and the lack of democratic solutions such as parliamentary systems (Rahimi, 2019).

Afghanistan has followed previous regimes and adopted a highly centralized governance model. Under this system, the president had more authority than a king, and the constitution – through some vague provision – allowed the president to act unilaterally and override all existing checks and balances mechanisms. The system of centralized governance monopolizes power (politically, financially and administratively) in an executive branch – or simply the president himself. The executive branch has full powers in such a way that they can have a great influence on the legislature and the judiciary. At the same time, the executive branch was not accountable to the legislature and the people of Afghanistan. Thus, due to the multiplicity of ethnicities, religions and languages in Afghanistan, the central presidential system intensified ethnic divisions. As a result, all these things went hand in hand, and in total, the system after 2001 could not create an inclusive, peaceful, democratic, development-supporting and stable Afghanistan (Qadam Shah, 2021).

### *3.3 Immense Violation of the Constitution*

Indisputably, the basic foundations of a democracy-based system are formed by the constitution. In a society where the law does not exist, and if it does not apply, in such a society we cannot talk about democracy (Amiri, 2010). The new constitution of Afghanistan, which was formed after the Bonn conference, was recognized as the new road map of the new political structure of Afghanistan. According to the new constitution and the aid of the international community for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, this country was expected to see a different chapter of security, prosperity and development. According to the report of Afghanistan Freedom House, the constitution of Afghanistan has been violated in various cases. The widespread violation of the constitution by certain government institutions is reflected in this report and it shows that the government institutions themselves are pioneers in violating the constitution (Mazidi & Raja, 2016). The findings of the Afghanistan Freedom House show that over the past few years, more than 92 cases of the constitution have been violated by three government institutions, the executive branch, the legislature and the judiciary. The most violations were committed by the executive branch (Mazidi & Raja, 2016). The widespread violation of the constitution by government institutions and officials led to the marginalization of the constitution in Afghanistan. For example, family and ethnic and tribal relations replaced the principles established by the constitution, many laws were ignored

and the power of the president was beyond the law. As a result, this issue led to the delegitimization of the government, which weakened its foundations and eventually collapsed.

#### *3.4 Doha Agreement*

Another major cause of the collapse of the Afghan government was the Doha agreement between the United States of America and the Taliban group. On Saturday, February 29, 2020, the world witnessed one of the strangest and at the same time the most historic peace agreements between a non-state actor called the Taliban and a state actor, the United States of America (The Institute for Islamic World Futures Studies, 2020). Although intellectuals, journalists and political analysts had warned of the bad outcome for the United States of America. But the United States ignored the Afghan government, it negotiated and reached an agreement with the Taliban and granted internal, regional and global legitimacy to the Taliban group. After the start of US negotiations with the Taliban, Iran, Russia, China, Uzbekistan and other countries hosted the Taliban. The United States placed the Taliban on the same level as the government. On the other hand, Ashraf Ghani and his small circle started secret meetings and negotiations with a part of the Taliban and Pakistan against the wishes of the United States of America. Because the Taliban leaders, who were in Doha to negotiate with the representatives of the Afghan government, did not expect the collapse. According to their statements, the transformation was not supposed to be in the form of complete collapse. President Ghani and his small circle coordinated and surrendered Kabul to the Haqqani group, and this was what stunned the United States of America and all the progressive forces of Afghanistan (Hamid Zadeh, 2021).

#### *3.5 Weak Army*

One of the main reasons for the collapse of the republican system can be considered the weakness of the army. The sudden fall of the central government of Afghanistan and the defense and security forces for the army that was claimed to have reached a good quality with the support of the international community, especially the United States, showed that despite years of investment, the Afghan army is weak and corrupted. In fact, after twenty years and more than 80 billion dollars of training and support from the United States, the well-equipped security forces of Afghanistan could not prevent the rapid takeover of this country by the Taliban (BBC, 2021). The collapse was so rapid that even President Biden had to admit during a speech at the White House that he and his administration were caught by surprise. This is despite the fact that the United States always talked about the ability of the security forces after the withdrawal.

#### *3.6 Ethnic Discrimination*

Ethnic differences are one of the reasons for the continuation of war and violence in the country. Major part of the country's wars and subversive conflicts took place and continued on the basis of ethnic interests. Ethnic differences have caused the country's citizens to be divided into different populations on the ethnic axis and participate in political interactions based on this affiliation. Ethnic discrimination was one of the factors that distanced people from the government. According to the research report of the Independent Human Rights Commission of Afghanistan, 52% of government officials, 10% of non-governmental administration officials, and 38% of ordinary people were called the cause of ethnic discrimination by the respondents (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2018).

This discrimination reached its peak during Ashraf Ghani's era and became official. Ashraf Ghani destroyed the national trust between the government and the nation. Ethnic discrimination was rampant in the system and most of the political institutions. Officials of all political institutions, ministries and even scientific places were appointed based on ethnicity, position and language. No attention was paid to expertise and competence. The ministries were divided among the heads of the tribes without considering the background and expertise of the officials, and the institutions that operated under the ministries and other big institutions were also occupied by the relatives of the ministers, army officials and people in power in general, and in this way, This situation allowed for corruption and the execution of illegal activities with impunity (Hamid Zadeh, 2021).

#### *3.7 Corruption*

Afghanistan's highly centralized governance system, which was approved in 2001, gave the president unlimited political, financial and administrative power, and the people had virtually no role in decision-making, and this led to the corruption of the system. On the other hand,

a huge stream of international aid to Afghanistan without a transparent monitoring system has broadened the scope of corruption in Afghanistan. According to the United Nations report, Afghans usually have to pay bribes when approaching government officials to go through administrative procedures. In the past 12 months, 52% of Afghans, at least once, have had to pay a bribe to a government employee. The average amount of bribe victims who have been forced to pay is reported almost five times per year (UNODC, 2010).

The United States of America, which experienced the longest war in Afghanistan, spent one trillion dollars and killed and wounded thousands of soldiers (Dawlatyar, 2021), never seriously pressured the Afghan governments and officials and did not hold them accountable. The United States of America was either a spectator or a sponsor of fraudulent elections. The United States of America did not seek to build or support a democratic government and system from the beginning. For this reason, in the last twenty years, corrupt and unbelieving forces occupied Afghanistan's political institutions. In the last twenty years, these forces were only thinking about their livelihood and increasing their capital. Kabul and the big cities of Afghanistan were fed up under the pressure of corruption, oppression, cruelty and discrimination of the rulers who fed on US dollars (Hamid Zadeh, 2021). As a result, corruption led to the unstable foundations of the republic in Afghanistan, which collapsed after two decades.

### *3.8 Poverty and Unequal Distribution of Resources*

Afghanistan is a land-locked country and has a lot of underground resources. The weakness of the industrial structure caused by flawed political and economic system has caused these natural resources be kept unused. The corrupted system of distribution of wealth and social services did not allow people to equally benefit from these natural resources. In fact, one of the reasons for the victory of the Taliban in Afghanistan was the extreme widespread poverty (Nasiri, 2021).

### *3.9 Legitimacy Crisis*

Legitimacy is one of the important and fundamental issues in political philosophy and the biggest factor that justifies citizens' obedience to the ruling power. It is the factor that the right to exercise the sovereignty of the political system in legislative, executive and judicial dimensions can be evaluated as justified or unjustified (Mohammadi, 2015). In this era, for the first time, Max Weber expressed the concept of legitimacy as a general concept. According to him, legitimacy is based on "belief" and demands obedience from people. Power is effective only when it is legitimate (Alam, 2012). Legitimacy means being legal or accordance with the law (Ibid). Legitimacy is directly related to the satisfaction of the citizens and the provision of justice by the citizens. If the satisfaction and justice are not implemented, the legitimacy of the government will decrease and if it lasts, the legitimacy of the government will be questioned (Effrat, 2011). The legitimacy crisis is caused by citizens' dissatisfaction with the government, which has a political, social and economic dimension (Heywood, 2011). The crisis of legitimacy was an effective factor in the collapse of republic government of Afghanistan in the long term. In short, it can be said that the foundations of the collapse of the republic structure started from the first term of Ashraf Ghani's presidency and it took an upward trend in the second term of his presidency (Rahimi, 2021). As a result, the accumulation of these challenges during the last two decades led to the broadening and deepening of the fragility of the foundations of the republic government.

### *3.10 Interventions of United States' Regional Opponents*

The main supporter of the collapsed system was the United States of America. It has been providing money, weapons, all the necessities for Afghanistan in the past twenty years. According to President Biden's statements, over the past twenty years, the United States spent one trillion dollars on equipping and training hundreds of thousands of Afghan security and military forces. By the time of the evacuation of Kabul, about 2,300 Americans were killed in the war in Afghanistan and about 20,660 others were wounded (BBC, 2021). Supporting the Taliban by the US opponents played a major role in prostrating the US army in Afghanistan. The Taliban did not only had Pakistan with them in the last twenty years, besides, China, Russia and Iran were also regional rivals of the United States and were supporting the Taliban group.

### *3.11 The Absence of Real Intellectuals in the Government*

Afghanistan has been suffering from having no committed intellectuals or think tanks. The number of real intellectuals to monitor the system in the last twenty years has been very

limited. Most of the appellants sought to get closer to the power system. Upon reaching the position in the government, tried to acknowledge the government actions and benefit from corruption.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Research Type

Generally, research in the field of social sciences is of two types, quantitative or qualitative. This research includes quantitative research and was selected based on the relevance of the topic of descriptive analytical research.

### 4.2 The Importance and Rationale of Research

The rapid fall and collapse of the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan created many questions in the minds of researchers, intellectuals and politicians, and the people of Afghanistan. They did not believe that the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan would fall so easily. Therefore, the research on the factors of the failure of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is considered one of the crucial needs of the Afghan citizens especially new generation of Afghanistan. For establishing a democratic government and pillars of political stability, the cause and effect of collapse of the republic government needs to be unpacked.

### 4.3 Research Objectives

Main objective is to clarify the factors of the fall of the Republic in Afghanistan.

Sub objectives focus on the following:

- To examine the relationship and the level of trust between Afghanistan republic government and people;
- To examine the relationship between administrative corruption and the fall of the Republic in Afghanistan;
- To investigate the relationship between the centralized system and the fall of the Republic in Afghanistan;
- To investigate the relationship between ethnic domination and the collapse of the Republic in Afghanistan;
- To investigate the relationship between the Doha Agreement and the fall of the Republic in Afghanistan;
- To examine the relationship between social justice and the fall of the Republic in Afghanistan;
- To examine the relationship between political participation and the fall of the Republic in Afghanistan.

### 4.4 Data Collection

The data collection is based on an online questionnaire sent through Google form from May 1, 2022, to June 30, 2022, to the contacts of social media users such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram and personal communications. The respondents have answered the questionnaire according to their desire and satisfaction. During the data collection, efforts have been made to observe the ethnic representation from different ethnic groups. Also, quantitative data analysis was done based on the SPSS program.

## 5. Results and Discussion

The current research is one of the new research projects related to the fall of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, which is considered to be applied research in terms of purpose, descriptive in terms of method, and quantitative in terms of nature and of the data. The sample is consisting of 225 people. 20% of the respondents are women and 80% are men, and they are between the ages of 18 to 66 (Figure 1).



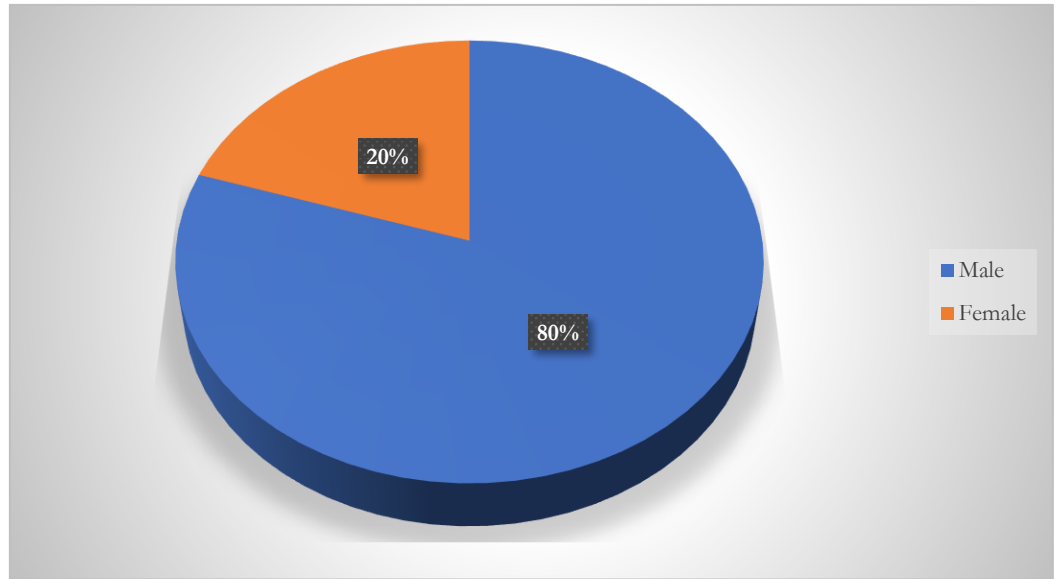


Figure 1. Gender of participants.

Afghanistan’s politics mostly revolves around ethnic policies, and in this research efforts has been made to observe ethnic balance in data collection and analyze the variables from different ethnic groups with equal percentages, and Figure 2 shows the percentage of ethnic groups.

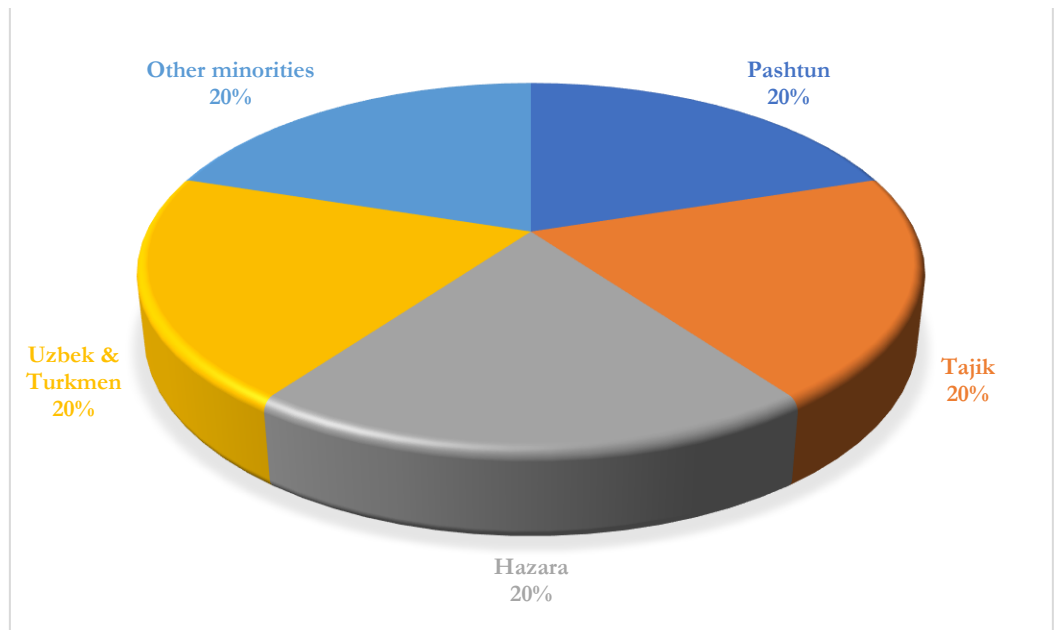


Figure 2. Ethnicity of respondents

The respondents of this study were selected from the literate people and those who have access to the internet and social networks. According to Figure 3, 53% of the respondents hold bachelor degree, 30% master’s degree, 11% Ph.D., and 6% have graduated from grade 12.

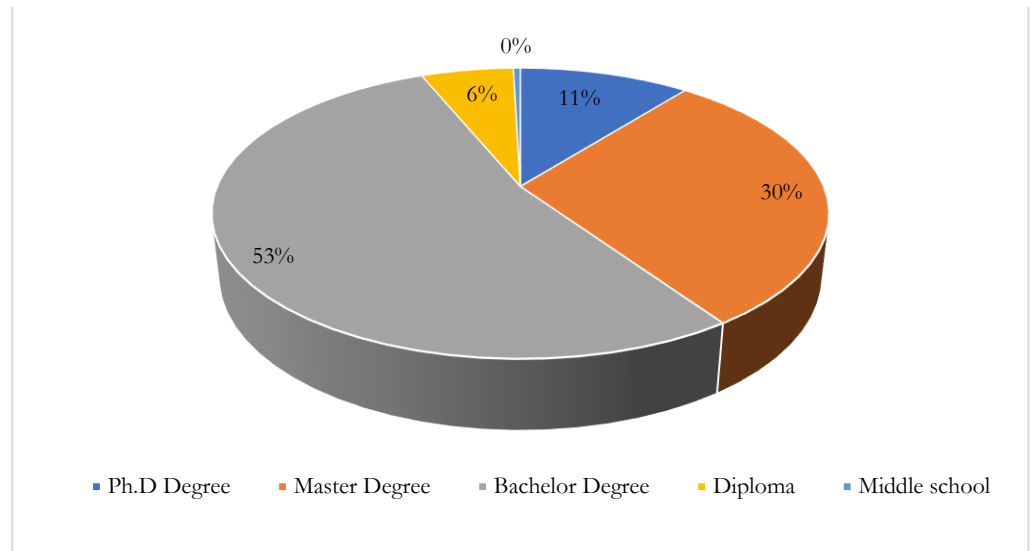


Figure 3. Education level of participants.

Figure 4 shows the level of studies and field of study of the respondents.

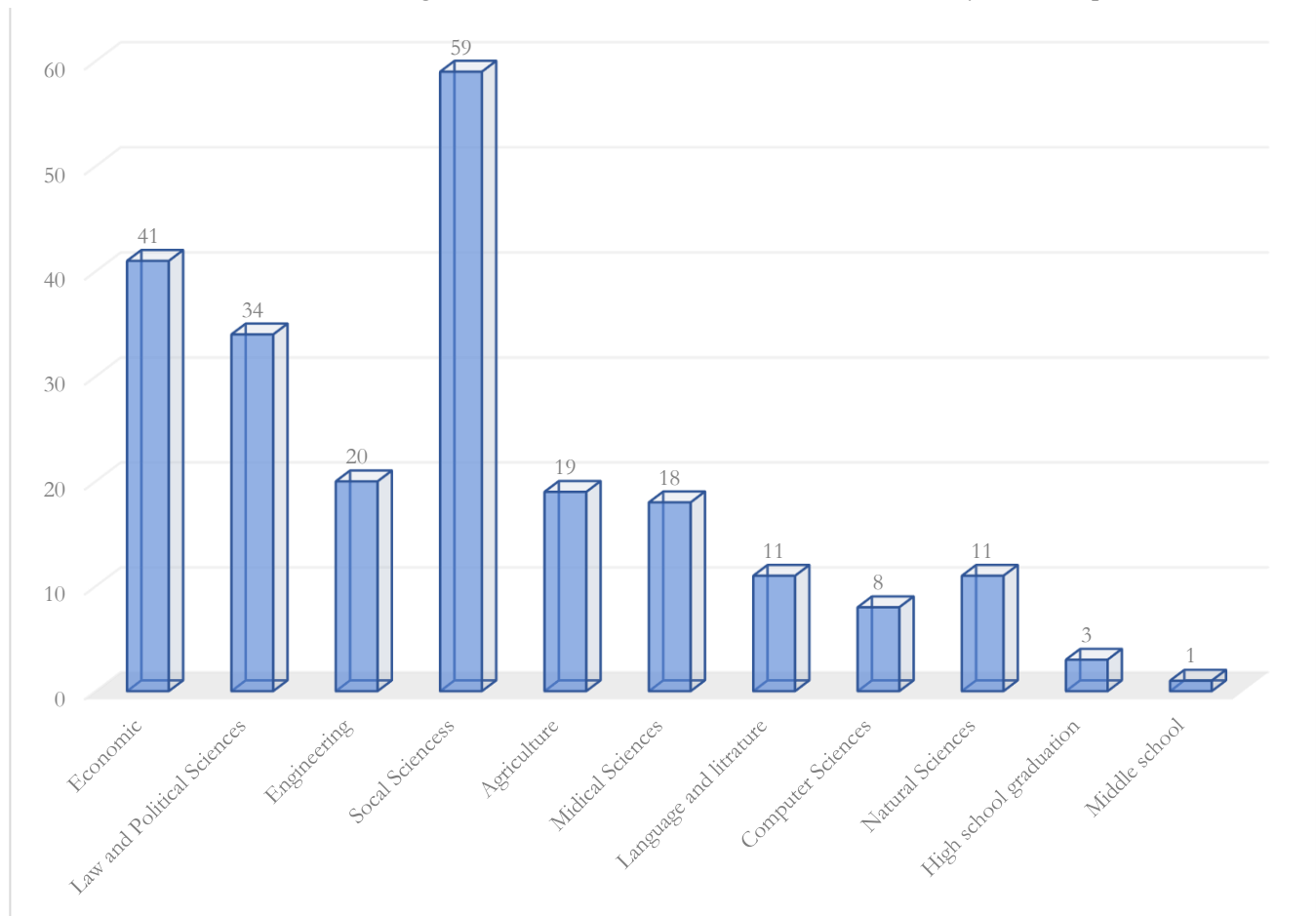


Figure 4. Field of study of participants.

Respondents with different levels of education and different fields are engaged in various jobs. Figure 5 shows that most of the respondents are elites of the Afghan society and this increase the validation of the data and information about the fall of the republic government of Afghanistan.

