

Traditional Beti Gastro-Medicine in Cameroon: An Ethno-Analysis of Therapeutic Eating and Care Practices through Meals

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ABSTRACT	ARTICLE DETAILS
In human societies with their own culinary heritage, which varies according to their history and culture, food plays a key role in traditional pharmacopoeia. The preparation and preparation of so-called “therapeutic” meals are based on knowledge and know-how that are nonetheless influenced by the introduction of new conventional medicines. This reflection sheds light on the role that food can play in the traditional pharmacopoeia of African peoples such as the Béti people, who live in several Central African countries. The aim of this article is to show not only how certain foods were consumed as medicines to cure certain illnesses, but also to prevent them. On the basis of oral sources combined with field data, this work aims to interpret the various symbols represented by certain plants in their relationship with man in terms of health. In this way, the research carried out on food in Béti country will enable us to perceive food not only as a consumer good, but also as a therapeutic means, especially in the context of a world marked by the COVID. KEYWORDS: Diseases, food, alicaments, pharmacopoeia, traditional medicine, Béti.	Published On: 7 July 2025 Available on: https://ijmir.com

1. INTRODUCTION

In human societies with their own culinary heritage, which varies according to their history and culture, medicinal foods or alicaments have been used by the Beti and Fang-Beti of Cameroon since the 19th century. As a result of foreign cultural influences, particularly in the second half of the century, eating habits have changed. Today's population seems unaware of the identity and healing dimension that these foods embody. There is a growing desire to get closer to Western foods, which is leading to a gradual abandonment of traditional eating habits. When food loses its value, it's not just a memory that disappears, but the history of a people. This jeopardizes the food culture of the Beti, which it is important to preserve. To what extent are foods considered medicinal or alicaments in Cameroon, specifically among the Béti of Cameroon? What are these foods? And how are they consumed to cure and prevent certain illnesses? These are the central questions we aim to answer in this article.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study is conducted in the Beti and Fang-Beti region, which geographically covers the Central and Eastern regions. This choice takes into account the observance, which is still very specific, despite the opening to globalization of the sacred and ancestral character that meals occupy in these regions, and also the fact that it allows for the different social visions related to food and people for those who know how to decode the messages carrying therapeutic didactics. Meals are indeed considered as functional foods, means of preventing certain diseases and as instances of socialization sometimes useful for maintaining harmony within groups. The study was carried out using a multidisciplinary approach and used both secondary and primary data. Secondary data came from the literature on food as a functional food, while primary data were collected from direct observations and interviews with resource persons (traditional authorities, patriarchs/matriarchs (symbol of wisdom, the latter remain true guarantors of tradition, education and social stability through their words and life experience. Mbala Owona, (1990)). A field survey was carried out between June 2020 and August 2021, at the end of which more than thirty semi-structured and free interviews were conducted. The data collected were mainly analyzed on a qualitative basis following the rules of content analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to present the meals used to treat illnesses among the Beti. Studies in this area have been carried out in the region, such as Betti (Betti, 2001), who focused on plants used in the treatment of malaria. Regarding diet, this is the first study