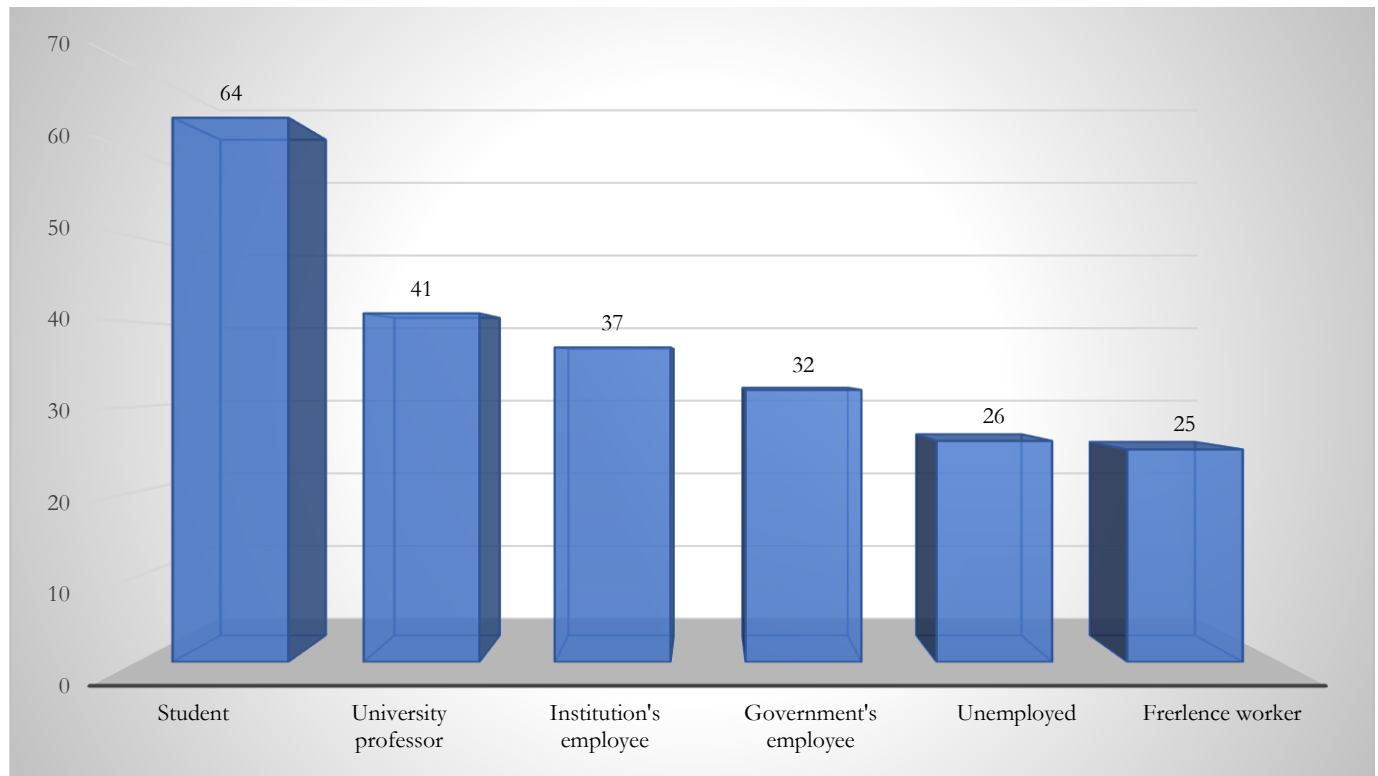


Figure 5. Job of respondents

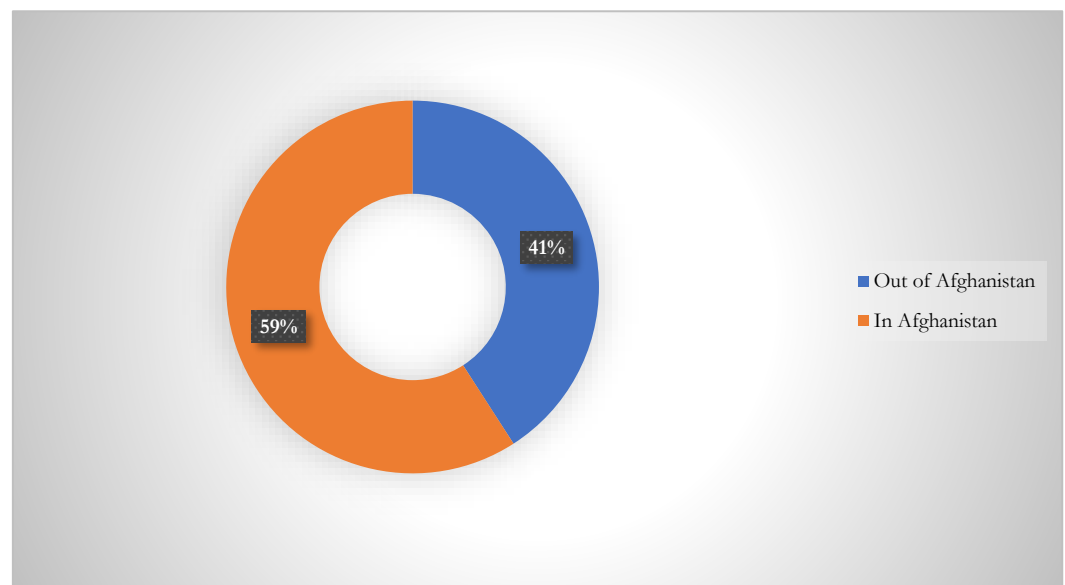
In this study effort has been made to involve participation from different provinces, and fortunately, out of 34 provinces of Afghanistan, residents of 31 provinces participated in this research. Table No. 1 shows the percentage and frequency of people from different provinces.

Table 1. Respondents' matrix based on provinces

Name of Provinces	Frequency of Participants	Percent
Uruzgan	2	0.9
Badghis	1	0.4
Bamyan	27	12.0
Badakhshan	9	4.0
Baghlan	6	2.7
Balkh	16	7.1
Parwan	1	0.4
Paktia	5	2.2
Panjshir	8	3.6
Takhar	4	1.8
Jawzjan	9	4.0
Khost	2	0.9
Daikundi	5	2.2
Zabul	1	0.4
Sarpol	9	4.0
Samangan	7	3.1

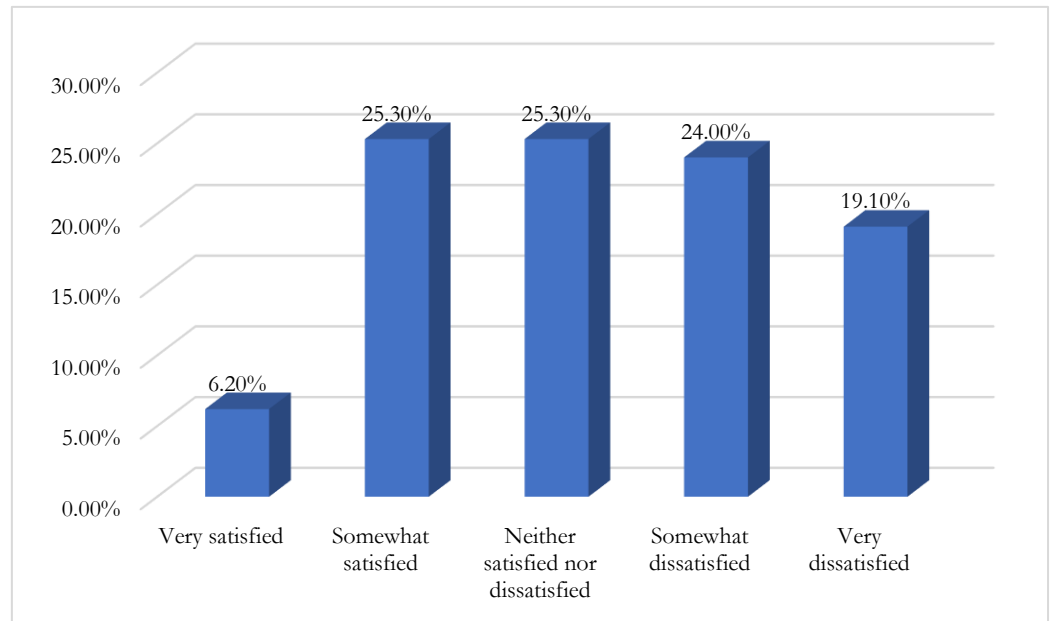
Farah	3	1.3
Kandahar	6	2.7
Kabul	31	13.8
Kapisa	5	2.2
Kunduz	5	2.2
Kunar	3	1.3
Laghman	5	2.2
Maydan Wardak	8	3.6
Nangarhar	7	3.1
Nuristan	1	0.4
Harat	3	1.3
Hilmand	2	0.9
Ghazni	15	6.7
Ghor	6	2.7
Faryab	13	5.8
<b>31</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>100%</b>

Since the data was collected online through social networks. A number of respondents resided outside of Afghanistan who escaped abroad during the power transition. Most of the respondents reside in Afghanistan. Figure 6 shows the percentage of the participants live abroad and in the country.



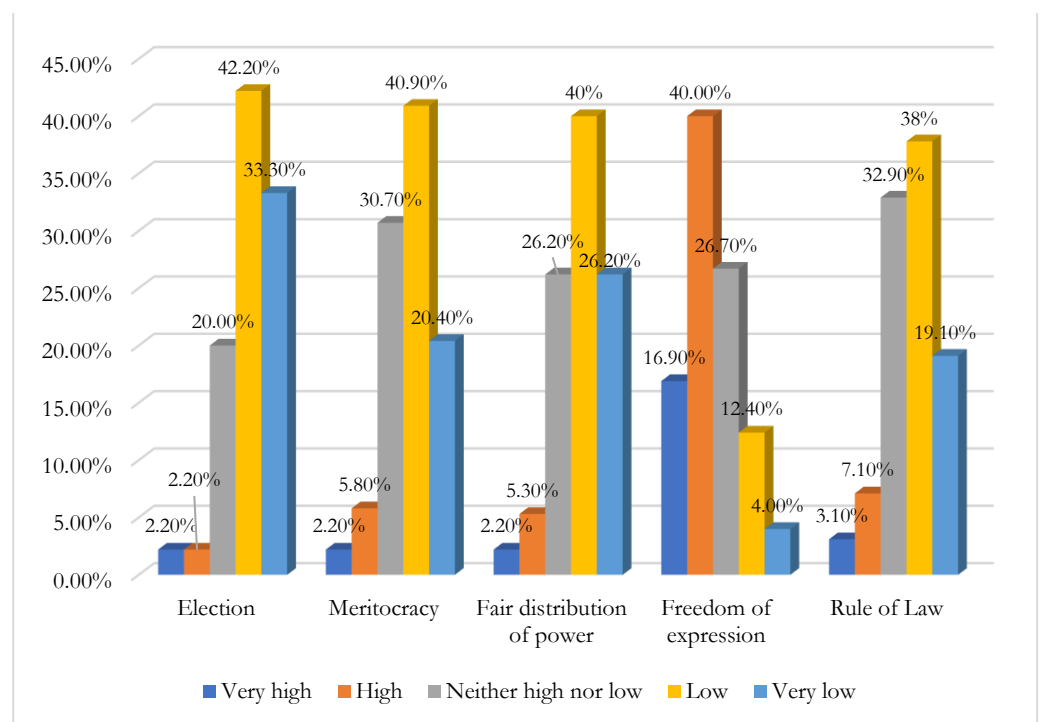
**Figure 6.** Current residence of the respondents.

Based on the review of the research literature, the distance between the people and the government had increased. Figure 7 shows that the respondents are not very satisfied with the government of the Republic and the level of dissatisfaction is higher than the level of satisfaction. 6.2% of the respondents are very satisfied, 25.30% of the respondents are somewhat satisfied, 25.30% of the respondents are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 24% of the respondents are sometimes dissatisfied and 19.10% of the respondents are very dissatisfied.



**Figure 7.** The level of people’s satisfaction with the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

In this research, the following indicators, based on the opinion of the respondents, have been analyzed and evaluated. Figure 8 shows how much the government has tried to consolidate the democratic system and how satisfied the people are.



**Figure 8.** The level of observance of the republican system is one of the components of democracy.

Figure 8 and 9, indicate that the majority of the participants are not satisfied with elections, meritocracy, fair distribution of power, rule of law, observance of citizen's rights, balanced development, political participation, equality and political legitimacy.

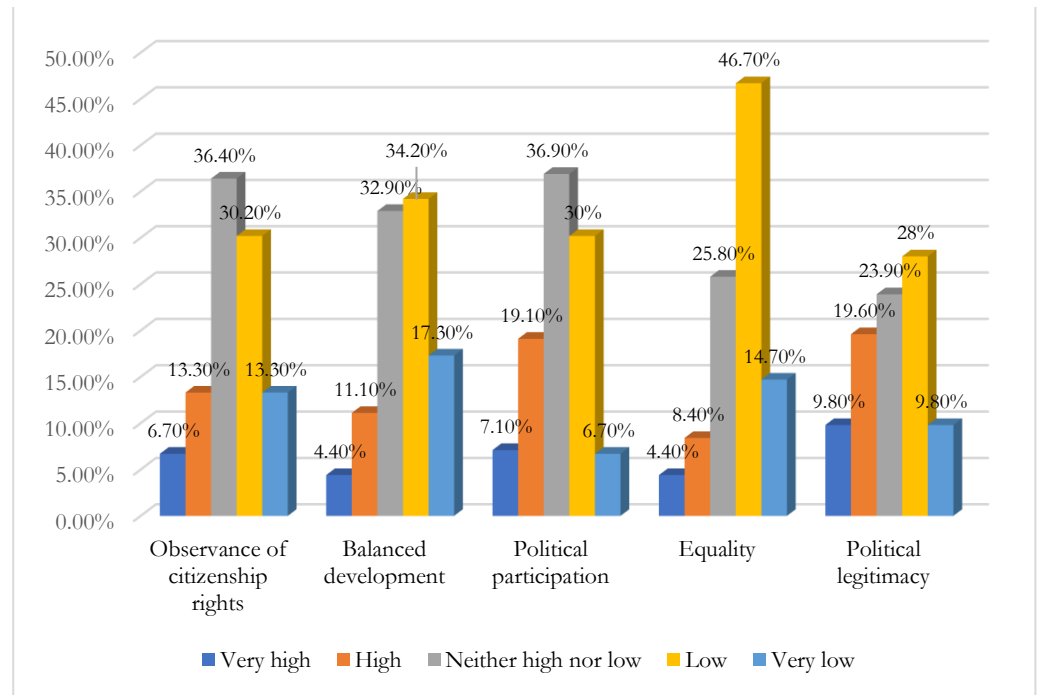


Figure 9. The level of compliance of the government with the components of democracy

Politics in Afghanistan is directly related to ethnic politics, and one of the most crucial problems in Afghanistan is ethnic conflicts. It has long roots in the history of Afghanistan. Figure 10 evaluates ethnic characteristics, and focus on attitudes of different ethnic groups towards the rule of republic government. The level of compliance with political participation and equality by the government and the political legitimacy of the system was measured based on the ethnic indicators, and the four politically influential ethnic groups in Afghanistan, namely Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek and Turkmen, and other ethnic minorities.

Concerning political participation by the government, Pashtuns have the highest satisfaction and positive opinion, and Hazaras have the lowest satisfaction and negative opinion, followed by Uzbeks, Tajiks and other minorities.

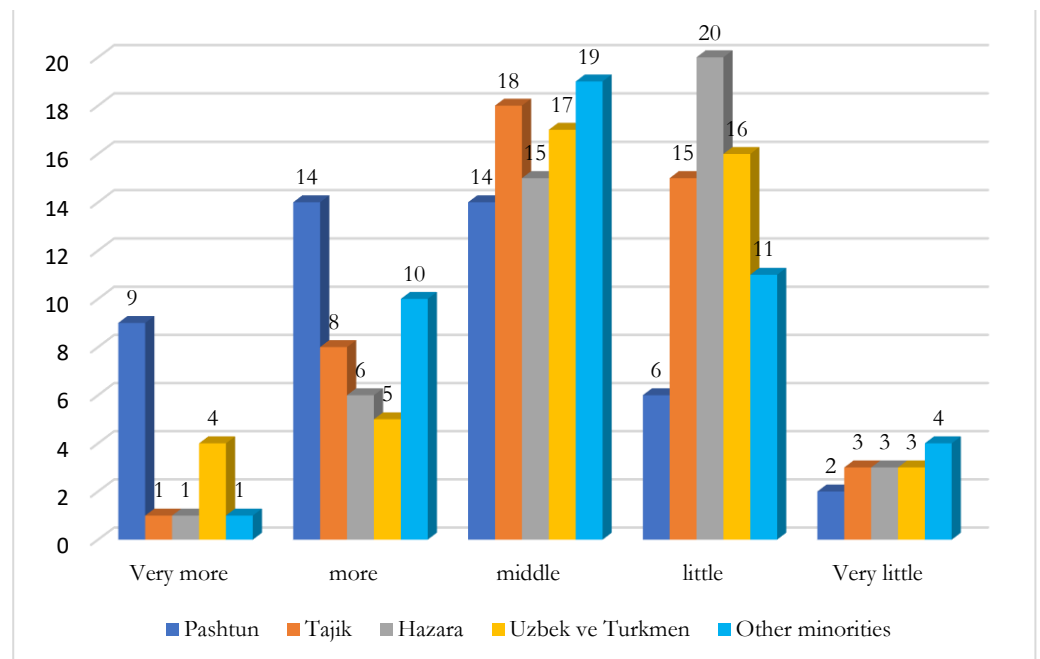


Figure 10. The extent of political participation by the government

With respect to equality between citizens by the government, Pashtuns have the highest satisfaction and positive opinions, and Hazaras have the lowest satisfaction and negative opinion, followed by Uzbeks, Tajiks and other minorities, and Figure 11 clearly shows the frequency of respondents' opinions. is showing.

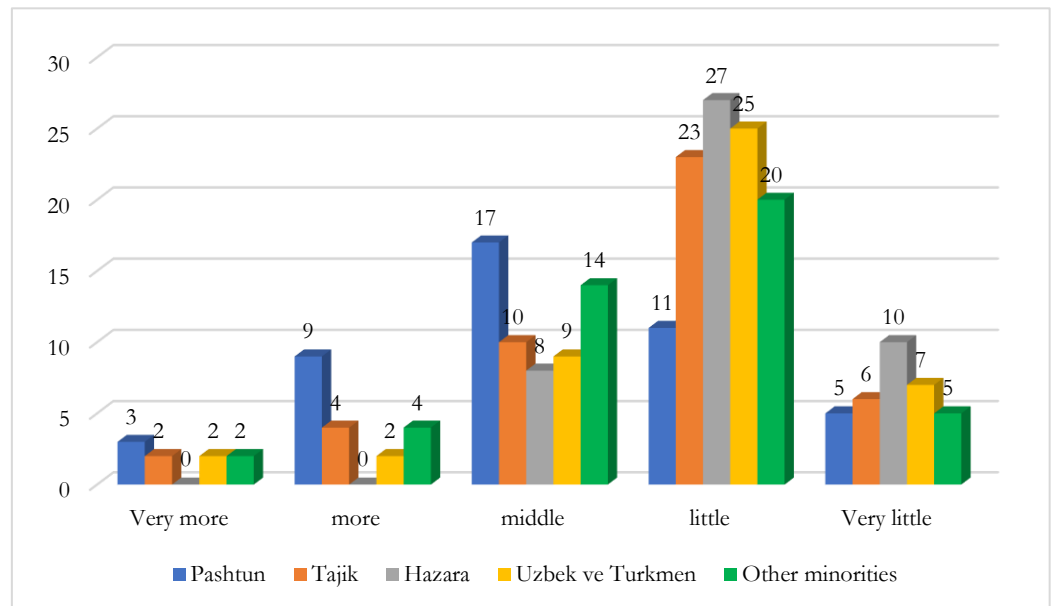


Figure 11. The extent to which the government respects equality.

Regarding the political legitimacy of the government, the Pashtuns have the highest satisfaction and positive opinion, and the Hazaras have the lowest satisfaction and negative opinion, followed by Uzbeks, Tajiks and other minorities. Lack of satisfaction of the Hazaras, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen and other ethnic minorities indicates the crisis of political legitimacy in the republic system.

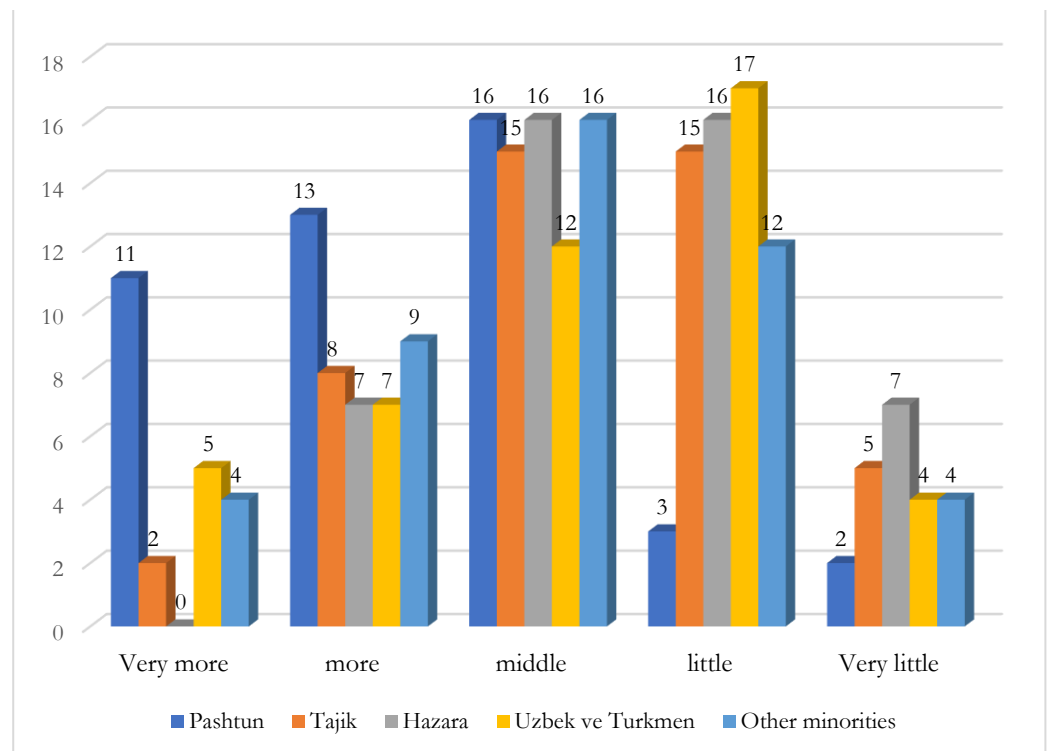
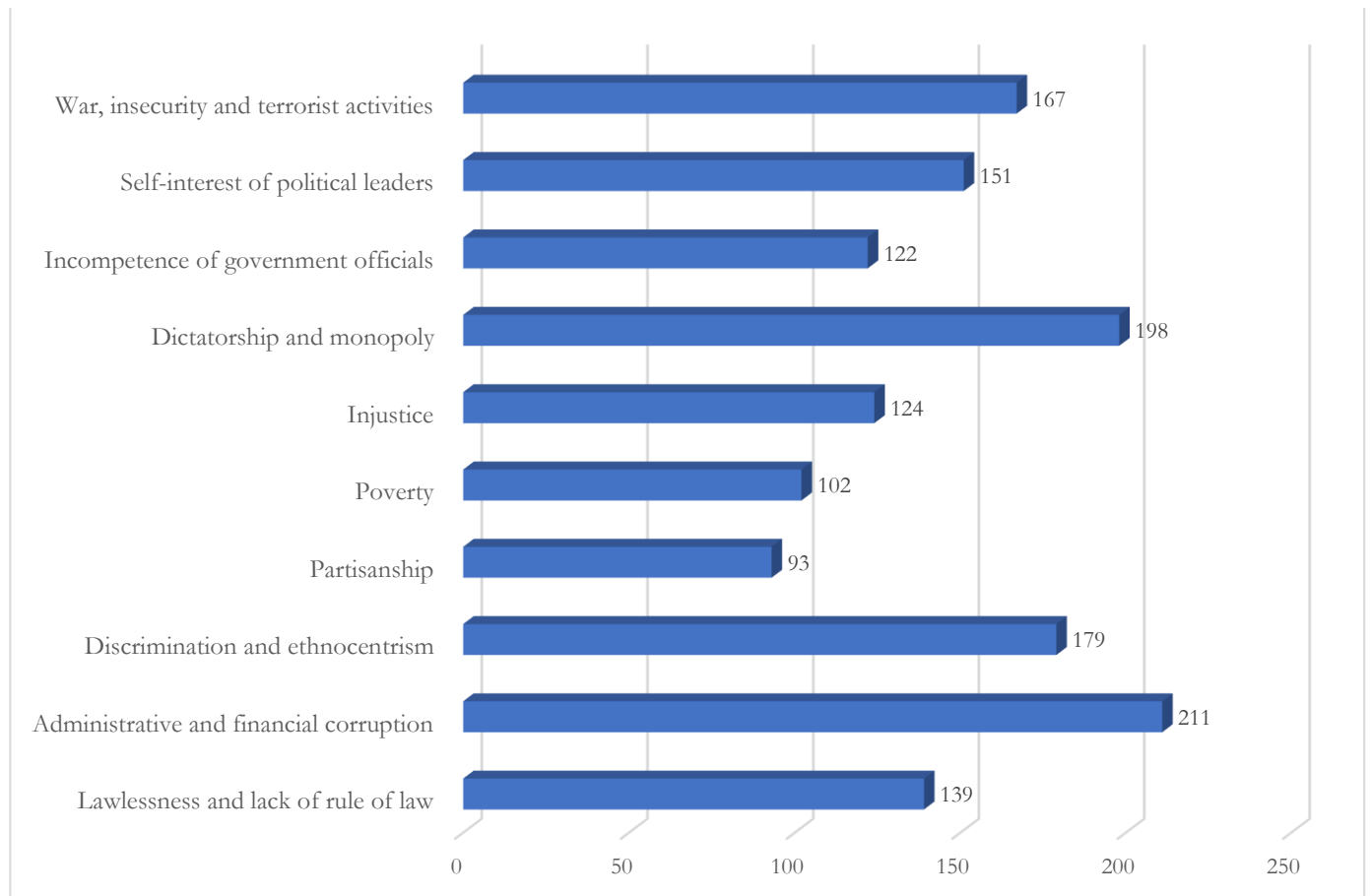


Figure 12. The degree of political legitimacy of the government

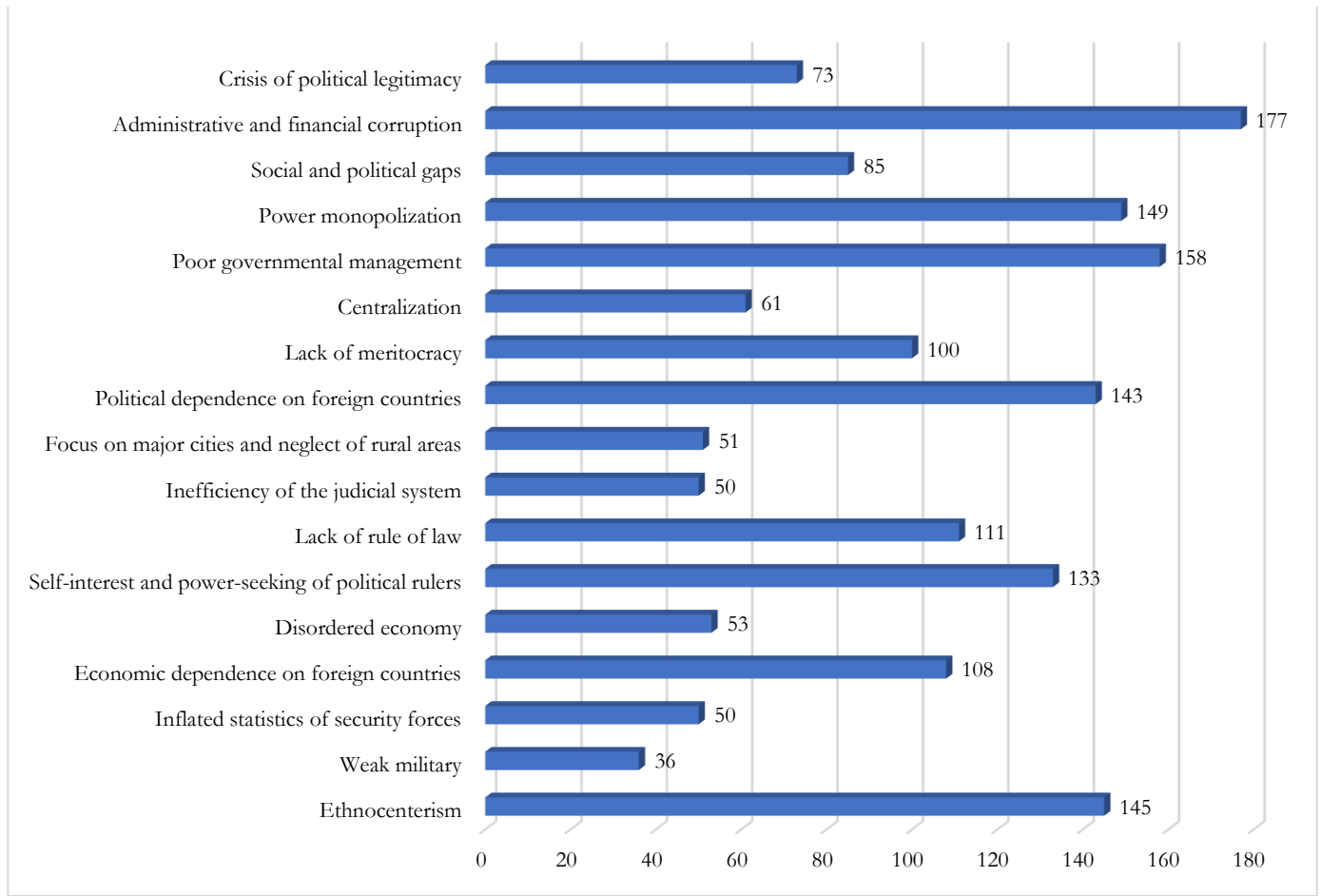
The failure of the system of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan did not happen all at once, but there were various factors and many problems that over time weakened the system of the republic and created a political crisis. The most crucial problems that existed during the republic state are analyzed based on the respondents' attitudes. Figure 13. Indicates the most decisive problem during the republic was administrative and financial corruption, which 211 out of 225 respondents mentioned this problem. The second problem that his highlighted by the participants is dictatorship which has chosen by 198 out of 225 people. The third problem was discrimination and ethnocentrism 179 out of 225 people mentioned discrimination and ethnocentrism as the most acute problems in the republic period.



**Figure 13.** The most important problems in the period of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

The republican system in Afghanistan could not strengthen its foundations during two decades. Various factors caused the democratic system to fall apart and collapse after two decades. The vital factors that caused the downfall of the system, based on participants views are as follows. Financial and administrative corruption, which 177 out of 225 respondents mentioned this problem. The second factor that caused the downfall of the republic state was the managerial weakness of the top-level officials that 158 participants from 225 respondents mentioned it. The third factor that resulted in downfall of the government was the monopolization of the power in the top-level officials, especially the president himself, which was answered by 149 participants among the respondents. The fourth major factor that caused the collapse of the system was ethnocentrism and discrimination, which was mentioned by 145 respondents out of 225. The fifth factor is political dependence on foreign countries, which weakened and collapsed the Afghan government on the eve of the withdrawal of NATO forces and the reduction of financial aid. Following that, there are many other factors such as lack of rule of law, economic dependence on foreign countries, lack of meritocracy, imaginary statistics and figures of security forces, crisis of political legitimacy.





**Figure 14.** The most important factors of the downfall of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

The fall Republic state of Afghanistan has created many problems in the Afghan society, and according to the opinion of the respondents, which is reflected in Figure 15, the most significant problem that the people are currently facing is poverty. Out of 225 respondents, 215 said that poverty is the most acute problem.

The second problem is the restriction of women from education, work and clothing, which 176 out of 225 people mentioned this issue. The third problem is closing schools and educational challenges, which 168 respondents considered as the most significant problem in the current situation. Other problems such as ethnic domination, political legitimacy, and ethnic exclusion also deteriorated and fostered the fall of the republic state.

The respondents have been asked to share their experience and opinion about how the fall of the republic of Afghanistan could have been prevented. Figure 16, shows that fight against ethnicism and the unity of the ethnic groups who live in Afghanistan are the answer of the majority of the respondents. 71 out of the 225 said to fight against ethnicism and discrimination. In the second step, to prevent the fall of the Republic, they stated fighting against corruption. In the third step, the political participation of ethnic groups and the provision of social justice are mentioned by the research participants.

In the fourth step, the correct management of the armed forces and the military struggle against the Taliban have been mentioned, and 47 people have responded, and in the fifth step, honesty in the peace talks has been read, which has been raised by 45 people. Pursuing meritocracy, preventing the monopoly of power, implementing laws, not depending on foreigners, transparent elections, poverty alleviation and giving a role to parties have been mentioned among the issues that by implementing these things, the government could have prevented the collapse of the system.

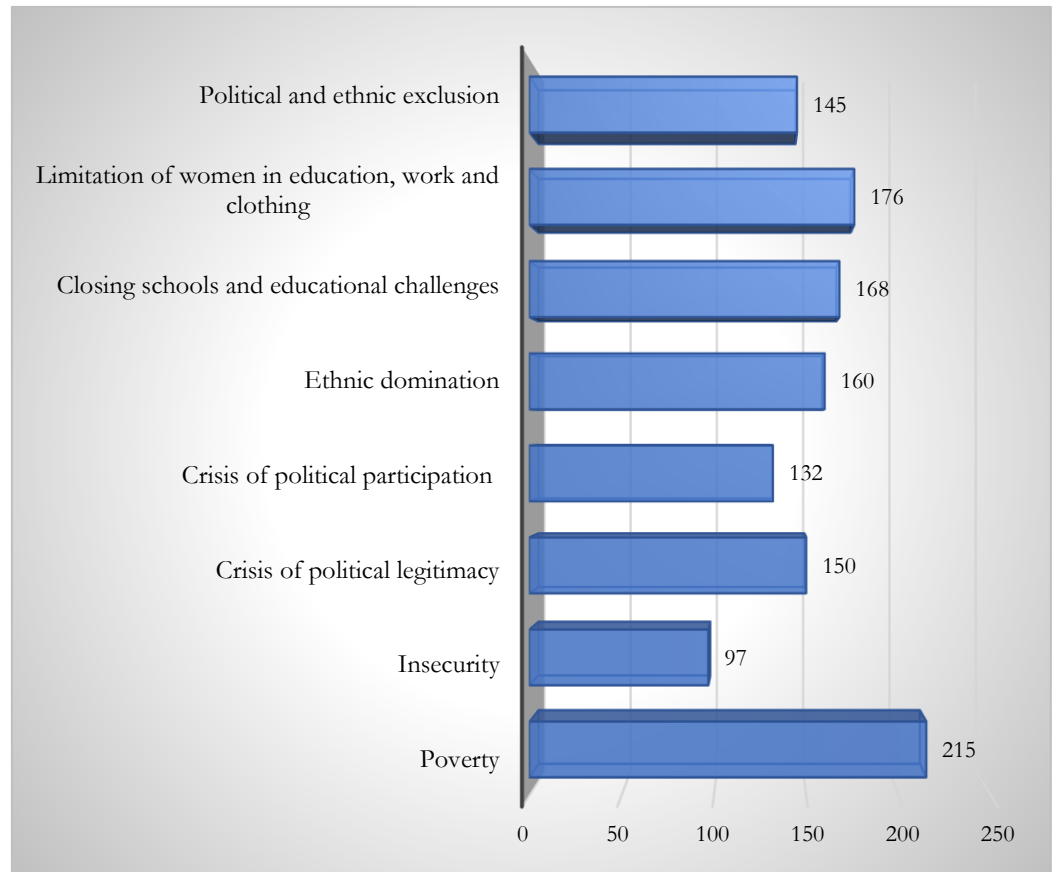


Figure 15. The most important problem after the fall of the republic.

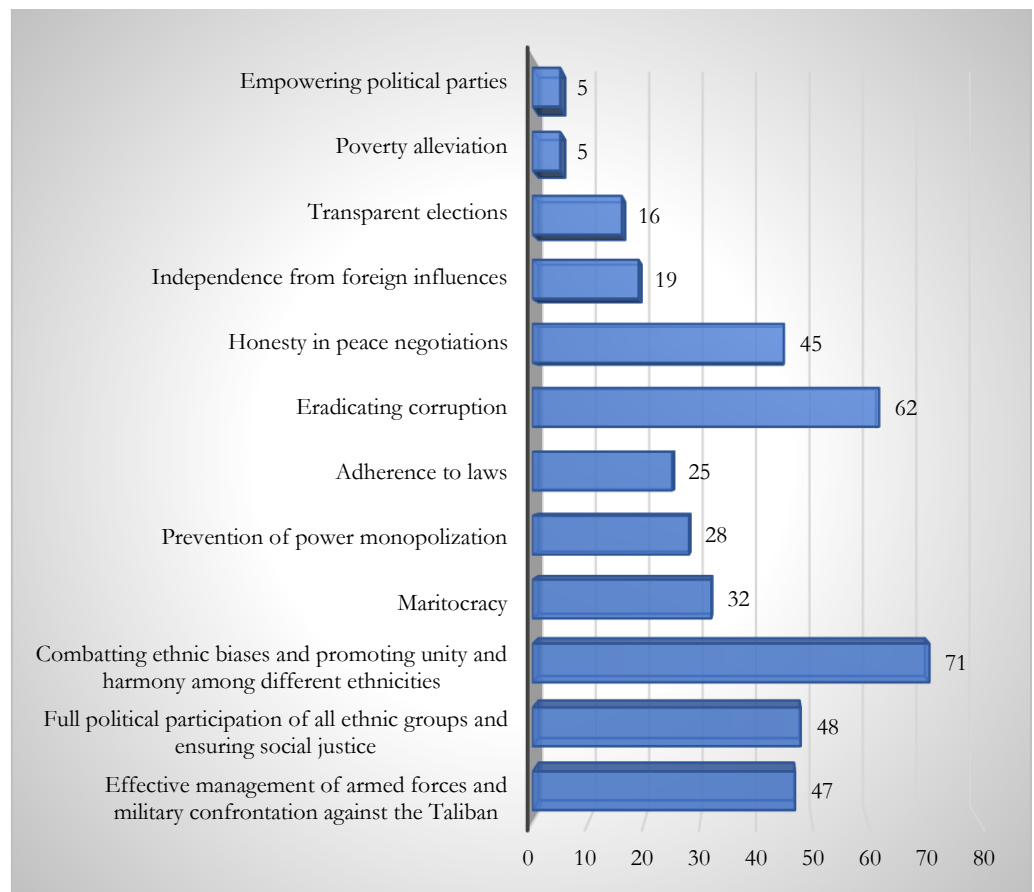


Figure 16. The solution to prevent the fall of the republic based on the views of the participants.

In the current situation, Afghanistan is in a political crisis – the republican system fell apart, the legislature was abolished, the economic and business foundations destroyed, and people are struggling with poverty. Meanwhile; In this respect, the respondents have been asked about the type of system that can be effective solution for political stability and overcoming the existing political challenges. Figure 17 shows that 37% of respondents suggested the political participation of all ethnic groups in an elected government. 28% of the respondents suggested federal system, 19% of the respondents were pro an inclusive Islamic government, 10% of the respondents showed interest for the division of Afghanistan based on ethnicity, 3% of the respondents were pro parliamentary system and 3% of the respondents preferred the monarchic system.

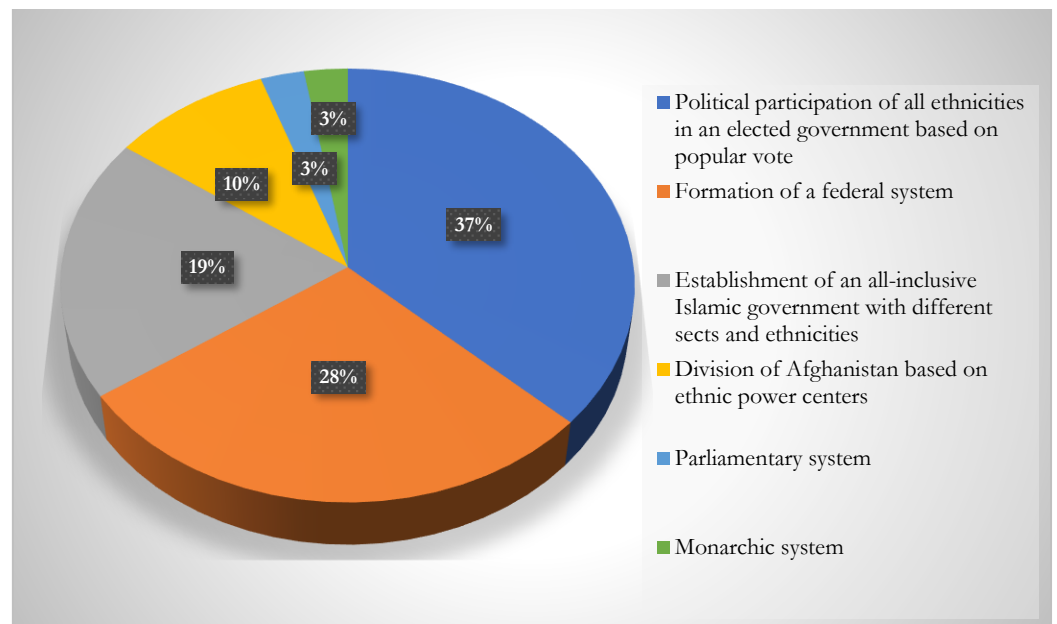


Figure 17. A political solution to the current situation in Afghanistan

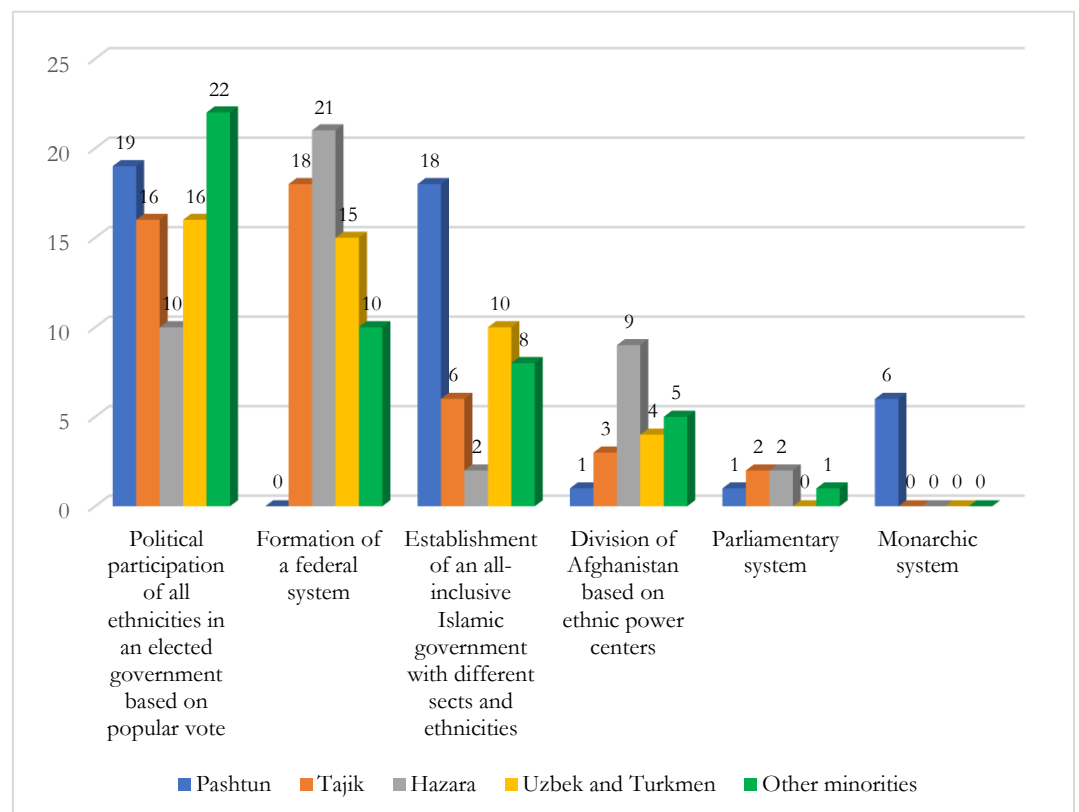


Figure 18. The political solution of the current situation in Afghanistan with the analysis of ethnicity.

There is a debate between Afghanistan's intellectuals and politicians on the type of Afghanistan's political system, and each group and stratum will reveal their political views according to their wishes. Since ethnic politics has been ruling in Afghanistan, even now, the type of future political system of Afghanistan is being analyzed from the ethnic dimension in social media. Therefore, the type of political system that can be the future political solution of Afghanistan analyzed based on the ethnic fact by the answers of the respondents in Figure 18.

Afghanistan's history has always been marked by political turmoil, experiencing over forty years of war and insecurity. A stable and resilient system has never taken root in Afghanistan; instead, most governments have collapsed due to insurgency, coups, and internal conflicts. The collapse of the republic in Afghanistan also had various internal and external factors, reaching its peak with the intensity of war, insecurity, and the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan, leading to a political and military crisis, resulting in the downfall of the republic.

The data from this research indicates that administrative corruption, ethnic politics, a centralized and individual-centric system, ethnic discrimination, war and insecurity, injustice, electoral fraud, and political conflicts among leaders, citizens' dissatisfaction with the government, multi-dimensional games played by powerful global nations regarding Afghanistan, interventions by neighboring countries in Afghan political affairs, the failure of government authorities and politicians to adhere to democratic principles, and the personal abuse of government resources by the powerful and governmental officials all paved the way for the collapse of the republican system. With the fall of the republic, Afghan citizens are grappling with hunger and poverty.

The change of the republican system, the exacerbation of the political crisis, and the absence of a government based on the will of the people, coupled with the lack of recognition by the United Nations and other countries, have multiplied the problems of the Afghan people. The future of Afghanistan appears uncertain and dark.

## 6. Conclusions

Afghanistan is a country with a long bloody and tensions history and always has been the center of political conflicts between domestic, regional and global powers. The political problem of Afghanistan is very complex and multifaceted. The intra-ethnic tensions inside and the involvement of neighboring countries, regional and world powers have turned Afghanistan into a swamp of war and terrorism. Afghanistan has never tasted the sweet flavor of political stability and a system based on political independence, especially in the last four decades, and the people of Afghanistan have never become a real nation, but ethnic politics has always been dominant in the country. Therefore, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan could not keep its foundations strong and stable during two decades as the result of internal and external factors caused to collapse. It has been found that the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has not been able to strengthen and implement the foundations and principles of democracy like transparency, free and fair elections, meritocracy, fair distribution of power, rule of law, observance of citizen's rights, balanced development, political participation and equality.

It has been found that Administrative and financial corruption, dictatorship and monopoly, discrimination and ethnicism, war and insecurity and terrorist activities, personal gain, lawlessness and lack of rule of law, injustice, incompetence of officials, poverty and partisanship were the most acute problem in the republican period that are caused the fall of republic government in Afghanistan. In addition, lack of rule of law, economic dependence on foreign countries, lack of meritocracy, social gaps and political, imaginary fake statistics and figures of security forces, crisis of political legitimacy, centralism, disordered economy, and ignoring rural areas, inefficiency of judicial system and weak army were the root for the republic collapse.

With the escape of President Ashraf Ghani and the Taliban's takeover, Afghanistan has been confronted with major political, economic, and social problems. The most pressing problems, prioritized by respondents, include poverty, restrictions on women in areas such as education, employment and clothing, closure of schools, educational challenges, ethnic dominance, political legitimacy crisis, political and ethnic exclusion, political participation crisis, and insecurity. Since the Taliban came to power and established the Islamic Emirate,

no country has officially recognized their government, and a political crisis prevails in Afghanistan.

Respondents in this study propose the following political systems to overcome the existing political crisis and institutionalize political stability in the country: 37% advocate for the political participation of all ethnic groups in a republican elected government based on people's votes, 28% suggest the formation of a federal system, 19% propose the establishment of an all-encompassing Islamic government representing various religions and ethnicities, 10% support the division of Afghanistan based on ethnic power centers, 3% favor a parliamentary system, and another 3% prefer a monarchy. The findings presented in Figure 18 indicate that Pashtuns lean more towards a centralized system and an Islamic government, while Hazaras, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmen lean more towards a decentralized system and the ethnic minorities express a preference for the establishment of an inclusive republic based on the people's votes.

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Research Article

# Objects as Expression of Power, Religion and Therapy: The “Country” Pots in the Bamenda Grassfields Fondoms of Cameroon

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**Abstract:** In most parts of the world especially in Africa, people can be identified and distinguished through objects. These objects which some are worn on the body or carried along are decorated with symbols which could be decoded by those who comprehend their cultural connotations. The object this article focuses on is the indigenous or ‘country’ pots of the Bamenda Grassfields, pots which were used in the past by women in the kitchen, by traditional medical doctors and by traditional leaders; notables and heads of secret societies. Today, these country pots are not very visible in the kitchen as it was the case before because of the introduction of other containers. The questions raised by this paper are: What is the place of the country pot in the lives of the Bamenda Grassfields people? What is the symbolism of the motifs represented on the Bamenda Grassfields country pots? What are the change currently taking place in the production and use of these pots? The objectives of the article are to examine the roles and find out the meanings of the motifs represented on pots. It also explores the changes which are taking place in the production, commercialisation and use of the country pots. Data for this article was collected using the qualitative method and this data was analysed using content analysis and interpreted soon after collection was over. The interpretation was done with the theories of cultural ecology of Steward, functionalism of Radcliff-Brown and Malinowski, symbolic anthropology of Geertz and cultural evolution of Tylor and Morgan. Findings reveal that the country pots are an aspect of material culture of the Bamenda Grassfields. They are of very great cultural value and play a fundamental role in these cultures; they are an expression of power, religion, healing as well as communion. The country pots like any other cultural element, if they are valorised, they will continue to identify the people from generation to generation.

**Keywords:** country pots; expression of power; healing; objects; religion; Bamenda Grassfields; Cameroon

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## 1. Introduction

Containers are very invaluable in African societies in general and in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon in particular for they are objects of everyday use. They are used in the kitchen by the women, in healing by traditional medical doctors, and in religious ceremonies by secret societies. These objects also serve as a great source of income to the artists who manufacture them. Containers in general and some country pots in particular are objects which express power. In this paper, the author concentrates on the country pots. Pots are any of various types of containers; usually round, especially one used for cooking food. Any of a variety of containers with or without a lid, especially for storing food or liquids. Indigenous or country pots in this paper refer to the pots which have origins or which are produced in the Bamenda Grassfields fondoms and whose knowledge or technology has been handed down from one generation to another.

Gosselain (1999), Notué and Triaca (2005), Forni (2007), and Carine and Wang (2021) have written on the pots lay particular emphasis on pots produced from clay. Gosselain, concentrates on the processing of clay pots and symbols in Sub-Saharan Africa. He lays particular interest on the prohibitions in pottery production. Notué and Triaca (2000), note that the Mankon Kingdom collection is made up of receptacles and other containers. Among these containers are pots. Forni like Gosselain writes on the production of clay pots. She goes

further to give the functions of clay pots and their symbolism in the Grassfields of Cameroon. Carine and Wang look at pottery as an expression of art therapy in the Western Bamileke Cameroon. This article entitled “Objects as Expression of Power, Religion and Therapy: The *Country* Pots in the Bamenda Grassfields Fondoms of Cameroon”, covers three types of pots; clay, wooden and woven pots. Apart from the functions of pots, the article equally pays particular attention on the cultural significances of the motifs represented on the pots. The last part of the paper concentrates on the changes surrounding the *country* pots.

Country pots in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon exist in three major types; those made from clay (clay pots), those made from wood (wooden pots) and woven pots (those produced from grass and fibre). These objects play diverse roles in the lives of the Bamenda Grassfields people specifically and the Grassfields people in general. Some masks jujus use the pot to cook protective medicine for the jujus. Large pots serve as containers to store food (cereals like maize and beans). In the Bamenda Grassfields area, production centres of these pots are Kedjom, Kom, Oku, Babessi, Nsei and Bamessing.

The Bamenda or Western Grassfields is a region that corresponds to the Anglophone North West Region of the Republic of Cameroon in Africa. The part of the Grassfields that was under English Administration known as the ‘Bamenda Grassfields’ (Warnier, 1975: 43). The territory is characterised by high plateau with an altitude ranging from 1000m to 1800m which lay on either side of a volcanic mountain range – running south-west and north-east from the Gulf of Guinea to the Tibati, whose highest regional peaks are Mount Bamboutos (2740m) and Mount Oku (3008m). With a surface of roughly 16,800 square kilometres. The Western boarder is separated from the Upper Cross River basin by a sharp escarpment. A range of hills runs north-east to the Gayama gap and divides it from the basin of the Katsina Ala River. It is partially marked off from Takum area and south-western Adamawa by an arc of mountains (Eyongetah & Brain, 1974).

The Grassfields in general and the Bamenda Grassfields area in particular are a country of grassy hills and mountains with open gallery forests. The natural vegetation of this region consists of short and tall grasses with raffia and oil palms growing along the courses of the rivers and streams and banana trees surrounding the compounds. The trees serve as raw materials to wood carvers who use them to produce a variety of pots. The oil and raffia palms as well as grasses especially the spear grass (*heteropogon contortus*) serve as raw materials to weavers who manufacture woven pots, and the abundant clay found in areas of the Ndop Plain is used by potters to make magnificent earthenware such as pots, jars, bowls, pipes, cups and many more.

Nkwi and Warnier (1982, p. 12) note that most chiefdoms in the Western Grassfields have traditions regarding their origins. According to these traditions, the chiefdoms of the Western Grassfields can be classified under five headings, depending on their origins: the Tikar, the Widekum, the Bali-Chamba, those who claim yet other origins outside the Grassfields and the aborigines.

All the peoples of the Bamenda Grassfields are organised in fondoms of different sizes. Most of them are independent (Warnier, 1975, p. 42). Almost everywhere, *chiefdomship* is hereditary and the *Fon* is a sacred figure. The distribution of power between fons, regulatory societies, lineage and ward heads varied from fondom to fondom as well as the degree of concentration of power, the less centralised being probably the Meta is among stateless societies (Warnier, 1975, p. 32-33). The political structure of most, if not all, Bamenda Grassfields fondoms are, basically similar. The *Fon* has very great executive authority next to the village regulatory society known as *kenifon*. Chiefs, notables and quarter heads also form part of the political structure. Most Bamenda Grassfields fondoms are patrilineal (apart from the matrilineal Kom and the Aghem societies) and highly ranked societies. The political system is based on hereditary traditional authority and access to power is highly determined by direct descent. On the political strata of these fondoms therefore, the *kenifon* comes first followed by the *fon*, notables and quarter-heads. Only the *fon* and a few notables have the privilege to own and use indigenous pots especially those that bear anthropomorphic or zoomorphic or anthropo-zoomorphic motifs.

The people of the Bamenda Grassfields are polytheistic, they believe in religions such as the African traditional religion, Christianity and Islam. Most Bamenda Grassfielders are animists who believe that spirits inhabit some natural objects and such spirits control the lives of these people. They equally have many gods and each has a specific role in the society. If these gods are venerated, they will be very benevolent (nice) but if neglected, they are capable of punishing the living. In Bamenda Grassfields religion, pots are very instrumental, they are used by different societies known to the people as ‘houses’ such as *kenifon* house, *samba* house,

*njub* house and many more. Many of these houses or their members come together once a week or month to discuss issues concerning the house. When they meet, palm wine is heated in the clay pot and then put in the carved pot and then shared out to the members present to drink. Christianity is the religion of many people of the Bamenda Grassfields unlike Islam which is found mostly in Sabga, a small quarter in Kedjom Ketingu in Tubah Sub Division, Mezam Division. In some Christian churches, clay pots are used as musical instrument.

The people of the Bamenda Grassfields are involved in numerous economic ventures, namely, farming, arts, hunting and many more. In the domain of farming, the people are engaged in crops cultivation as well as animal husbandry. The crops which they grow like the animals they keep serve for domestic, commercial and religious use.

In the aspect of arts, Bamenda Grassfields people produce varied articles (among which are pots) using raw materials such as wood, clay, and grasses which they obtain from the immediate environment. These objects in general and the pots in particular are produced by both the male and female folks who transform elements of nature to create culture. Just like farming, the arts objects which the people make are destined for home use, for commercialisation and for use in rituals by secret societies. The artists generate lots of revenue from their products selling them both in the local as well as neighbouring markets. Some of these objects are sold in big towns in Cameroon and others even exported.

The *country* pots of the Bamenda Grassfields like all other aspects of culture is gradually witnessing some changes in the domain of production, commercialisation and use. The activity of wood carving and wooden pots sculpturing was done with special wood types and by a specific class of people in the past but today, many young people are engaged in it using all sorts of wood. The ruling class (the *Fons*, notables and heads of secret societies) were the main clients and users of the indigenous pots in the past. Today, artists do not only sell their products to traditional dignitaries, they expose these objects which they sell to both local and foreign buyers. Some of them carry their pots to the markets, both local as well as neighbouring markets and sometimes such objects are sold at giveaway amounts.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The researcher employed mainly the qualitative method in this article and the method was grouped under aspects such as selection of research participants, data collection, data collection tools and procedure and data analysis.

### 2.1 Selection of Research Participants

The participants who took part in this study were selected using the snowball sampling method. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method where new participants are recruited by other participants to take part in a research study. It begins with one or more study participants and then continues on the basis of references from these participants. The process continues until the researcher reaches the desired sample, a saturation point. The snowball sampling technique was to ensure that a wide range of the study topic was covered.

### 2.2 Data Collection

Data for the study was collected using participant observation, and in-depth interviews. The researcher who is actually a sculptor in wood participated in the carving of some wooden pots. That is, he worked with several artists both in the forests and the workshops where most of the works are produced. In the course of the carving, the researcher got to understand the different wood types and techniques that the sculptors use. The researcher visited several women who produce woven pots as well as the men and women who make clay pots. In some of his visits, the researcher and these artists went to the different places where raw materials are collected. This gave the researcher the opportunity to comprehend how such materials are obtained, transformed into objects and how the objects are commercialised. The researchers equally observed how these pots are used during certain ceremonies which he was allowed to take part in. In-depth interviews were conducted with producers of the different types of country pots. Some of the questions which were established had to do with types of raw materials used in their productions, where and how such materials are obtained. Other questions centred on the symbols on pots and their cultural significance. There were questions on the functions of the indigenous pots in the lives of the people and the last part of the questions dwelled on changes which are taking place in the production, commercialisation and use of the country pots. In all, 20 artists were interviewed, 8 carvers of wooden pots; 6 producers of clay pots and 6 producers of woven pots. In-depth interviews were also conducted with some *Fons*, notables and heads of secret societies. With these category of



individuals the researcher asked questions which had to do with interpretation of symbols on pots, the functions of these pots as well as the changes surrounding the country pots. The interviews with these notables gave a greater insight into the meanings of the symbols used on the indigenous pots, and their roles in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon.

### 2.3 Data Collection Tools and Procedure

The researcher used the observation and interview guides respectively to collect data for the study. Among the questions that featured on the guides were types of raw materials used in the production of indigenous pots, where and how such materials are obtained. Other questions centred on the symbols on pots and their cultural significance. There were equally questions which focused on the roles of the indigenous pots in the lives of the people in particular and the culture in general. The last set of questions concentrated on changes which are taking place in the production, commercialisation and use of the country pots.

In the course of the observations and interviews, the researcher took detail notes in his exercise books. Most of the interviews with the carvers of pots were carried out in the course of the carving exercise since the researcher also participated in the carving. Interviews with the women who produce woven and clay pots was often done in the evenings when these women had returned from their farms as from 6pm. As regards the men who produce pots from clay, the researcher interviewed them most times at 5pm in the evening. And most of the interview sessions lasted for about an hour. For interviews which did not go to the end, the informants gave the researcher appointments to continue with such interviews on later dates.

### 2.4 Data Analysis

Data was analysed soon after data collection was over. Data which was audio-taped using a digital voice recorder was replayed many times and then transcribed verbatim. After the transcription, the voice recorder was replayed over and over to verify the quality and reliability of the transcription. This transcription was done into Microsoft word. It was analysed using content analysis. The data was read, coded, clustered and then sub-themes and themes were developed. The contents of the pictures were interpreted iconographically

## 3. Results and Discussion

Indigenous pots go beyond mere objects used in the kitchen, they cut across all the aspects of the society. They are not only used to store food, water and other items, they serve diverse purposes in the hands of varied individuals and societies. The findings of this paper are presented in the following order: typology of *country* pots, interpretation of motifs adorned on pots, functions of pots and the evolution in the production and uses of these pots.

### 3.1 The Typology of Bamenda Grassfields Country Pots

In the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon, there are containers in varieties depending on the raw materials used in their production. In the section of the article, the theory of cultural ecology developed by Steward (1972) was used for data analysis and interpretation. In this theory, he attempts to explain human condition in relation to the environment, the environment determines culture. This article demonstrates how the people of the Bamenda Grassfields transform elements of the environment or nature such as clay, wood as well as grass or fibre to fabricate culture, the *country* pots. Commenting on such containers and the materials used in their production, Notué and Triaca (2005) in a study in the Mankon kingdom note that:

*The Mankon heritage containers are a large variety of pans, vases, cups, pots, bowls, jugs, pitchers, bags and other containers made of earthenware, wood or other materials, with different uses, ritual ceremonial objects, cooking utensils and so on. The pieces that are used to preserve or prepare products for worship or prestige (camwood powder and various drinks for initiations, palm wine and oil for libations, sources, tobacco, etc.) are sculpted, woven or modelled with great care (p.48-50).*

In the field, the researcher found out that there are three major types of country pots. Such pots are categorised according to the raw materials used in their production. These objects have some main centres of production as demonstrated in table 1 below. These pots include those made from clay, wood and grass or fibre (from raphia palm).

**Table 1.** Pots and the main centres of production in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon

Type of pots	Major production centre
Clay	Babessi, Bamessing, Nsei
Wooden	Oku, Kedjom, Kom
Woven	Kedjom, Kom

*Source: Author's development (20.01.2024).*

### 3.1.1 Clay Pots

These are pots which are made from clay (see figure 1 below). Clay is a type of soil which is soft, sticky. It can be moulded when wet to make bricks, pottery and ceramics. Clay is plastic when moist but hard when fired (Moffor, 2022c). Carine and Wang (2021) comment that the art of pottery needs creativity as they put it:

*Pottery demands a great deal of time and calmness, which motivates one to let go of their thoughts and take the opportunity to discover the depths of themselves. It may be viewed as a type of meditation for some. This is also the tangible outcome that it produces: a bowl, a plate, a vase, or a sculpture that individuals created from start to finish (p. 76).*

Clay articles are produced by potters both men and women who manipulate and transform clay into magnificent utensils of great cultural utility. The production centres are Nsei, Bamessing and Babessi (see table 1 above), in the Ndop Plain in the Ngoketunjia Division. Among these centres, Forni (2000), says that Nsei is without a doubt the largest pottery producing village not only in Ngoketunjia Division but also in the Western Grassfields.



**Figure 1.** A country pot made from clay used for the cooking of food.

*Source: Tikere's archive, taken on 20.01.2020 at 10am in an elderly woman's kitchen.*

Pots are often described as the “work of women.” This expression implies that they can be identified as women’s distinctive contribution to the family’s economy and the community’s social life. Until the 1940s - 50s, all Babessi women were taught to mould clay pots. Even though many opted for other kinds of income-generating activities in their adult lives, they were helping with the collection of clay or with the firing of the pots. Young boys and men, on the other hand, would participate in the production of clay pots only as



occasional helpers, and even then, only in activities that are not directly connected to the shaping of the pot or its decoration (Forni, 2000, p. 43). Although women were engaged in pots production, the latter manufactured ordinary pots while the men produce objects used by the men themselves and sacred groups.

Clay pots are in diverse sizes, shapes and importance and Forni (2000) state that:

*Cooking pots (wang ku, ku bang) and serving/eating bowls (keyo, ku to, ku beko) of different sizes and degree of elaboration constitute the most common items produced by local potters. Cooking pots are produced mainly by women and elder male potters (who often specialise in the production of cooking pots with handles and lid. Cooking pots are a good item for women to produce, as a woman can never be sure to be at work place free of interruption. The care of children and the many duties around the compound may, in fact, distract a potter from her clay work and it is thus preferable to engage in the production of simple items that do not require a lot of work for their completion. Eating bowls, on the other hand, are produced prevalently by men, especially the ku to and ku beko, whose decoration can reach the highest degree of refinement and complication found on Nsei pots. (p. 139-140).*

Some of the clay pots are produced together with their stands. The majority of these stands are woven out of grass while others are sculpted out of wood and decorated with some emblematic motifs like the lizard, bats' head, the scorpion and the earth spider. Such pots with stands are used by specific individual and social groups in the Bamenda Grassfields. Those which are destined for cooking do not need any stands since they have to be placed on the fire site.

Commenting on prohibitions in pottery, Gosselain (1999) notes that from a technical point of view, breaching a taboo may affect three stages of the manufacturing process: clay extraction (clay suddenly disappears, it loses its workability or it becomes unexploitable); drying (pots crack, even if sheltered from the sun); firing (pots explode during the process). These accidents relate to external factors such as local pedology or meteorological fluctuations, that is. factors that potters can hardly master regardless of their knowledge or skill (p. 209).

In every area of the continent, the most frequently occurring prohibitions concern sexual intercourse, menstruation and pregnancy. For instance, numerous potters avoid making love on the eve of clay extraction, a prescription that is sometimes attached to the whole manufacturing process and may be followed by all people present. Similarly, menstruating or pregnant women are not allowed to extract or manipulate clay, and sometimes even to touch unfired vessels. If people mostly fear that such persons could harm the clay deposit or cause breakage during drying and firing, some of them also speak of potential danger for the woman or the foetus. Among Igbo of Nigeria, the shaping of vessels could result in a difficult childbirth for pregnant women (Barley, 1994, p. 92). And according to some Balom and Sanaga potters of Cameroon, they could give birth to a stillborn baby if they entered the clay pit (Gosselain, 1999).

### 3.1.2 Wooden pots

Wooden pots in the Bamenda Grassfields are objects produced mostly in fondoms like Kedjom, Kom and Oku. As the name implies, these are objects produced from wood and expert carvers know exactly the type of tree to use in sculpturing the country pot. Wood best for their production is fresh wood. Jefferson (1974), Mveng (1980), Bohannan and Curtin (1995) and Knopfli (1999) all asset that sculptors work with wood in general and green wood in particular, so that objects will not crack too much when dry although cracks appear in most pieces. To Mveng (1980), Bohannan and Curtin (1995), Kassam and Megerssa (1996) and Knopfli (1999), good carvers know exactly which species of tree to choose for a particular piece of work, and almost every type of object requires a particular kind of wood. Wood for carving is got from individual as well as community forest (Moffor, 2022c).

Experienced carvers in Kedjom, Kom as well as Oku use three main tree types for carving in general and for the carving of wooden pots in particular. Out of these three, the most used tree for carving is *Cordia platithyrsa* or gum stick in Pidgin English. This type is preferred by most carvers because it is one of the most resistant trees. Insects do not attack it; it does not crack easily and it is not very heavy. This tree which is propagated through seeds and cuts take about 17 years to become mature for carving. An object produced from a mature *cordial platithyrsa* can last for more than a century without needing any repairs (Moffor, 2022c).

The next type of tree used in sculpturing wooden pots is *Ficus oreodryadum*. This tree known as fig tree in Pidgin English is heavy and also resistant to insect bite. It was and is still highly respected in the Grassfields today for many reasons. The tree like all trees according

to the Grassfields people, houses the gods and this is one of the reasons why it is found in most, if not all, compounds in this region. They are planted either in the centre of the compound or in the back yard, and considering its high religious value, the tree cannot be cut carelessly (Moffor, 2022c).

Different types of fig tress exist but the major ones found in this area are *figus elastic*, the rubber fig or rubber tree, *figus salicifolia* and mistletoe fig (*figus deltoidea*). *Figus elastic* or the rubber fig has large leaves but not very common in the Grassfields area so, it is rarely used in carving. The next is *figus salicifolia*, this type has slender and long leaves and is mostly planted in the shrines and at the limits to act as boundary demarcation. This is the most used fig free for carving. The last type of fig tree common in this region is *mistletoe fig* (*figus deltoidea*). This is classed as a perennial variety of *figus* that has thick waxy delta-shaped leaves. This type does not grow very tall and it is also planted in shrines.

Another traditional tree used in wood carving in general and the sculpturing of pots in particular is *pochylobus edulis*, black or bush butter in Pidgin English. This tree, when dry, is easily attacked by insects and it cracks easily. Carvers mix wood gun and saw dust to fill cracked portions.

The acquisition of wood for the manufacture of objects, especially, wood for carving, required and still requires some ritual performance because these trees house the spirits. Usually, some rituals were and are performed to appease the gods: to beg for permission from them (the gods) to cut ‘their’ tree as well as infringe in ‘their’ location. Very often, a branch of this tree in the case of *kevem* or *figus oreodryadum* is cut and planted somewhere else in the compound to replace the mature tree cut (Moffor, 2022c).

The wooden pots are sculpted by the male folk only, this is because there are taboos surrounding wood carving. Women are not allowed to go into where this activity is performed. In the days of old, only elderly men who had had a long period of training in wood carving could be ordained to carve. This was because their age coupled with their long training permitted them to produce objects which were invaluable in the society.

Some of the pots produced by expert carvers were and are decorated with many symbolic motifs with others showing scenes of important ceremonies like dancing, hunting and birth celebration in the fendom. Some of these pots are very large and can hold many litres or gallons of palm wine. A few artists demonstrate their artistry by carving a single pot that has two pots, one beneath and the other above as demonstrated in the figure below (figure 2). Such a pot portrays the ingenuity of its creator. They are made in different sizes to meet the needs of the secret society that owns it; this explains why some of them are black, white and even red.



**Figure 2.** A large two in one sculpted wooden pot used for storing of dry maize.  
Source: Tikere’s archive, taken on 10.10.2005 at 2pm at a sculptor’s workshop.

### 3.1.3 Woven Pots

These are pots made from grass (spear grass – *heteropogon contortus*) and fibre from raphia bamboo as demonstrated in figure 3 below. Kom and Kedjom are the major production centres of this object. It is the activity of the women and women from sixty years and above can often be seen weaving pots, baskets and bowls. They are tired and many of them cannot perform tasks that require a lot of energy like farming. Commenting on the fact that only elderly women are engaged in woven pots production, an elderly woman, a producer of these pots said that:

*As you must have noticed, only elderly women like myself are doing this work. I used to do it as a part time job when I still had the strength to work on the farms. Today with my age, I can no longer go to the farm anymore. Now that I only stay at home, I take weaving as my main activity. My children help me in the collection of the raw materials I need. I continue in this activity because I cannot just stay without doing something (12.01.2024).*

Unlike the bowls which are produced with lids, generally, pots do not have lids. Most of the pots woven have three handles (see figure 3) on which the object can be handled. Such pots are meant to hold or store dry food stuff like maize, beans and groundnuts



**Figure 3.** A woven pot with three handles used for storing dry food stuff.  
*Source: Tikere's archive, taken on 14.08.2019 at 10am in Oku Palace Museum.*

This container is often kept in a clean and dry place because the materials with which it is made are not humid friendly. Once it is used, it is carefully cleaned, dried and stored in a clean place to avoid it from getting bad (Moffor, 2022e).

### 3.2 An Insight in the Motifs Represented on Indigenous Pots

Pots like many sculpted objects are splendidly decorated with anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, anthro-zoomorphic symbols as well as some geometric figures by wood carvers who have a mastery of the culture in which these objects have to serve. These artists do not only invest time and energy to carve, they also do so in painting their objects with symbolic colours of black and red. Such colours are used according to the aspirations of the users. Some of the motifs which are conspicuous on the Bamenda Grassfields country pots include human heads and figures, the elephant, the frog, the lizard, the scorpion, the double gong and many more. This portion of the article which concentrates on the cultural significance of human heads and figures, the elephant and the frog motif is interpreted using the theory of symbolic anthropology of Geertz (1973). A theory which focuses on the symbolic rather than material aspect of culture. It is the study of culture through the interpretation of the meaning of symbols, values and beliefs in society.

#### 3.2.1 Human heads and figures

Some carvings present only the human head, others portray humans with raised hands

meanwhile others have a combination of both and each has a specific cultural connotation. The human head for instance is symbolic because the head is regarded as the house of a spirit. Bamenda Grassfields belief system considers the human head as a means through which the people can communicate with their ancestors. Here, when a man dies and is buried, a small stick or stone is placed on his 'head' on his grave. This is a symbolic head which is prepared on his grave. Whenever there is a celebration in his honour, the head of the family performs some rituals where he pours some palm wine on this head while uttering some words of prayer. This head therefore, serves as a communication channel between the living and the ancestors.

Important to note is the fact that the *Fon* alone has the prerogative to use objects with human heads. Human heads on royal objects may be the means through which the *Fon* and his immediate subordinates - the notables (sub chiefs and fonmakers) can reach the ancestors and the gods. This therefore shows why all royal objects such as pots, bowls, houseposts, doorframes, stools, thrones, title cups as well as the masks bear human heads.

One Bamenda Grassfields *Fon* in an interview told the researcher that:

*The human head is a channel which we use to communicate with our ancestors and gods. We believe that those who have 'gone' (died) ahead of us are still living and occasionally, we must venerate them and in order to do this, we have to perform some rituals on their heads. This is a tradition which I inherited from my father and those who will come after me will continue with the same rituals (01.02.2024).*

The Bamenda Grassfields people like most Grassfielders note that the days of old were characterised by wars and each time these societies were engaged in wars, victims' heads were transported back to the *Fons*. The number of heads obtained in a war portrayed the bravery or might of the society and the *Fon* whose warriors brought back such "trophies" - heads. To show a *Fon's* might, therefore, human heads or figures are engraved on sculptures. A *Fon* using a pot (see figure 4 below) or sitting on a stool or throne adorned with human figures and/or heads presents himself as a successful ruler, who has brought many slaves under captivity.



**Figure 4.** A royal palm wine wooden pot adorned with human heads and figures.  
*Source: Tikere's archive, taken on 10.10.2022 at 11:35am in the palace of Kedjom.*

The indigenous pot above does not only bear human heads, it is equally decorated with motif of human with raised hands at the base ring. Humans with raised hands supporting a pot has two interpretations; they are persons who have been captured in a war. They carry a pot which belongs to the *Fon* a symbol of loyalty and respect. In the second, it represents the whole fondom, that support their leader or people who have to work for the success of the fondom: The people who always turn out to work on the farm of the *Fon*, repair the palace

and perform many other tasks that lead to the growth and smooth running of the fondom. It is an expression of loyalty and respect to the *Fon* they always have to look up to for help and protection being their 'father'.

The human motif is the most used symbol on the Bamenda Grassfields arts. It could appear just in part or as a complete figure as mentioned above, and this could be due to the fact that humans are animals with a difference, and that difference is culture, a major reason for humans' adaptability and success. Social and cultural means of adaptation have been crucially important in hominid evolution. Humans live in society and society is organised life in groups. Humans like many other animals including apes, monkeys, wolves and ants, live in organised groups but human populations however, are organised not only by their habitual social activities and relationships, but also by exposure to a common cultural tradition.

Humans can communicate with other humans through the use of language. Even though other animals do communicate, the medium which humans use is more pronounced. Humans' capacity to think depends on his capacity to possess language. To Kottak (1991, p. 36) language is an arbitrary system of sound symbols combined in a special way to transmit knowledge and ideas. Other animals may use sounds to communicate but they do not use them as humans use words to signify things or to designate abstract concepts like 'pot', 'house', 'statue' 'woman', 'tree' and so on. The use of language by humans allows them to transmit knowledge to other humans, from generation to generation. This humans' ability to communicate knowledge has been reinforced by writing.

Man has the ability to manufacture and use tools. Man's capacity to use tool, depends on the power to think, to invent just as the knowledge of tool and their usage is transmitted from one generation to another. This ability to make and use tools has made man to be able to control his environment as well as other creatures. Humans have been able to trap down other animals to use as food, clothes and shoes. They cut down huge trees which they turn into tangible objects as beds, pots, stools, poles and construct homes.

### 3.2.2 *The elephant*

They are the largest land animals now living. They typically live for 50 to 70 years, but the oldest recorded elephant lived for 82 years. Elephants are herbivores, and spend up to 16 hours a day eating plants. The elephant's trunk is sensitive enough to pick up a single blade of grass, yet strong enough to rip the branches off a tree. If the desired food item is too high up, the elephant will wrap its trunk around the tree or branch and shake its food loose or sometimes simply knock the tree down altogether.

The trunk is also used for drinking. This appendage also plays a key role in many social interactions. Familiar elephants will greet each other by entwining their trunks, much like a handshake. They also use them while play-wrestling, caressing during courtship and mother-child interactions, and for dominance displays; a raised trunk can be a warning or threat, while a lowered trunk can be a sign of submission. Elephants can defend themselves very well by flailing their trunk at unwanted intruders or by grasping and flinging them. An elephant also relies on its trunk for its highly developed sense of smell. The tusk, also known as ivory, is strongly favoured by artists for its carvability.

Elephants live in a structured social order. The social lives of male and female elephants are very different. The females spend their entire lives in tightly knit family groups made up of mothers, daughters, sisters, and aunts. These groups are led by the eldest female, or matriarch. Adult males, on the other hand, live mostly solitary lives. The female's life also involves interaction with other families, clans, and subpopulations. When a group gets too big, a few of the elder daughters will break off and form their own small group. They remain very aware of which local herds are relatives and which are not. The males do live primarily solitary lives, they will occasionally form loose associations with other males. These groups are called bachelor herds. The males spend much more time than the females fighting for dominance with each other. Only the most dominant males will be permitted to breed with cycling females.

Elephants within a herd are usually related, and all members of the tightly knit female group participate in the care and protection of the young. After the initial excitement, the mother will usually select several full-time baby-sitters, or "allomothers", from her group. An elephant is considered an allomother when she is not able to have her own baby. The more allomothers, the better the calf's chances of survival and the more free time its mother has to feed herself. A benefit of being an allomother is that she can gain experience or receive assistance when caring for her own calf.

In the Bamenda Grassfields, the elephant head which is a motif could be seen on pots,

stools, thrones and on masks. Objects like the pots, may portray only the head of the elephant (see picture 5 below). The elephant to the Bamenda Grassfields people is a symbol of royalty. It is also used as an emblem in many rituals and cults of powerful secret societies which use various objects on which the beast appears (receptacles, pipes, drums, masks, seats). When this animal is represented on masks and pipes, it incarnates, in a symbolic synthesis, the indomitable forces of nature that can be harnessed and used for various profitable purposes by an individual or the community (Notué & Triaca, 2000, p. 70).



**Figure 5.** A wooden pot decorated with multiple motifs including the elephant.  
*Source: Tikere's archive, taken on 10.10.2005 at 11:36am in the Kedjom Palace.*

Due to its commanding size, most Bamenda Grassfields fondoms, consider their *Fon* to be an elephant. Just as an elephant is the largest and heaviest animal in the forest, so is the *Fon*, the largest and heaviest person in the society. The *Fon* is not that large and heavy but since he is head of his people, it is a way of giving him respect and honour. The perception of the *Fon* being the largest and heaviest man in the fondom may come from the fact that during his coronation, a ritual is performed which empowers him. To empower him therefore, the public throws pebbles or small stones, grass and leaves, at him in a symbolic ritual to show that this is the last time that any commoner would hurt him or be disrespectful towards him. The fortification of the *Fon* with symbolic stoning will chase the new *Fon* from the plaza to the inner chambers of the palace. This stone throwing ritual according to the tradition of the Bamenda Grassfields fondoms, is symbolic in that it empowers the *Fon*, an indication that the entire fondom has given him absolute power and authority over the fondom. It also means henceforth the *Fon* is the custodian of the tradition, an embodiment of the fondom and the link between his subjects and their ancestors (Moffor, 2022a).

The elephant is also regarded as one of the most peaceful animals because it feeds on grass. It does not depend on other animals for survival. It has a retentive memory, a quick ear and a good eye; these are all qualities that are expected from a good leader such as the *Fon*. He ought to be peaceful, alert, bright and commanding. Commenting on the peaceful nature of the *Fon*, Nkwi and Warnier (1982), note that the *Fon*, in olden days, was never involved in repression. Repression and social control must deal with polluting actions, and the *Fon* belonged to the opposite pole of human society, the cultural pole, which is free from pollution and danger. He was therefore, kept away from any polluting contact and was never involved in social control and repression except as a moderator.

### 3.2.3 The Frog

The frog is an amphibian, a small vertebrate that needs water, or a moist environment, to survive. The skin of a frog is permeable to oxygen and carbon dioxide, as well as to water. That is, frogs are often semi-aquatic or inhabit humid areas, but move easily on land. They typically lay their eggs in puddles, ponds or lakes, and their larvae, called tadpoles, have gills and develop in water. Adult frogs follow a carnivorous diet, mostly of arthropods, annelids and gastropods. The morphology of frogs is unique among amphibians. Frogs are unusual because they lack tails as adults and their legs are more suited to jumping than walking.



In the Bamenda Grassfields fondoms, the frog motif is used on varied objects ranging from vessels (pots, cups, bowls), stools, drums, housepoles among others. Pots adorned with this motif as demonstrated in figure 6 below is reserved for the ruling class; the *Fon* and the notables. This design is highly symbolic, representing prosperity and continuity of the clan.



**Figure 6.** A wooden palm wine pot adorned with the frog motif.  
*Source: Tikere's archive, taken on 10.10.2005 at 11:36am in the Kedjom Palace.*

The frog is regarded as an animal with two lives due to the fact that it can live both on land and in water. The frog in this cultural universe is associated with human fertility, a concept that is central to ideas of strength and power as measured in the numbers of people that support the fondom and provide it with a work force and an army. They also consider the frog as a supernatural animal owing to the fact that there are some frogs that are nocturnal and can camouflage in times of trouble or to catch prey. Being nocturnal, they are able to communicate with night spirits, spirits that humans cannot see with their naked eyes. These special abilities of the frog, favour their representation on objects.

The major characteristics of the frog are that it stands for life and night spirits. A pot decorated with this emblematic animal - the frog, is like a bond which links the invisible world of ancestors or gods and life here on earth all characterised in the frog. This explains why this pot has a multipurpose function. It is believed that people such as Fons, sub chiefs and fonmakers who use items decorated with the frog motif are able to communicate with the living dead and the spirit world. People who use such objects are able to live multiple lives like the frog, an aspect interpreted by this people as a symbol of long life.

Knopfli (1999, p. 54) notes that the general opinion of the local people of Western Grassfields of Cameroon concerning the frog is that it indicates life, life in various aspects. The above statements contain four reasons for the frog being the symbol of life. Firstly, its ability to live on land and breed in water, secondly, its ability to leap more than man, thirdly, its ability to reveal even the most secret of still waters, fourthly, its ability to produce masses of eggs. That is, it symbolises fertility and new life not only in the sense of pregnancy, but also in terms of prosperity through abundant farm yields.

The frog is often adorned on objects with their hands and legs touching one another. The hands and legs of the frogs linking one another on the pot above, represent unity and togetherness. This means that those who use this object must be united and be ready to work together for the betterment of their society. They have to avoid discrimination, bias, and quarrelsome behaviour and until all these are absent then the society will progress. Holding each other is protecting the people they are heading. They could be compared to the mother hen that also does everything within its power to protect its chicks from predators. Togetherness is a common theme in Bamenda Grassfields sculptures and this is demonstrated in motifs such as the frog, lizard, the bat and others.

There are not only the motifs which are represented on the pots which are symbolic, the objects themselves have great cultural connotations. This is highlighted by Forni (2007) who notes that:

*Cooking in Babessi must be understood in relation to a wider set of socio-cultural practices and meanings. "To cook" (mena) is a verb used in Babessi to refer to a number of literal and figurative transformations that occur daily and on ritual occasions. Cooking transforms*

*ingredients from their “natural” and raw state into a cultural product. This fundamental change is sometimes achieved metaphorically simply by placing crucial ingredients in a clay pot, which even in the absence of *in situ* “cooks” ingredients into a culturally significant product. Pots can thus be seen as instruments of cultural transformation that are likely to be found in all those instances in which critical passages in an individual’s life or in the life of the community need to be culturally sanctioned. Indeed, Babessi clay pots have increasingly become very special cooking containers whose artistic agency has been enhanced by the gradual shift of their use from daily routine to particular events (p. 49).*

### 3.3 Country Pots in the Lives of the Bamenda Grassfields People

The country pots are receptacles of everyday use. They have a multiplicity of roles as they are visible in all the different aspect of life in the Bamenda Grassfields. The data here, is interpreted using the functionalist theory of Malinowski (1944) and Radcliff-Brown (1965) The theory regards culture as an integrated whole and tries to explain how the relationships among the parts of society are created and how these parts are functional that is meaning having beneficial consequences to the individual and the society. The theory sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability; it states that our social lives are guided by social structure, which are relatively stable patterns of social behaviour. The indigenous pots portray the material culture of the Bamenda Grassfields people, they are used in the kitchen, they have a function in religion, politics, economy and in therapy.

#### 3.3.1 Pots in the Kitchen

The indigenous pots are very invaluable in the kitchen of the Bamenda Grassfields woman. They fulfil three major functions – they are used to cook food, store food stuffs and water. The clay pot was one of the main pots which was used to prepare beverages like ‘corn beer’ and ‘guinea corn beer’. These are locally brewed liquors from cereals like maize and guinea corn. Such drinks are common in the fondoms of Kom, Nso and other Tikars fondoms. Although these pots are rarely used today, the producers of the local beer who are mostly women note that beer produced in such pots does not stay so much on the fire, these pots generate a lot of heat which cook their drink in a shorter length of time. A producer of ‘corn beer’ had this to say in an interview:

*I have been cooking corn beer and selling for about 20 years now. I used to own many clay pots in which I cook as well as preserve the drink to cool down before selling. Many of these pots are broken and only two are left. Whenever I cook the beer in the clay pot, I realise that it cooks fast and due to this, I am able to economise the wood left after the cooking to prepare some other drink or food for the home (10.01.2024).*

Different foods are cooked in this container; cocoyams for *achu* (paste obtained from pounded cocoyam), beans, *cornsufu* (porridge cornflour) and much more. Food prepared and served in this container taste very different. It has an extra flavour that one cannot have when one prepares and serves food in other containers. I lived the experience of watching my grandmother cook in the clay pot. As a young boy in the primary school, I used to visit and spend the holidays with her. Her favourite pot to cook food was the clay pot. Some of the advantages I noticed with such pots were that; when cocoyams for *achu* for instance was put in a clay pot and put on the fire, it took a short time to get ready for pounding provided there was fire under the pot. The second advantage was that food prepared in the clay pot usually taste different and every time some of us who were with her would always request that she cooked all food in the clay pot.

Pots are used as containers to store water and sauce. Some of the pots are very large that can hold above forty litres of water. Water from this container is used for kitchen chores and for drinking as well. Although very few people use them today, because of the introduction of plastic containers, those who still use this pots remark that water from this container is very fresh and cold like water from the fridge. Commenting on pots being storage containers, Koreana (1998) notes that:

*Just as humans cannot survive if breathing or circulation is obstructed, the same is true for food. Fermented food such as soybean sauce and fish sauces are representative of Korean cuisine thanks to the crockery that allows such breathing. Modern containers for storing food are airtight and consequently food stored therein will quickly spoil, but food stored in crockery pots will last longer. Moreover, the taste of sauces stored in crockery pots does not deteriorate, rather, it improves with aging. Also, water kept in crockery does not become rancid easily (p. 57).*

Indigenous pots equally serve to store food stuffs like beans, maize and sometimes



groundnuts. When maize for instance is shelled from the cob, it is mixed in some local medicine to prevent insects from entering in it and then poured in the large pot and covered with a basin in case this pot does not have a lid. An interlocutor noted that:

*The kind of food stuff which I store in the country pot is maize. We grow a lot of maize in this fondon and sometimes we find it difficult to store it. To store it therefore, many people like myself shell it, and then put some local insecticides in it and pour it in a large pot. Some of the pots can take as many as four tins or buckets of maize. This method of storing maize did not begin today. I grew up and saw it and I am sure that my children as they are seeing it they will do the same. It is true that the use of such pots is rampant in the interiors of the fondon, but many people still use them (12.01.2024).*

Pots are not only functional in the kitchens, they are containers used in the palaces, secret societies and other quarter assemblies. Forni (2007) states that, the use of some pots refers more to the social importance of the group than to identification with individual members. This is especially true for pots used by palace societies, quarter assemblies, and for other social gatherings. On most public occasions, pots are displayed as signs of unity and community. In Babessi, a palm wine pot is among the first things that the members of a newly formed male association (*samba* house) or rotating credit group (*njangi*) needs to acquire, as it is considered highly inappropriate for a society to meet and share raphia wine out of plastic containers. However, the use of the clay pot (*kub chuo* or *kub meh*, 'group pot') is not just a choice dictated by proper etiquette. Sharing from the pot is an important sign of group unity: Within both age-mate groups and rotating credit associations, each week a different member is responsible for celebrating (or cooking) the meeting (*mena chuo*). The raphia wine brought by the celebrant is placed in the pot and shared among all the members. The pot filled with raphia wine becomes an index of the group's common mind and purpose. For this reason, even though not consecrated with any particular medicine, the pot acquires a very strong power and can be taken as a "testimony" in case of internal conflicts (p. 51).

Gosselain (1999) notes that pottery is associated with other realms of the human experience. Barley has recently compiled a series of examples showing how, in different parts of the continent, pots 'may become an idiom in which the state and the major components of a marriage are expressed' (1994, p. 92). An illustration of this phenomenon is the *imbusa* custom, recorded by Clarke among the Bemba of Zambia:

*When a man marries a girl, she makes a pot called an 'imbusa'. Before they have sexual intercourse, this is filled with water and the leaves of herbs, and each of them take hold of it and carry it and put it on the central fire in the hut. When they have finished their love-making, they go together and take the pot off the fire and wash their sexual organs. If the pot is broken, they are not allowed to have sexual intercourse until the pot is remade. The pieces of the old pot are ground up, mixed with new clay and a new imbusa modelled. (Clarke, 1931, p. 274).*

### 3.3.2 Pots and Power

Country pots are equally very invaluable in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon because some specific types are used by the ruling class; Fons and fonmakers. Such pots are those adorned with emblematic motifs of human heads and figures, elephant, scorpion, lizard, chameleon, snake, double gong and many more. Pots decorated with these anthropomorphic and zoomorphic symbols are used by the traditional dignitaries during state events. Whenever there is an important meeting in some *fons'* palaces, palm wine is poured in a large pot and the *Fon* orders that it should be shared as they discuss state matters.

In Kedjom Ketinguh for instance, there are three palm wine pots in the palace which are associated with the myth of the people - one belonging to the *fon* (see figure 5 above), one to the 40s and the last one to *chinse nyen* society. The *chinse nyen* institution is the group which takes care of the palace as well as the *kwifon*. It is like the watchman of the fondon. These pots which are all carved from *fueh* tree except that of *chinse nyen* society which is made of camwood have lived for so many years. That of the *fon* is decorated with emblematic figures such as the human head, the elephant head, double gong, stylist scorpion and some geometric figures. He can give wine from this pot to someone he cherishes dearly and when this is done, it is interpreted as a mark of blessing. Him alone has his discretion to identify those to whom to give wine from this container with enormous cultural significance.

The next pot which is that of the 40s is black in colour adorned with human heads. It is placed on a carved stand ring bearing the lizard motif. Considering the magnitude of this object it cannot be placed directly on the ground or floor. The 40s are the founding fathers of both the *kwifon* and the Kedjom Ketinguh society. And due to the special position, they occupy in this fondon, they have the privilege to use emblematic objects in general and pots

in particular.



**Figure 7.** A wooden palm wine pot used by the 40s.

*Source: Tikere's archive, taken on 10.10.2005 at 11:36am in the Kedjom Palace.*

The palm wine pot of *chinse nyen* society is carved from the camwood tree and decorated with motifs such as the frog, the scorpion and some geometric figures (see figure 7 above). This very invaluable object is placed on a specially designed standing ring made from fibre. These institutions; the 40s and *chinse nyen* hold their meetings in the palace once every week and each time they meet, they share palm wine from these pots.

Forni (2007) comments on the types of pots used by title holders when she states that while in other kingdoms of the Grassfields certain motifs (especially those of animals) refer to specific titles and privileges and cannot be used by commoners or women, Babessi potters have the freedom to combine anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images to create their personal decorations. With the exception of anthropomorphic motifs that are generally considered *per se* “frightful” images, to be placed on special pots, other patterns are loosely characterized in relation to their symbolic and emotional impact. Though never explicitly defined by the potters, it became clear that vessels are *mebime* “frightful” not because of any single decorative element. Instead, it is their combination and the elaboration of the design pattern that communicates the “frightfulness” of a pot. A pot identified as *mebime* generally displays an almost mesmerizing decoration, whose design and texture are likely to inspire in the viewer awe and an immediate sense of respect (p. 47).

Pots are used as elements of social stratification. During the annual dance of the Bafut people for instance, princes and princesses carry some objects and also dress splendidly this in order to demonstrate their social status, they are of noble birth. They carry objects such as the clay pot, bag, calabash and whisks as demonstrated in figure 8 below. They equally wear different types of necklaces. These princesses from left to right carry containers such as bags, calabash and pots. These objects which they carry either on their bodies or in their hands are a demonstration of the material culture of the Bafut people in particular and that of the Grassfields in general.

Writing on pots and power, Forni (2007) notes that in choosing to apply images that refer to male hierarchy and political power onto a water pot destined for a woman's kitchen, the potters suggest the profound connection between the domestic and official spheres. Even though men control political power and retain exclusive access to the secret knowledge and objects from which that power originates, women are aware that the images associated with its public display represent a wider notion of power that connects human and spiritual worlds in which they also take part. In the interpretations of the potters, cowrie shells, snakes, frogs, and other zoomorphic and geometrical patterns placed on pots give form to different elements of the social space inhabited by men, women, ancestors, gods, and animals. Many

of these images, such as lizards or snakes, reflect local belief in the transformative power of kings, twins, and ancestors. Others, like the scorpion, refer to the punitive power of the king. Spiders, chameleons, and frogs may be a reference to the ability to communicate with the otherworld, whereas cowrie shells, bracelets, human heads, or skulls are mainly associated with the life of the palace (p. 47).



**Figure 8.** A wooden palm wine pot used by the 40s.  
*Source: Source: Tikere's archive, taken on 17.12.2012 at 7.58 am at the Bafut Palace.*

In most Bamenda Grassfields fondoms, there are groups specialised in different aspects of life. Some are war groups, meanwhile others are specialised in traditional medicine. These groups are identified through their objects and songs they sing. These groups can be identified through their drums, bags as well as pots. In the Bafut *fondom* for instance, the *nda* society has a clay pot which it uses during important occasions and as well as in their meetings. There are eight ndas or war groups in Bafut fondom, and each performs its dances mainly to inform the people of its existence. In the days of old, when there were rampant wars, the Bafut fondom had different war societies specialised in different war weapons; there was a group specialised in guns, another in bows and arrow (see figure 9 below) and others engaged only in traps setting.



**Figures 9 and 10.** The *nda* group of Bafut and its pot.  
*Source: Tikere's archive, taken on 17.12.2012 at 4pm at the Bafut Palace.*

This group portrayed in figure 9 above is a warrior society that was usually called to defend the land in the case of inter-tribal land disputes as demonstrated in their indigenous weapons; bow and arrows, spears, and swords. It is important to mention that the migratory history of many Grassfields fonomdoms was characterised by inter-tribal land disputes. But today with the absence of such disputes and other quarrels among Bamenda Grassfields fonomdoms, the function of the *nda* society has changed. Today, it comes out mainly during the *fon's* dance known in the Bafut language as *abine-mfor*. During this ceremony, it displays its colourful dance like all the other dance groups in the entire fonomdom. The *abine-mfor* is an annual jamboree hosted by the *Fon*. The *nda* society has a pot (see figure 10 above) which acts as a symbol of unity and bond that binds the group. During their meetings, palm wine is poured in this pot, the pot put on the fire for a few minutes to hit. When this is done, it is shared to those present in their drinking cups.

### 3.3.3 Pots as Objects of Religion

Indigenous pots play an important role in the religious life of the Bamenda Grassfields people. Bunnet (1996) defines religion as *that aspect of culture which relates man with the sacral and the supernatural*. Religion also concerns itself with man's relation with the profane or the secular, identifying the sacred from the profane, defining how and why a particular object becomes sacred or profane and setting traditions or conventions as to how humans should behave in dealing with the sacred. More specifically, religion may be defined as *a system of beliefs, practices and philosophical values concerned with the definition of the sacred, the comprehension of life and salvation from the problem of human existence*. Religion is a system of beliefs involving supernatural forces or beings that provide shape and meaning to the universe (Opoku, 1978).

Geertz (1973), one of the anthropologists responsible for creating the symbolic approach, defined religion as “a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, persuasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.” Geertz suggested that religious practices were a way to enact or make visible important cultural ideas. The symbols used in any religion, can be interpreted or “read” by anthropologists to discern important cultural values. At the same time, religious symbols reinforce values or aspirations in members of the religious community.

Pots are used in religious practices. This can be seen in certain ceremonies which hold in the palace like in the residences of sub chiefs or fonmakers. During such an occasion, a sculptured pot is placed at the centre of the room where the traditional dignitaries are gathered. The pot is very large and can contain three to four jugs (a jug is a twenty litres container) of palm wine. All those present have to drink the wine which is poured in the pot. If the occasion is hosted by the *fon* in the *ntob* or palace, before this is done, the *fon* or chief priest has to honour the ancestors and gods by pouring some of the palm wine in his title cup at the door (the main entrance to the house) while making a prayer. His prayer seeks to thank the ancestors and gods for bringing them together, for protection, for provision and the like.

This pot stands for unity as the ruling class of the fonomdom sits around it, discuss serious matters concerning the society, take important decisions and put in place mechanisms to execute them. In such a gathering, they are guided by the ancestors and gods they had called upon at the beginning of the ceremony. It is alleged that whoever drinks from the pot must be of exemplary character: must not commit adultery, must not equally take something which does not belong to him otherwise he is going to suffer slow pains and die. This palm wine pot thus serves as a form of social control, which checks the conduct of people vis-à-vis others in the fonomdom. It plays the role of a code of conduct where the leaders through their outstanding behaviour will influence the characters of others especially the younger generation. Additionally, being moulded out of clay, the soil of the ancestors, and because they are produced through processes and skills that have been passed on from one generation to the next, ‘country’ pots are the proper containers to be used whenever for the ‘cooking’ of palm wine which directly involves both social and spiritual forces.

To Forni (2007) pots take on spiritually significant roles in life's passages. In Babessi, the *ntieke* is made or purchased to bathe a new-born baby twice a day during the first months of life. The *ntieke* is then kept by the mother in a special place and preserved until the child has grown into an independent adult. Only then is its function fulfilled, allowing the mother to start using the pot as a normal household container. However, if the baby dies soon after delivery, the pot is used to wash the corpse and is broken over the grave immediately after burial. To keep the pot would be a dangerous thing, as the “cooking” process that transforms

babies into fully socialized human beings was not successfully accomplished. This is the only circumstance in Babessi in which pots are broken over the grave. The basin used to wash the corpse of an adult is not broken after burial. In this case, death is not framed as an unsuccessful transformation, but as an appropriate and natural passage to a different stage of life in the ancestral world (p. 50).

Among the Bamilekes in the Cameroon Grassfields according to Carine and Wang (2021) there are purification vases and vessel (*kop sua*), hemispherical shape, is decorated with three stylized mygale figures, arranged horizontally. In Baham, (one of the Bamileke groupings) the container is used during the offering of the sacrifices of the sits and the divinities of the family, during the initiation and enthroned ceremonies of the new king, for the preparation of the meal of the head of the family (p. 77).

Another religious use of pots, regards the burial of miscarried babies and very young twins. Pots are used to contain in their 'bellies' (*bvo*) the excessive 'heat' of miscarriages and of twins who have died before the completion of the *tiene venyi*, the celebration performed to control the potentially dangerous supernatural powers of twins. Whereas miscarriages are just collected in a pot and buried under a plantain tree near the compound and forgotten, the burial of twin who has not been fully celebrated has to be performed by the *gha nchegow*, the titleholder responsible for the control and the protection of the twins. The grave of the twins buried in the *torne venyi* are marked by the bottoms of large clay pots that are buried upside down to contain the supernatural powers of the deceased baby, which could still harm his or her sibling and parents (Forni, 2000, p. 196).

In Nsei, clay pots are receptacles of the 'heads' of important high-ranking ancestors (that is the notables and the *fons*). 'Heads' are generally kept for men and women who die after a full life, leaving children to worship them as ancestors. However, only those heads belonging to important personalities are buried inside pots when officially installed in the domestic shrine. On the day of the burial, before the corpse is wrapped in cloth and placed in the coffin, the head of the deceased is touched with a large stone, which will be kept near the grave until the official day of the 'placing of the head' (*ko' keto*). This day precedes the official death celebration or 'cry die' (*ko tzo*) which can be celebrated one or more years after the death of a man or woman (Forni, 2000, p. 218).

### 3.3.4 Country Pots and Economy

The *country* pots are a great source of income to many Bamenda Grassfields people. Some of the artists work full-time meanwhile others do it just as part-time job. Those who take their art activity as a part-time job carry out other economic activities such as farming. These artists through their art activities contribute to the economy of this region in one way or the other. Recently, so many young men are learning the art of sculpture, pottery making in the different production centres. These youth acknowledge that this is a means through which they can generate income. A young apprenticed in wood carving said:

*Now our days, jobs are very difficult to come by, and due to this reason, I have decided to learn wood carving where I will produce different types of wooden objects. Apart from the fact that I will make money from this activity, I will equally have the opportunity to contribute to the promotion of the culture of my people (04.02.2024).*

Pottery in Nsei is a thriving 'industry' which constitutes a fundamental source of income for numerous families involved in the production and marketing of pots. And Knopfli (1997) notes that the number of young people choosing to pay to become apprentices of specific potters has increased considerably. This is partly explainable by the influence of the Prespot project (Presbyterian pottery project), founded by Swiss missionaries in the village at the beginning of the 1980s, where youths are required to pay a fee for their training, partly as a consequence of the increased local market demand. In terms of importance and income produced, pottery is second only to agriculture and is becoming increasingly appealing also to those youths (mostly boys) who do not come from potting families and did not have the opportunity to learn from their relatives. For most of these young people and for their masters, potting is a full-time activity which structures the week with a variety of tasks.

To those involve in their production, they are in the first-place commodities; products which can be traded, bought or sold mainly to acquire income. But before pre-colonial times, carvings were not manufactured for economic purpose – they were mainly to serve the *fondoms* in varied domains, political and magico-religious. This explains why many of the palaces in the Grassfields of Cameroon had to ordain those who carved objects in the tribal style, articles with motifs which conformed to the tribal tradition. Furthermore, in the pre-colonial era, the fons, nobles and secret societies served as the major market for sculptors since the majority



of these objects were made for them (Knopfli, 1999). To Notué and Triaca (2000 and 2005), notables and customary societies are the patrons and the main clients of artists. Ironically, such producers were not rewarded handsomely: they were usually brought together each year and a feast organised at the palace by the *fon* on their behalf. With colonisation, carved items were highly priced by tourists and art collectors and this made these cultural artefacts including pots to become highly in demand that many sculptors and *fondoms* started using them as commodities.

The marketing of most pots and bowls is done at the local as well as external level. The daily and weekly markets are not the only outlet for local carvers, who are usually capable to commercialise these vessels directly from their workshops, to art shops, handicraft centres, museum owners and to tourists. Some of the artists told the researcher that they produce most art objects including pots on command and as a result, they never go to the market to sell their goods. People come from far and near to collect their objects at their workshops. Those who do not work on order, carry their goods to the market, where they have to bargain their prices with clients. Others supply to some handicraft shops in Bamenda such as the Presbyterian Craft Project (Prescraft) and Bamenda Handicraft Co-operative Centre. These two handicraft centres are non-governmental organizations that are aimed at encouraging art in the Western Grassfield in particular and the Grassfields as a whole. (Moffor, 2022b).

The costs of bowls and pots (be they wooden, clay or woven) vary from one type to another, from size to size and from one producer to another. Large bowls and pots no matter the type are more expensive than small ones (Moffor, 2022b). Although woven pots are generally more costly than carved and clay objects, a wooden pot which is splendidly decorated with multiple motifs is more expensive than the woven type. This is because of the time which has been invested in its production. The cost of a pot therefore is evaluated according to the material use and the time used for their production. A dealer in carvings with the pots inclusive told the researcher that:

*I have been buying and selling arts particularly wooden and woven objects for many years now. With the experience which I have had, woven articles are very expensive but carved pots with finer and multiple symbols like the frog, lizard, scorpion, earth spider among others are generally so costly (01.01.2024).*

Another interlocutor, a sculptor said:

*I carve diverse types of objects. Their prices differ depending on the type of wood used, size and motifs which appear on them. Objects adorned with miniature and multiple motifs take so much time to carve as well as do the finishing. Although the art objects demonstrate the ingenuity of the artists, the primary aim of their creator is to make money (20.01.2024).*

### 3.3.5 Therapeutic Functions of indigenous Pots

Locally made pots have a role in therapy. Therapy simply means treatment intended to relieve or heal a disorder. The pots do not actually treat but they are used to prepare or cook medicine which treats diseases. The most used pots are those made of clay. Forni (2000) remarks that clay pots are also central in many of the healing performances carried on by native healers who generally use clay pots both as 'frightful' medicine containers in their carefully arranged medicine shrines, and to cook herbs used when treating patients. It is generally believed that these remedies would not work if fried or boiled in a metal pot since a foreign container could not effectively release the power of the local herbs (p. 194).

The figures below show the shrine or herbal home of a traditional or native doctor. In this shrine like in many shrines of most traditional healers are pots which are used to prepare medicine. Other objects commonly found in the herbal home are calabashes, statues and many others. Majority of the medicine cooked in these pots are herbs, barks and roots of trees. When such elements are on the fire, the native healer has to speak some words as demonstrated in figure 11 below.

In an interview with a traditional doctor, he told the researcher that:

*When patients come to me with a problem, I consult them and if their disease is within my capacity, I treat them. Their treatment or medicine I prepare for them depends on what they are suffering from. They are some disorders which I treat with ground medicine while others are treated with boiled medicine. The boiled medicine could be from trees barks, roots or herbs or a combination of two or all three. I usually collect the herbs very very early in the morning when the herbs still possess all their nutrients. When I return home, I boil them in the clay pots for many hours for the power of the element to be fully released (05.02.2024).*





**Figure 11.** Indigenous pots used in cooking traditional medicine.  
*Source: Tikere's archive, taken on 11.12.2019 at 5pm in a traditional healer's home.*

Some traditional medical practitioners have these native pots in their shrines which are found not far from the home, usually in one part of the compound. Such a pot is usually placed on stones and some concoction poured in it. It is this concoction which is used to bathe patients with spiritual problems. Spiritual problems here are those problems that patients cannot find solution to in other medical spheres. These include cases where someone may work hard, and no matter how hard he/she does, he/she does not succeed. Some people find it difficult having children. Others their children and family members go to school or learn a trade but end up not succeeding. When these people experiencing such hardship visit the fortune teller, their problems are usually attributed to some evil spirit or forces. These patients will then be proposed spiritual bathe. This bathe is aimed at sending out the evil spirits which harbour in the patient consequently stopping him/her from achieving his/her ambitions in life. This bathe is usually performed in the evening on specific days depending on the native doctor. To bathe the patient therefore, the healer may ask the patient to be a male or female, to undress and stands beside the pot and the native doctor uses some fresh leaves of the peace plants, dips them in the pot and then puts on the patient's head. When this is done, he uses a small vessel and carries the remaining concoction from the pot and bathes the patient. When this is done, the native doctor believes that the peace plant which represents peace together with the concoction have restored the health of the patient.

One native doctor said that:

*I treat patients who come with spiritual problems in the shrine behind my home. Patients with spiritual problems are those with issues which have to do with curses, stagnation in life, 'eating' in the dream, 'spiritual husbands and wives' and many more. Patients with such problems and attacks come to me and say that they have being to several hospitals and no illness can be diagnosed but they are really sick. When they say that no illness can be diagnosed, I will carry out my consultations and if I find out that their problems are spiritual then I will embark in attacking the problem spiritually (10.01.2024).*

Other native doctors use the clay pot to prepare the treatment of filaria. Filariasis commonly called filarial among the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon is caused by several round, coiled and thread-like parasitic worms that belong to the family filaridea. The Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon do not attribute the cause of filaria to the natural cause seen above. They believe that this disease attacks someone who either steals something in someone's farm on which filaria medicine has been put. It is important to mention that to discourage stealing in this part of the country, people place medicine on their farms or on anything that thieves can carry away.

To treat filaria therefore, this plants as demonstrated in figure 13 below is uprooted, the roots cleaned and boiled in a clay pot in palm wine and given to someone suffering from the

disease to take twice daily; a cup in the morning and another in the evening. This medicine is hit each time before drinking. Anyone who seeks treatment of filaria, takes his clay pot to the native doctor. The native doctor will put prepared medicine in it for him/her to take home. In the case where the doctor uses his own pot, its contain is transferred in a container brought by the patient. The patient will hit it in his/her home and take as prescribed by the doctor.



**Figure 12.** *Sansevieria laurentii vrouwentong* plant used in the treatment of filaria.  
*Source: Tikere's archive taken on 05.09.2017 at 11am in a traditional healer's compound.*

There are diseases that when their treatments are prepared in the clay pot, this pot is handled by the patient alone, because some illnesses have taboos. If someone else touches the 'medicine pot,' he/she will get contaminated by the same disease. Appendicitis commonly called in the Bambui language as '*mbib*' is one of such diseases whose treatment has a lot of taboos. Appendicitis as a pain in the lower right belly or pain near your navel that moves lower. Appendicitis occurs when the tube-shaped appendix becomes blocked, often by fecal material, a foreign body, or cancer. Blockage may also occur from injection, because the appendix swells in response to any infection in the body. Appendicitis is almost always a medical emergency that requires prompt surgery to remove the appendix. The people of Bambui *fondom* believe that appendix can be treated by taking the medicine of the native doctor. This medicine will cause the appendix to be flushed out. I suffered from appendicitis when I was 10 years old. A native doctor prepared a concoction and put in a clay pot which I took to him. He instructed me to add two litres of palm wine to the herb and roots and then boil the concoction for an hour after which I had to take a glass every morning and evening. I had to hit the medicine each time I had to consume it and the most important issue was that no one else had to touch this pot except me.

### *3.4 Dynamics in Country Pots*

This portion of the article examines the changes which have taken place in the production and use of the native pots. To interpret the data, the theory of evolution was employed. This theory which may also be called cultural or socio-cultural evolution was developed in the 19th by Tylor and Morgan. It is the process of change and development in human societies that results cumulative change in their stores of cultural information. The *country* pots are cultural objects which were used in every domain of everyday life in the past. Although they are still visible today, there are some changes which are gradually taking place in their production, and use. In the past, wooden pots like any other carved objects for instance were produced by the elderly men, young people were not interested in their production because they called the trade old fashion and an activity reserved for the older generation. But today, more and more youths are gaining interest in wood carving since their objects are demanded locally, nationally and internationally as well.

The involvement of many youths in carving and the shortage of trees for carving, have made the young boys to sculpt objects from all sorts of trees, trees which do not only conform to the norms of wood carving but are not resistant to insect attack. They hardly use the

traditional woods for their products. Many of them could be seen in big towns carrying their objects on their heads which they sell at giveaway prices.

Pots are used as a musical instrument in the church. Churches which frequently use such an instrument are the Presbyterian, Baptist as well as Catholic. Such instruments are played to praise God, the creator of the universe. Figure 14 below portrays a dance group which uses some traditional musical instruments with one of such being the pot. The pot is hit on the mouth to produce music. This is one of the choir groups in Presbyterian Church Baforkum in the Bmabui fondom, North West Region of Cameroon. The pot in this figure is made from clay but today, there are churches that use pots made of aluminium.



**Figure 13.** A church group producing music with local instruments including the pot.  
*Source: Tikere's archive, taken on 05.12.2020 at 10:25am at a Presbyterian church occasion.*

Such instrument in the past were associated with the traditional African religion and Christians were discouraged from handling them let alone playing them. Commenting of the use of the *country* pot as a musical instrument in the church, a Presbyterian Church pastor in an interview told the researcher that:

*This instrument (the pot and other locally made instruments) are used to produce music in church to give praise to God. As we know, God is the creator of the universe, he deserves the first place in our lives. He is King of kings, Fon of fons. Using such instruments in the church is to justify the fact that we owe everything we have and produce to him (04.02.2024).*

Before the introduction of the aluminium and metal pots, in the Grassfields' part of Cameroon, the clay pot was a very invaluable kitchen utensil. The pot was used in cooking, and storing water and food stuffs. Although today there are some elderly mothers who cook in the clay pot, many women have abandoned it in favour of metal and aluminium pots. According to Forni (2007), in day-to-day use, locally made pots have been largely supplanted by those of cast aluminum and the most common serving dishes are Chinese or Nigerian made enamel pans. The practical advantages of using such durable containers rather than the local clay "country" pots are obvious. In addition to greater durability, the possession of a good range of "whitemen pans" is a visible statement of status (p. 49). Many women say that although the clay pot is good because cooked and stored in it taste better, the pot is difficult to handle.

#### 4. Conclusions

The country pots are cultural elements which play a great role in the lives of the Bamenda Grassfields people of Cameroon. These are pots fabricated from diverse raw materials in different production centres by both the male and female folks. The male alone produces sculpted pots from wood meanwhile only the women manufacture woven pots from grass and fibre (from raphia bamboo). The clay pots are fabricated by both men and women; the men produce those used by the men themselves and secret societies while the women make those which are normal. Many of these pots are adorned with a variety of emblematic motifs which range from anthropomorphic, zoomorphic to geometric figures. These articles

decorated with specific motifs are used by the ruling class and their cultural significances can be decoded by those who have a mastery of the culture in which the objects serve. In the past, the carved *country* pots were produced with special wood which had some cultural connotations but today due to the shortage in trees for carving and the involvement of many young boys in the carving activity, the quality of the objects which are produced today has dropped. Despite these changes witnessed in the production of the native pots, their place is inevitable in the cultures of the Bamenda Grassfields. They are still used in the kitchen by a few elderly women and they are very useful instruments in the hands of traditional medical doctors. They are ritual ceremonial objects as well as items of social stratification. The indigenous pots are a good source of income to those who are engaged in their fabrication. This article handles four main domains; typology of indigenous pots, cultural significances of the different motifs represented on the pots, the functions of the pots and dynamics in the country pots. Another study could be carried out to understand the history of these country pots in the Bamenda Grassfields in particular or the Cameroon Grassfields in general.

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Narrative Review

# Rituals of the tombs of the Just in Islam

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**Abstract:** This article explores the association of beliefs with shrines among Muslims and their importance to them. Shrines are the graves of righteous saints among the Muslims. The practices and rituals performed by visitors to the graves of the righteous among the Muslims were analyzed and discussed. These actions were discussed extensively so that the reader would not forget to understand the nature of these rituals and actions that take place at the grave of the righteous according to the point of view, religion, justice, and traditions of the Muslim faith. It must be noted that to this day, many still perform and participate in these rituals with great belief and reporting spiritual benefits. This article explores in detail what these rituals are and their importance.

**Keywords:** Islam, graves of the righteous, customs and traditions.

## Introduction

There exists a distance between God and his believers within the frame of institutionalized religion, in which rites and rituals are organized in a set order. They don't meet the expectations of the ordinary believer who seeks the proximity of God in a direct way in order to give him His abounding blessings and fulfill his daily desires. In other words, many believers search for more spontaneous ways to refer to God without passing through different mediating agents that can lessen the power of the spiritual experience. Many people, whose religiosity is based on simplicity and innocence, come to the tombs to pour their hearts there and ask for what is important to them in all domains, like maintenance, health, mating or kids, and so on.

In the past, they used to visit the tombs of the just on the anniversary day of the death of the Just. The common belief is that on the day of his departure, the Just exists for sure in his place. In other words, the Just comes down from the upper world in which he exists to the earthly world, shedding on it from his spirit and merits, and this is a good time to communicate with him and ask him to do the mediating act for fulfilling the requests. Another time in which people traditionally visit the tombs of the Just is the first day of the month or the middle day of the month (15<sup>th</sup> of a month), while the moon is full, and in repentance days: the month of

In general, the visit to the tomb of the Just is done collectively, especially to distant tombs located on hilltops, in distant villages, and in caves. In the feasts held near the tombs, they used to tell a lot of things praising the Just: patients who were healed, infertile redeemed, miserable saved, and so on. These stories (part of them true and some fake) are meant to strengthen the myths associated with the Just and enlarge the group of believers going there.

Within the frame of the rituals performed at the tomb of the Just there are different ritual practices, such as telling a prayer, writing poetry, performing songs and thanksgivings, and stretching over the tomb, lighting candles, immersing in the waters near the tomb, laying stones, hanging cloths on trees near the tomb, writing notes between the tombstones. The celebrators who arrive in groups usually arrange merrymaking.

As a part of the Just ritual, there are customs related to the need to keep in touch with the Just by giving and taking: leaving something personal near the tomb in order to remind the Just of the visitor and his request, and taking something from the tomb or its surrounding, in order to continue and hold on to the Just also after the event of visiting. Some customs are performed privately, while others are performed in public. Many customs are common to all of the tombs, while others are special to a particular tomb (Rayner 1984:39).

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## Objectives of the article.

This article aims to shed light on the social and religious dimensions and other actions that take place at the shrine of the righteous man among Muslims.

As well as the factors that motivate visiting shrines and venerating them

The article also aims to identify the actions and rituals undertaken by the visitor to the shrine and their impact on continuing to visit the shrine of the saint among the Muslims.

Essay objectives require an understanding of some basic terms in the essay

Beliefs regarding shrines about Muslims and in the Islam religion, in order to understand their motivations.

## The importance of the topic

The article addresses one of the important topics related to visiting the graves of the righteous in the Islamic community. An anthropological approach is crucial in Understanding Hajj practices: beliefs and rituals. This article attempts to contribute to social and anthropological studies of religion by discussing important matters. Areas and topics of social reality: “The society that does not work to understand it The actions and behaviors of its citizens and issues of bias around their actions is essential.

“ Identity Society” (Rashik, Shamharoush 2010: 7). Therefore, it is important to understand And clarify the human relationship with the sanctities (the shrines and their patrons).

The Muslim tombs of the Just, with their white domes, are among the most common and typical sites in the landscape of this Land. They exist almost in every place, from the slopes of Hermon in the north to Mount Sinai in the south, and from the Jude desert (Medbar Yehuda) and the Jordan valley (Bekat Yarden) in the east to the beach plane in the west.

The typical tombs include a relatively simple and shaky structure, with one or two rooms covered by a white dome. Near most of the tombs of the Just, there is a water source – a pit, a well, or a spring, and special healing merits are attributed to their waters. Also, near most of the tombs of the Just, bushy trees grow (mostly oak, fig, carob, or olive), and sometimes a grove. They constitute an integral part of the totality of the tomb, which was sanctified due to it. There is a strict prohibition against damaging the trees or picking their fruits, except for their use in the tomb.

Most tombs are built in a relatively high place and can be seen from a distance. Very few tombs are located in valleys. The tombs of the Just are spread in all parts of this Land, from Galilee and the Golan up north, in the villages and towns, on hilltops, in valleys, in the open fields, and near settling places. They are especially numerous in the Arabic villages and relatively rare in the Jewish settlements. Naturally, the majority of Muslim tombs of the Just exist in areas where the Muslim population is stable, and thus, there is no wonder that most of the Muslim tombs of the Just are located in Judea and Samaria (Yehuda veshomron), in the villages around Jerusalem and in Galilee. Thus, Muslim believers live near the tombs to which they attribute merits. In a more specific manner, most of the tombs of the Just are located in the mountains of Jerusalem and its surroundings, while above 75% of the tombs are situated on hilltops. Often, tombs are built near a big stone or a pit, near a spring or an old tree (Lezros 1982:79).

Most of the tombs exist within the Arabic villages or near them, and in many villages, we can find several tombs – one inside the village and others outside the village. One of the tombs inside the village is usually turned into a mosque. Many of the tombs of the Just are found in the graveyards or nearby. Sometimes it is a big cemetery, and sometimes only a few tombs. In most cases, the graveyard was established around the tomb, and in only a few cases was the tomb built inside the existing graveyard.

## The theology around pilgrimage to the tombs of the Just in Islam

Also, in Islam, pilgrimage to the tombs of the Just and the ritual activity that developed around it are pronounced expressions of the popular religion. Islam is not different from other religions in this matter; the distance between God and the believer is no less than the distance in Judaism. Therefore, along with the institutionalized religion in Islam, a parallel system of popular religion was developed in search of different ways to communicate with God and His messengers.

Pilgrimage to the tombs of the Just in Islam is more complicated than in Judaism. Just for clarification, it is worth distinguishing between Orthodox Islam and the popular Sufi Sunnite Islam.<sup>1</sup>

The Islamic Arab culture, like other cultures, was developed through a conflict between rationalism and non-rationalism, between certainty and non-certainty, and between innovation and traditionalism, namely between the normative and familiar and the creative and strange (Basilius 2008:16-25). In other words, between factions that consider the ancient and the past as sacred and models to follow and rationalistic and empiric factions that doubted and asked questions in many cases about the mystical issues of human existence.

The rationalistic, certainty approach is represented by the Orthodox Islam. This is the formal stream, pedantic to perform the commandments and demanding faith in the mission of the

Prophet Muhammed rejects other mediators between man and God (Cahen 1995:269-270). In other words, this stream stands for rationalistic faith principles that draw on religious law systems, the Sunna, and doctrines in the domains of faith, judgment, and administration. The representatives of the Orthodox stream are the Ulama – the Orthodox Sunnites. They made an effort to keep the control over the institutes in their hand. These Ulama accepted the authority of the secular state, and in return, they were given permission to continue their religious activity with the support of the state (Cahen 1995:288).

Faith in God, especially in the certainty of faith, is perceived by Orthodox Islam, Judaism, and Christianity as an important basis for worshipping God. Al-Jahiz places it among the four foundations upon which the believer's faith is based and according to which he can be judged: righteousness, the straight money (meaning it is money that has been earned after hard work and effort), and the one who shares the worship of God (Al-Jahiz 1945:230). The Imam Mohammed Ben-edris Alshafii (767-820) and the two philosophers Abd El-Malek Ben Karib Al-Azmaii and Omar Ben Bahr El-Jahiz were among those who rooted the traditional tendency in the Arabic culture. The consciousness, according to Al-Shafii, means understanding the former. This is an understanding that doesn't search for the unknown but focuses on the known to understand it in a deeper manner.

The Islamic, popular and mystic Sufi movement developed in the 9th century along with the Orthodox Islam.<sup>2</sup> Its representatives are the different Sufi orders that sometimes were involved in sociocultural activities (Lazros 1980:80). The movement sees the significance of the religious laws in profound and hidden significances, namely, the value of the religious laws is not in their external form, but rather in their unseen depth. The popular Sufi Islam is based mainly on concepts such as asceticism, God-fearing, tolerance, humbleness, restraint, continence, impulses repression, self-scrutiny, loving God, and prolonged abstemiousness. We can see that the Sufi stream appeals to the sentiments, to the inner consciences, to the experience world of the believer, and demands moral purity and adhesion to the Just's teachings (Drori 1987:22). From those who identify with it. In other words, the relation between the believer and his God is demanded to be total and without mediators. The Sufi movement is the most tolerant sector and less fanatical in Islam.

The origin of the pilgrimage to the tombs of the Just in the Sufi tradition seemingly lies in the pagan and Christian worlds that preceded Islam. In mysticism, the Just person, the

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<sup>1</sup>**Sunnites** – the ones that their religious laws and their judgment are determined according to the main stream in Islam – the Sunna. In the seventh century Muslims were divided to Sunnites and Shiites; the basis of this rip was the question that was authorized to be elected to be Caliph – the head of the Muslim community, the heir and substitute of the Prophet Mohammed.

<sup>2</sup>**Sufi** – the movement Hasidism and mysticism in Islam, which was deeply affected by the Neo-Platonism and other mystic concepts that originated in Eastern religions. The involvement in this movement is called: 'Sufism' (tasawuf). Its principles: fostering the spirit of asceticism, cancellation of the life of this world and scorning the practical religion commandments, seeking to know God through meditation, in different phases (situations and status). There is a number of versions regarding the origin of the name:

- A. according to their attire made of wool (suf in Arabic) – as a distinctive mark for simplicity and modesty;
- B. according to the name of sitting in a remote-corner inside the mosques, on Sufa bench.
- C. according to the name of being pure 'safa' – pure, clean of tendencies of material, worldly life.

friend of God and His protector (wli) has a central place. This is because the “wli” is the popular image of “Sufi,” a person who knows how to suppress his soul and win Godly enlightenment, expressed in this context mainly by his ability to perform miracles and wonders (“karamat”) (Lazaros 1982:78). The “wli” is the protector of man from the wrath of God, and mediates on his behalf in front of Him in every simple matter and also in big matters, and God responds to him in all times. The ability of the “wli” includes: healing patients, fortune-telling, understanding the language of the living and the inanimate, bringing down rains, and moving mountains (Lazaros 1971:132). The basic assumption was if he could do so during his lifetime, he will do more after death. Thus, the stories about these Just after their death were more than in their lives, and accordingly, also the ritual of admiration to them. The ritual of pilgrimage to the tombs of the Just – “ziara” (from the Arabic word “zara” – which means to visit, and hence the word Mazar: a place of visit, a holy place) was fostered in the Sufi orders.

The sacred Just were actually a sort of “mediators” between believers and the Creator. Since in their lives, they were flesh and blood, they can understand the feelings of the humans with their weaknesses and are able to please them more easily than Allah. If we add to this the fact that the contact with the Just doesn’t oblige them to obey the strict commands of the formal religion, we will get the beginning of the explanation for the pilgrimages to these tombs.

Out of Sunnite Islam, in the Shiite stream of Islam, the ritual of tombs of the sacred Just constitutes a foundation of the religious existence. Contrary to the disagreements among the Sunnite Islamic wise-men regarding the ritual of the tombs of the Just, there is unanimity among the Shiites concerning the obligation to perform the rituals of the tombs of the Shiites’ sacred Just. This ritual is one of the most developed forms in the ceremonial and conceptual aspects of religious activity. Unlike the Sunnite, in which the rituals of the tombs of the Just represent popular religious culture, in Shiite, it is an expression of institutionalized religion.

This ritual, which also encompasses a broad strata of Orthodox believers, was and remains an undesirable innovation (B`edaa) in the religion of Islam. However, the popular need to mediate between the ordinary man and his God was strengthened, and the ritual of the saints was very common, in part even preserving pagan ritual traditions in monotheistic attire.

In Israel, the ritual of the tomb was more common than in other places due to the many tombs spread in the Land of Israel. Nevertheless, the ritual was not isolated only for the prophets but also to the Just and the miracle makers (Tawfiq 1996:23-50).

### **All kinds of sacred in Islam.**

In Islam there are three kinds of Sacred, and their tombs are an object of pilgrimage (Tawfiq 1996: 20-62).

**A) Historical figures** –many of the Muslim sacred are admired commanders and warriors in the Muslim army that occupied the Land in 638. Others are warriors who died and were buried in distant countries, but they have a tomb indication (one or more) in the Land.

**B) Men from the Quran** – only a few of the men mentioned in the Quran are perpetuated in “holy places” in the Land, while the most famous among them is, of course, Muhammad. There are sites in the Land of Israel related to his activity, most of them in Jerusalem.

**C) Biblical figures/personages** – the Land of Israel, as the Land of the Bible, serves as a ravine of vision (That is, it is a country unique in being sacred to the three monotheistic religions), including the Biblical personages who lived and were buried there. For many of these prophets, there are even sites perpetuating their names: one site perpetuates his birth place, another site perpetuates his activity, a third site perpetuates his death, and so on. In certain cases, they point to different tombs belonging to the same Biblical figure, while the inhabitants of each village are convinced that “the real tomb” is in their region.

As a result of this, the tombs of the Sacred in Islam are known by different names: “Nabi” – prophet (here we must note that the concept of the prophet in Islam doesn’t specify only the prophets but also a long list of influential people in different degrees, mentioned in the New Testament and in the Bible and not as prophets), “Sidna” – our master (an appellation of ancient fathers or of important Muslim sacred), the “wli” – the beloved or the sacred (usually referring to the tomb structure itself) and “maqam” – place (a holy place is not always a burial place but indication to the buried person). “Kaber sheikh”, is the most



common concept, and it indicates the burial place of a spiritual leader or a valuable personality (Tawfiq 1996:23-50).

A reference in the Islamic annals indicates that also admired women reached a degree of sanctity from the earliest periods until today. In most places dealing with the lives of the sacred people, many sacred women are also mentioned, and their miraculous deeds are no less impressive than those of men. It is important to note that the sacred women did not emerge from the aggressive and fighting Islamic stream, but rather from the Sufi, the mystic and ascetic stream.

According to Sufi Islam, there is a determined hierarchy of degrees of sacred people living in the world, and it is accepted that their number will always remain fixed: 400 living sacred people. The rituals of visiting the tombs developed over the years, and the Sufi visit the tombs to be blessed, to stretch over them, to ask personal requests, and to celebrate the sacred birthday.

### **The most important finding of the article.**

Through the article, the most important recommendations were reached:

1-Interest in building education and awareness centers to inform people of the importance of visiting the graves of righteous Muslims.

2-Introducing the culture of visiting graves into the educational curricula to raise students' awareness and create a generation interested in visiting the graves of the righteous among Muslims.

3- Paying attention to introducing the graves of the two friends into tourist centers so that the visitor can feel comfortable learning about the importance of those graves.

### **Conclusion**


In this article, I tried to provide an idea about the beliefs and rituals associated with the graves of the two righteous Jews among the Muslims, and it is challenging to offer an analysis.

The nature of the relationship between the levels of cultural structure, i.e., religious, social, political, and even economic levels. I even gave an ethnographic presentation. Recording the beliefs, customs, and traditions practiced by Muslim visitors to their holy shrines and the actions they perform during their visit to the shrines of righteous saints. It must be noted that, to this day, many people still participate in these rituals.

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# The Impact of Digital Technologies on Memory and Memory Studies

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**Abstract:** With the widespread integration of smartphones, computers, and the internet, information access and processing have undergone significant changes. This paper investigates both positive and negative implications, acknowledging the extension of cognitive capacities through easy access to vast databases and external memory aids while also addressing concerns about diminished memory consolidation and reliance on shallow encoding strategies. Examining the interdisciplinary field of memory studies, the study also highlights collaborative efforts among scholars in psychology, neuroscience, sociology, and information science to comprehend the impact of digital technologies on memory, and emphasizes the challenges and future directions in memory research, including issues like digital amnesia, information overload, and privacy concerns. Overall, the paper underscores the need for understanding the relationship between human memory and digital tools, enabling the development of strategies to enhance memory, counteract potential adverse effects, and promote a balanced utilization of digital resources in memory-related tasks.

**Keywords:** digital technologies; memory studies; information processing; cognitive impact; digital era

## 1. Introduction

The recent decades have witnessed a transformation in the way individuals interact with, encode, store, and retrieve information due to the advent of digital technologies. Tools such as smartphones, computers, and the internet have irrefutably influenced various aspects of human life. Among the intricate facets of human cognition profoundly impacted by this digital revolution, memory stands out. This study aims to explore the multifaceted relationship between digital technologies and memory, elucidating the cognitive impact and consequences for memory studies.

Traditionally, psychology and neuroscience have centered their focus on the study of memory, delving into the mechanisms and processes that underlie how humans acquire, store, and retrieve information (Camina & Güell, 2017). Memory represents an essential cognitive function that forms the foundation for learning, decision-making, problem-solving, and daily life. However, the digital era has introduced new variables into this age-old equation. The omnipresence of digital devices, vast information repositories on the internet, and the prevalence of external memory aids have brought forth opportunities and challenges concerning the way humans remember (Wilmer et al., 2017). In this context, it becomes imperative to investigate the extent to which digital technologies have modified memory functions. On the one hand, these technologies have made it more convenient for individuals to access and process extensive volumes of information, expanding cognitive capabilities and revolutionizing the learning process. On the other hand, the overreliance on digital devices for information storage and retrieval has raised concerns about potential repercussions, including the potential diminishment of memory consolidation and the adoption of shallow encoding strategies.

Furthermore, as the influence of digital technologies on memory continues to expand, the research landscape has evolved, so memory studies have transitioned into an increasingly interdisciplinary field, uniting scholars from psychology, neuroscience, sociology, and information science to scrutinize the implications of these technologies on human memory (Sierp, 2021). This collaborative approach not only enriches human understanding of memory in the digital age but also aids in identifying potential strategies for enhancing memory performance and addressing the challenges posed by the ever-evolving digital terrain.

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This study aspires to furnish an overview of the profound impact of digital technologies on memory processes and memory studies. By comprehending the intricate dynamics between human memory and digital tools, researchers and practitioners can collaboratively formulate strategies to improve memory performance, counteract potential adverse effects, and facilitate a more efficient and balanced utilization of digital resources in the realm of memory-related tasks. In doing so, humans can harness the benefits of digital technologies while preserving cognitive integrity in an era characterized by rapid digitalization.

## 2. Historical Perspective

Memory has been a subject of inquiry since antiquity, with ancient Greek and Roman scholars like Aristotle and Cicero exploring mnemonic techniques and the relationship between memory and learning. Aristotle, for instance, viewed memory as an active cognitive function, not a passive repository (Annas, 1995). Cicero's writings on memory elevated its importance, emphasizing its role in acquiring knowledge and disseminating wisdom (Pieper, 2014). These ancient perspectives set the stage for the ongoing exploration of memory and its interactions with digital technologies.

Ebbinghaus, a pioneering late 19th-century German psychologist, significantly advanced the understanding of memory processes. His experiments, often involving the memorization of nonsense syllables, thus introduced the concept of the learning curve, demonstrating a predictable pattern in the rate of forgetting over time. Ebbinghaus's work basically emphasized three core memory components: encoding, storage, and retrieval while underscoring the importance of the initial acquisition and registration of information. His studies also revealed non-uniform information retention, contributing to the understanding of memory capacity and the natural decay of memories. Ebbinghaus's empirical approach continues to influence contemporary memory research, forming a robust foundation for the understanding of memory processes, particularly in the context of the digital age (Ebbinghaus, 2013).

The mid-20th century witnessed the emergence of cognitive psychology, which revolutionized memory research. Researchers like Atkinson and Shiffrin proposed a model of information processing that emphasized the role of memory in cognitive functions. The Modal Model thus proposed three distinct components: sensory memory, short-term memory, and long-term memory, interconnected through processes of encoding, storage, and retrieval. Sensory memory briefly captures sensory input but quickly decays if not attended to. Short-term memory acts as a limited-capacity workspace, requiring constant rehearsal to maintain information. Long-term memory serves as a vast repository for enduring knowledge. The model also introduced control processes that govern attention, encoding, and retrieval (Hockley, 2000; Baddeley et al., 2019). While subsequent research has led to refinements, the Modal Model remains a pivotal milestone in memory research, revolutionizing the understanding of memory within dynamic cognitive frameworks.

With advances in neuroimaging and neuroscience, the understanding of memory has further deepened. The identification of brain regions associated with memory, such as the hippocampus, has therefore provided a neurobiological perspective on memory processes. This seahorse-shaped structure, nestled within the medial temporal lobe, plays a critical role in the formation, consolidation, and retrieval of memories that encompass facts and events. Neuroimaging studies have not only highlighted the hippocampus's involvement but have also revealed its dynamic engagement during various memory-related tasks, such as the initial encoding of information and the transfer of memories into long-term storage (Lisman et al., 2017; Voss et al., 2017; Bird & Burgess, 2008). Furthermore, the broader neurobiological perspective on memory has uncovered an intricate network of other brain regions, which underpin both declarative and non-declarative memory systems (Sridhar et al., 2023). Declarative memory involves the conscious recollection of facts and events while non-declarative memory encompasses skills, habits, and other forms of implicit memory. Thus, the amygdala, positioned near the hippocampus, participates in the encoding and processing of emotionally significant memories, potentially enhancing their retention and influencing their later retrieval (Rajmohan & Mohandas, 2007). The prefrontal cortex, particularly the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, handles working memory and executive functions, being responsible for the temporary storage and manipulation of information and permitting cognitive control over memory processes (Perry & Mitchell, 2019). The entorhinal cortex, acting as an intermediary between the hippocampus and the neocortex, facilitates the initial stages of memory encoding and retrieval, facilitating the transfer of data between these critical

brain areas. The posterior cingulate cortex, linked to the default mode network, becomes active during periods of rest and self-referential thinking, playing a part in memory consolidation and retrieval, especially regarding autobiographical and self-relevant memories (Anderson et al., 2016). Within the temporal and parietal lobes, various regions are also implicated in diverse memory processes. The temporal lobe, for instance, is crucial for recognizing and retrieving specific episodic memories whereas the parietal lobe aids in the integration of spatial and episodic memories. Involved in learning and executing motor skills and routines, the basal ganglia contribute to non-declarative or procedural memory, which includes skills, habits, and other forms of implicit memory. Facilitating the initial encoding of sensory memories, the thalamus relays sensory information to the cortex and plays a role in memory consolidation by transmitting information to and from the neocortex (Rolls, 2019; Kamali et al., 2023). While the functions of these interconnected brain regions are involved in various facets of memory, such as its formation, consolidation, retrieval, and emotional associations, they can vary among individuals, being influenced by factors like the type of memory being processed and the nature of the task or experience.

In recent decades, the digital era has brought new dimensions to memory research. Scholars have shifted their focus toward understanding how digital technologies impact the way information is stored, accessed, and remembered. This transition has been driven by the exponential growth of digital devices and the internet, hence the profound impact of the digital era on collective memory (Mandolessi, 2023). While some view digital memory as fundamentally different from traditional memory, recent analyses contend that it represents a materialization of principles established in memory studies. By reevaluating the social aspect of memory, examining the digital archive's dynamic nature, and exploring the interplay between memory and forgetting, studies demonstrate how digital memory reshapes human understanding of collective memory. In the digital age, the relationship between memory, technology, and society is therefore evolving as it reflects the ongoing transformation of memory processes. Concepts like the Google effect and photo-taking-impairment effect have arisen, reflecting how the ease of online information retrieval and the habit of capturing moments through photography can influence human memory (Storm & Soares, 2021). The prevalence of digital media and social networks also creates a shared visual memory on a large scale, challenging traditional notions of photographic memory. Digital health and mHealth (mobile health) represent burgeoning domains at the intersection of healthcare and technology, focusing on the application of digital technologies, especially mobile devices, to improve health outcomes and healthcare delivery (García-Gavilanes et al., 2017; Firth, Torous & Firth, 2020; Barasch et al., 2017). Additionally, the phenomenon of transactive memory has gained prominence, as individuals increasingly rely on social media platforms and digital networks to store and share knowledge, essentially extending their cognition into the digital realm (Han, 2023). This shift poses intriguing questions about the interplay between autobiographical memory and the information readily available in the digital environment, as well as the role of cognitive offloading in memory processes within the context of fake news dissemination and the evolving landscape of metacognition. This emerging field promises to shed light on how the relationship with digital technology and social media platforms shapes the cognitive landscape and the ways in which modern humans engage with, and ultimately remember, information.

### 3. Biased Mind

Many cognitive distortions can influence how individuals perceive and recollect past experiences, having the potential to affect decision-making, judgments, and social interactions, especially in a world dominated by digital devices and gadgetry.

Confirmation bias arises when individuals tend to remember or interpret information in a manner that aligns with their preexisting beliefs or attitudes. People are more likely to recall and emphasize information that supports their existing notions while minimizing or forgetting conflicting evidence. Confirmation or myside bias can thus reinforce established beliefs and hinder consideration of alternative viewpoints, potentially distorting one's perception of reality (Peters, 2022). Similarly, selective memory involves the recollection of information aligning with one's preexisting beliefs or emotional state while disregarding or dismissing information contradicting those beliefs. This bias can result in an overemphasis on confirming memories and a neglect of alternative perspectives (Waring & Kensinger, 2011). According to the availability heuristic, individuals tend to rely on readily accessible information when making judgments or decisions. Thus, when a specific memory vividly

stands out and readily comes to mind, individuals tend to assign it greater significance, even if it does not accurately represent the overall situation. The availability heuristic can therefore lead to judgments influenced by the most recent or emotionally charged memories, potentially resulting in inaccurate assessments (MacLeod & Campbell, 1992).

Hindsight bias, commonly known as the I-knew-it-all-along phenomenon, manifests when individuals believe they predicted an outcome after it has already occurred. People often overestimate their ability to forecast events and may remember their prior judgments as more accurate than they actually were. Hindsight bias can therefore distort one's understanding of how certain events unfolded and hinder one's capacity to learn from past experiences (Bernstein et al., 2007). As often as not, individuals attribute positive outcomes to their own abilities or efforts while attributing negative outcomes to external factors or bad luck. The self-serving bias can thus impact self-esteem and lead to unrealistic self-perceptions, as individuals frequently recall their successes as resulting from their competence while attributing failures to external factors (Shepperd et al., 2008). The anchoring heuristic materializes when individuals heavily rely on the first piece of information they encounter when making judgments. This initial anchor can influence subsequent assessments, leading to biased evaluations as people may anchor their judgments to irrelevant or arbitrary information, even if it holds no relevance to the decision at hand (Furnham & Boo, 2011).

Awareness of memory-based biases would enable individuals to take measures to reduce their impact and make more rational and objective judgments in the digital era. Additionally, researchers and psychologists keep exploring such biases to gain deeper insights into human cognition and develop strategies for mitigating their influence on behavior and decision-making in a fully technologized world.

#### 4. Digitalization

The widespread use of digital devices and online connectivity revolutionizes how individuals engage with information. Shifting from physical to digital formats facilitates easy access to vast knowledge repositories and instant global information sharing. Digital technologies thus offer exceptional convenience in information retrieval, the immediacy of search engines, online databases, and digital libraries transforming the acquisition, processing, and storage of information for people (Bergman & Whittaker, 2016). Digital technologies have also led to shifts in memory practices. With information readily available through smartphones and computers, individuals increasingly rely on these devices as external memory aids. The digital era has therefore raised questions about the implications of this reliance on external storage and retrieval mechanisms for memory consolidation (Yasseri et al., 2022).

Moreover, the sheer volume of data available at one's fingertips can overwhelm individuals, leading to cognitive challenges in prioritizing and processing information effectively (Arnold et al., 2023). Thus, while the digital era has introduced new paradigms for information retrieval, tools like search engines, recommendation algorithms and cloud storage have all transformed how individuals retrieve information, sometimes replacing traditional memory recall mechanisms. Consequently, people externalize their autobiographical memories through digital technologies and social media platforms, which therefore serve personal and social purposes that align with the functions of autobiographical memory. As such, while digital technologies do not alter the fundamental cognitive processes involved in autobiographical memory, they introduce new contexts that influence how these processes operate. For instance, smartphones enable real-time event recording, which can reshape attention and affect memory. Furthermore, social media platforms facilitate frequent reviewing and sharing of memories, which can reinforce or modify their perception (Eliseev & Marsh, 2021). Given that externalization in the digital era can reshape individuals' recollection of their own experiences, digital technologies can very well facilitate cognitive offloading, where individuals rely on external devices to remember information. While this practice can indeed reduce the cognitive load, it may also have serious implications for the quality of memory processes. The ubiquitous presence of smartphones can thus have a profound impact on memory as these devices are used for pretty much anything, from accessing information to note-taking and everyday reminders, altering for good how people remember and recall information in their daily lives (Grinschgl et al., 2021).

Thoroughly understanding the digital impact on information processing therefore proves vital to grasping the cognitive consequences and challenges posed by the reliance on digital technologies for memory-related tasks.

#### 4.1 Cognitive impact

The easy accessibility of vast information databases through digital technologies will expand cognitive capacities, enhancing individuals' ability to access a wealth of knowledge and make informed decisions. The revolution in the learning process, with online courses, educational apps, and e-books, fosters improved memory retention and the application of knowledge. Moreover, the use of external memory aids, such as digital calendars, reminders, and note-taking applications, augments individuals' memory capabilities by helping organize information and ensuring critical details are not forgotten.

Heersmink & Carter (2020) examine memory technologies as cultural tools that intersect with human cognition. The metaphysical aspects explore the function, informational properties, classification, and ontological status of memory technologies. The epistemological dimensions delve into questions regarding the truthfulness of external memory, conditions under which it constitutes knowledge, and the monitoring of metacognitive processes related to it. The ethical and normative discussions encompass the impact of memory technologies on biological memory, individual and collective identities, and their moral status. While this study primarily focuses on philosophical and conceptual inquiries, it also addresses empirical issues, acknowledging the interconnected nature of philosophical and experiential investigations in understanding memory technologies. Another, more recent, study discusses the transformative impact of technology on human interaction, highlighting statistics from recent Pew Research Center surveys of the widespread use of cell phones, smartphones, and internet access. Despite knowing from laboratory research that context and collaboration influence memory, little has been understood before about how virtual collaboration affects memory compared to in-person studies. The study thus reflects on the contextual nature of memory effects in online as it presents a virtual collaborative memory paradigm through two online experiments conducted via chatrooms. In Experiment 1, collaborative inhibition – lower recall in collaborative groups – was unexpectedly absent due to lower recall in individual participants compared to in-person studies. Experiment 2, on the other hand, with modified instructions and experimenter presence, resulted in collaborative inhibition (Greeley et al., 2022).

The overreliance on digital devices for information storage and retrieval may thus disrupt memory consolidation, potentially compromising the transfer of information from short-term to long-term memory. Digital technologies can often promote shallow encoding strategies, with easy access to information leading to a tendency to skim or superficially engage with content, potentially hindering the formation of robust memories. The phenomenon of digital amnesia, where individuals rely on digital devices to remember information like phone numbers or addresses, can lead to a decline in their own memory capacities, which can further affect the encoding and consolidation of information into personal memory. Strategies to counteract digital amnesia include encouraging active learning practices that engage cognitive processes, alongside judicious use of digital memory aids to enhance rather than replace memory functions (Ward et al., 2017; Lodha, 2019; Schacter, 2022).

Acknowledging the cognitive impact of digital technologies on memory would enable individuals to strike a balance between external memory aids and their cognitive processes, which can optimize memory performance. Educators and learners could therefore promote deep encoding strategies in order to counteract potential shallow information processing, and could encourage critical thinking, active engagement with content, and reflection in order to improve memory retention (Haux et al., 2021).

#### 4.2 Digital Studies

Memory studies, as an interdisciplinary field, have undergone a transformation in response to the pervasive influence of digital technologies, so much so that the insights from digital-era research can impact and refine existing memory theories, contributing to the understanding of how memory functions in a world inundated with digital information.

Psychologists are now investigating how digital tools influence memory, attention, and information processing while exploring the consequences of modern technology use and implicitly the effects of multitasking on health, relationships, and academic achievement. While neuroscience has played a pivotal role in uncovering the neurobiological underpinnings of memory, contemporary neuroscientists are exploring how digital technologies affect the brain's memory-related processes, which includes investigations into the effects of digital multitasking on brain plasticity. Advances in brain-computer interfaces enable the direct interaction between digital technologies and cerebral activities, offering exciting opportunities for memory enhancement while raising ethical and cognitive implications (Hoskins, 2009;

Bowen & Petrelli, 2011). Research in sociology also explores how individuals and societies construct, share, and preserve memories in an environment marked by social media, online communities, and digital archives, thereby investigating how digital culture shapes the collective memory of events, communities, and societies (Dorr et al., 2019). Last but not least, information scientists are exploring the management of digital information and its relationship to memory, which includes research on strategies for effective information organization, retrieval, and preservation. Information science can therefore contribute to the development of memory technologies, such as digital preservation methods, data storage, and search algorithms, which can have direct implications for how individuals and institutions remember in the digital age (Maguire, 2022; Eustache & Peschanski, 2022).

As researchers are pooling their expertise to address complex questions and challenges, this interdisciplinary approach fosters a holistic understanding of the impact of digital technologies on memory. Collaborative efforts are also leading to practical applications such as the development of interventions, educational practices, and memory-enhancing tools suited to the digital age.

#### *4.3 Data excess*

Information overload occurs when individuals are inundated with an excessive amount of information, to the extent that it becomes challenging to manage effectively. The constant flow of data from various sources, such as social media, news, emails, and online content, can lead to the fragmenting of one's attention and the reducing of one's ability to focus on specific tasks. This may, in turn, degenerate into decreased information retention and difficulties in maintaining sustained attention, which will impact memory processes. The abundance of information can also result in decision paralysis, where individuals struggle to make choices due to the fear of missing out or making suboptimal decisions. When individuals encounter an overwhelming amount of information, their capacity to encode, store, and retrieve knowledge effectively may be compromised. The challenge lies in sifting through the information to identify what is essential for memory consolidation. The availability of copious information may also lead to shallow processing, where individuals skim content without deeply engaging with it, which can hinder the formation of durable memories and long-term learning (Arnold et al., 2023). While such cognitive challenges can hinder effective memory-related decision-making, most individuals can often employ digital strategies like filtering, curation, and content aggregation tools to manage information overload. By curating and prioritizing content, they aim to reduce the cognitive burden associated with excessive information. Furthermore, some individuals will resort to digital detoxes and mindfulness practices to mitigate the effects of information overload as they disconnect from digital devices in order to reduce cognitive strain and promote mental clarity (Fan et al., 2021).

Future prospects for addressing information overload include the development of advanced information management tools, artificial intelligence-driven filters, and personalized content recommendations. Promoting digital literacy and critical information evaluation skills can thus help individuals navigate the digital landscape more effectively while educational programs and training initiatives can empower individuals to make informed decisions about their information consumption and memory practices (Mahdi et al., 2020).

#### *4.4 Privacy Concerns*

Digital platforms, apps, and websites frequently collect user data, sometimes without explicit consent or knowledge. Such data is then used for profiling, targeted advertising, and personalization, which can affect how individuals perceive and remember information. Since the use of digital technologies often results in the creation of extensive digital footprints, such as online activities, and interactions, the knowledge that digital interactions are being monitored and personal data is being collected has raised big concerns about data privacy and security (Quach et al., 2022). Individuals should therefore become more cautious about what they share online, which can affect the depth of their digital interactions and the content they choose to remember.

The Metaverse represents the digital realm that mirrors the real world, integrating technologies like AI, 5G, cloud computing, blockchain, and encryption algorithms to interact with users through avatars. Ensuring trust in avatars depends on privacy and authentication technology. Users need privacy data input and emotion projection to personalize their avatars, but this poses privacy security challenges. Balancing privacy and digital identity protection with data utilization requires distinguishing the importance of various identifiers in personal identity generation. Establishing a unified digital identity authentication system is essential for

societal trust. Remedies for infringements on digital identity and privacy security can therefore be modeled on the right to personality (Wu & Zhang, 2023). Privacy concerns can lead to anxiety and stress, which are known to have adverse effects on memory and cognitive function. Worrying about data privacy can divert cognitive resources away from memory-related tasks. In response to growing privacy concerns, there has been a movement toward adopting privacy-conscious digital practices and privacy safeguards and regulations. Legislation such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe and the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) in the United States aims to give individuals more control over their data. These regulations have implications for digital platforms and services, influencing how they collect and manage user data, which, in turn, affects the user experience and the cognitive impact of digital technologies (Alexander, 2020; Yom-Tov & Ofran, 2022).

Future prospects for addressing privacy concerns include the development of technologies and practices that prioritize data security and user control. Innovations in privacy-focused technology, such as decentralized identity solutions and end-to-end encryption, offer potential solutions to safeguard privacy and reduce cognitive stress related to data exposure. Digital literacy programs and awareness campaigns can empower individuals to make informed decisions about their digital interactions and data sharing (Alajlan et al., 2023). By promoting digital self-awareness and privacy education, individuals can navigate the digital landscape with greater control. Educational institutions and technology developers can play a pivotal role in addressing privacy concerns. Incorporating privacy education into curricula and creating user-friendly privacy tools can foster a more secure and privacy-conscious digital environment. Innovations in privacy-preserving technologies, including secure data sharing and encryption methods, can enhance privacy while supporting the memory and cognitive well-being of individuals who engage with digital technologies (Wu & Zhang, 2023).

#### *4.5 Cognitive Integrity*

The constant notifications, alerts, and temptations for multitasking can fragment attention and hinder effective information processing, potentially impacting memory. Consequently, one of the primary challenges to maintaining cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and critical thinking is the prevalence of distractions within a digital environment marked by continual connectivity and information dissemination (Aivaz & Teodorescu, 2022). Prospects for addressing this challenge involve the development of digital tools and techniques that promote focused attention and minimize interruptions, thus supporting cognitive integrity (Storm & Soares, 2021). Future prospects include the development of advanced content filtering and information management tools that reduce cognitive load and help individuals prioritize and manage their digital information effectively.

Since knowledge of data collection and digital monitoring and surveillance can also disrupt cognitive processes, digital literacy programs, as well as stronger data privacy regulations, will empower society at large to navigate the digital landscape with awareness and control (Jain et al., 2016). Furthermore, educational institutions, in collaboration with technology developers, can play a significant role in cultivating critical thinking abilities, which will enable individuals to evaluate information sources, make informed decisions about their digital interactions, and discern trustworthy content from misinformation (Khan et al., 2021; Rahayu et al., 2022). Achieving cognitive integrity thus involves striking a balance between digital engagement and mindful use of digital technologies. The development of digital tools and apps that promote mindfulness practices and digital well-being can therefore help individuals manage their digital interactions and maintain cognitive clarity (Abhari et al., 2021).

#### *4.6 Optimization Strategies*

As humans navigate the digital age, it becomes increasingly important to develop strategies that enhance memory performance while counteracting the potential adverse effects of digital technologies. Recent findings indicate that multitasking can diminish cognitive processing and academic performance, especially with instant-gratification media like social apps. Educators note negative impacts on teacher-student relationships and classroom integrity. Attempts to control digital distractions have limited success, and banning devices may worsen student engagement. Encouraging handwritten notes and incorporating technology breaks are therefore suggested strategies to combat multitasking tendencies and enhance proper learning (Kostić & Randelović, 2022).

Also, effective information processing involves engaging with digital content



thoughtfully in order to facilitate robust memory encoding and optimization. Educational institutions and online learning platforms can therefore play a pivotal role in promoting deep learning by designing courses and content that encourage in-depth exploration and critical thinking. Rather than relying solely on external devices, individuals can use these aids as supplements to their own memory processes. Prospects for achieving this balance include the development of personalized digital assistants that enhance memory functions while respecting one's cognitive processes (Lin & Chang, 2023). The artificial intelligence-driven memory enhancement tools could thus adapt to one's cognitive profile, providing tailored support for memory performance (Silvhiany et al., 2021).

## 5. Future Implications

The continuous collaboration of various disciplines will offer more prospects for memory optimization as practitioners, educators, researchers, and technology developers can create new interventions, educational practices, and memory-enhancing applications suited to safeguard cognitive integrity and enhance memory-related tasks in an ever-evolving digital landscape.

Applied research will thus provide scholars with new opportunities to refine existing memory theories in light of the digital age while they incorporate the cognitive impacts and challenges introduced by digital technologies. Educators will find more practical solutions for optimizing memory processes and enhancing students' memory performance by encouraging deep learning, critical thinking, and digital literacy. Practitioners in fields like psychology, counseling, and well-being will further promote mindful technology use among their clients, and, by providing guidance on managing digital distractions and practicing mindfulness, they can thus help individuals optimize memory performance. Professionals in data privacy, cybersecurity, and legal fields can advocate stronger data privacy regulations and thus help organizations implement more advanced privacy-focused technologies. Developers of digital tools and applications can create better solutions that prioritize user cognitive well-being and integrity. While these tools should be designed to enhance memory performance, they should also respect one's cognitive processes.

The implications of this research therefore extend to a wide range of practitioners and researchers who have a stake in understanding and optimizing memory in the digital age.

## 6. Recommendations

In the contemporary digital age, achieving equilibrium in the utilization of digital resources is becoming increasingly imperative, with the overarching goal of optimizing memory performance while upholding cognitive integrity. To address this challenge, this study presents a set of recommendations tailored to various stakeholders, such as individuals, educators, technology developers, and policymakers. These recommendations seek to foster a harmonious integration of digital tools into daily life while safeguarding the well-being of cognitive processes and memory.

The first recommendation emphasizes the need for individuals to engage with digital technologies mindfully. This entails cultivating an awareness of the timing and manner in which digital devices are utilized, along with a discerning recognition of their potential implications on memory and cognitive functions. By exercising mindfulness in their interactions with technology, humans can make informed decisions about its usage and impact on their cognitive well-being (Lucero-Romero & Arias-Bolzmann, 2023). Another key aspect of optimizing memory performance in the digital era is recognizing the value of external memory aids. Tools like digital calendars, reminders, and note-taking applications can indeed supplement one's own memory processes, yet striking a balance between their usage and one's intrinsic memory capabilities proves essential for memory enhancement.

An equally vital recommendation underscores the significance of digital literacy education, which can help individuals to develop the skills required to critically evaluate online information, discern trustworthy sources, and navigate the digital landscape responsibly. As technology increasingly becomes intertwined with daily life, digital literacy should therefore equip humans with the tools to navigate this terrain thoughtfully while ensuring that memory and cognitive processes remain robust (Tinmaz et al., 2022). Deep learning and critical engagement contributes to the formation of strong memories and encourages the practical application of knowledge (Manalo, 2020). Integrating digital literacy into curricula at all educational levels can equip students with the necessary skills to navigate the digital landscape

responsibly while educators play a critical role in ensuring that students can discern credible sources, practice critical thinking, and engage deeply with digital content.

Another recommendation advocates employing strategies such as reducing notifications, scheduling dedicated work periods, and occasionally engaging in digital detox, thus emphasizing the importance of managing digital distractions and addressing the challenges related to information overload (Fan et al., 2021). For technology developers, a stronger user-centric approach to designing digital tools will focus on more features that enhance memory performance, minimize distractions, and protect data privacy (Chammas et al., 2015). Diversified memory enhancement tools that adapt to users' unique cognitive profiles and memory needs could therefore provide more tailored support for memory optimization as a highly individualized aspect of cognition. Further advocating data can empower individuals to have full control over their digital footprints and personal data. This recommendation supports the enactment of data protection legislation and policies that ensure informed consent and data privacy, and aims to safeguard individuals' digital identities and privacy, directly affecting their cognitive and memory-related activities (Vervier et al., 2017).

It is also highly recommended that questionnaires be employed as valuable tools for data collection in future research papers that address the impact of digital technologies on memory and memory studies. By utilizing a well-structured survey, with clear, concise, and non-biased questions, researchers can systematically collect data on participants' experiences, attitudes, and behaviors related to the research topic (Taherdoost, 2021). This approach offers a standardized method for data collection, making it easier to analyze and draw meaningful conclusions from the gathered information. The sample questionnaire at the end of this study contains a series of questions designed to investigate the impact of digital technologies on memory and memory studies, thus gathering crucial insights from research participants. However, these questions may require adaptation to ensure alignment with the precise research objectives and the intended audience in future studies (see Appendix).

## 7. Conclusions

Smartphones, computers, and the internet have become integral to modern life due to their widespread use and accessibility, hence their position as a dominant force in shaping how individuals interact with and process information. The impact of digital technologies on memory therefore carries profound cognitive, educational, and societal implications since memory processes significantly influence mental capabilities, decision-making and learning processes, and overall well-being. As one downside, while digital technologies offer unparalleled access to knowledge and resources, they also introduce increasing challenges such as information overload, memory deficits, digital amnesia, and privacy concerns. Information overload, for instance, can lead to excessive cognitive load, making it difficult for individuals to manage and process information effectively, which can strain cognitive resources and impair memory retention. However, the digital era has also led to cognitive adaptation as individuals have developed new skills for sifting through vast amounts of information, evaluating sources, and critically thinking about the information they encounter. Additionally, the interdisciplinary collaboration among various academic disciplines, such as psychology, neuroscience, sociology, and information science, underscores the interdisciplinary nature of memory studies in the digital age.

As humans' dependence on digital technologies continues to grow, the future of memory and cognition will become increasingly intertwined with these tools. With practical applications in the fields of education, healthcare, and technology development, this study sought to provide both academics and practitioners with sustainable insights into how to leverage the benefits of digital tools for memory enhancement while mitigating the risks associated with excessive reliance on external aids. By exploring the opportunities and challenges of the digital landscape in the context of memory-related tasks, individuals can ultimately work toward achieving a harmonious integration of digital resources into their lives while preserving their cognitive integrity.

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## Appendix A

### Research Questionnaire

### The Impact of Digital Technologies on Memory and Cognitive Processes

#### Introduction

Digital technologies, including smartphones, computers, and the internet, have revolutionized how individuals encode, store, and retrieve information, significantly altering memory processes. The digital era has both positive and negative cognitive impacts on memory as it extends cognitive capacities and facilitates learning through easy information access while it raises concerns about diminished memory consolidation and reliance on shallow encoding strategies. Memory studies have evolved into an interdisciplinary field where scholars from psychology, neuroscience, sociology, and information science collaborate to understand the implications of digital technologies on human memory. This collaborative approach enriches the understanding of memory in the digital age and offers potential avenues for optimizing memory performance. Challenges in the digital era include information overload, digital amnesia, and privacy concerns, which pose obstacles to both researchers and individuals seeking to harness the benefits of digital technologies. Due to digital distractions, multitasking, and data privacy concerns, the preservation of cognitive functions in the digital landscape also becomes of paramount importance. Consequently, strategies for maintaining cognitive integrity consist of deep learning, mindfulness, balanced use of digital memory aids, digital literacy, privacy-conscious practices, and personalized memory enhancement tools.

This questionnaire aims to gather information about your activities and perceptions regarding the impact of digital technologies on memory and cognitive processes. Your responses will contribute to our research on this topic. Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge and experiences.

#### Demographics:

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Educational Background: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Technology Usage:

5. On average, how many hours per day do you spend using digital devices such as smartphones, computers, and tablets?
  - Less than 1 hour
  - 1-2 hours
  - 2-4 hours
  - More than 4 hours
6. Which digital devices do you use most frequently? (Check all that apply)
  - Smartphone
  - Computer
  - Tablet
  - Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
7. How often do you engage in multitasking with digital devices (e.g., texting while watching TV or using a smartphone during meetings)?
  - Rarely
  - Occasionally
  - Frequently

#### Memory and Information Processing:

8. How do you feel digital technologies have influenced your ability to remember information and facts?



- Enhanced my memory
  - Had no significant impact
  - Diminished my memory
9. Do you rely on digital memory aids (e.g., calendars, note-taking apps) for organizing and remembering tasks and information?
- Yes
  - No
10. How often do you find yourself experiencing digital amnesia, where you rely on digital devices to remember information you would have previously remembered on your own?
- Rarely
  - Occasionally
  - Frequently

#### **Educational and Learning Impact:**

11. If you are a student or involved in education, how have digital technologies affected your learning and information retention?
- Improved my learning
  - Had no significant impact
  - Hindered my learning
12. Have you noticed changes in your learning strategies due to the easy accessibility of digital information? If so, how has it affected the depth of your learning and understanding of topics?

#### **Privacy and Data Security:**

13. Are you concerned about your data privacy and personal information being collected by digital technologies and online platforms?
- Very concerned
  - Somewhat concerned
  - Not concerned
14. Do privacy concerns affect your digital interactions and information sharing habits?

#### **Cognitive Well-Being:**

15. How often do you experience digital distractions that impact your focus and cognitive performance?
- Rarely
  - Occasionally
  - Frequently
16. Do you practice mindfulness or employ strategies to manage digital distractions and maintain cognitive clarity? If so, please describe your strategies.
- \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Additional Comments:**

17. Do you have any additional comments, experiences, or observations related to the impact of digital technologies on memory and cognitive processes that you would like to share?
- \_\_\_\_\_
18. Please feel free to provide any additional insights or comments in the space below.
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for participating in our survey. Your responses are valuable to our research.**

*This questionnaire serves as a starting point and can be modified to suit the specific objectives and audience of any future research.*

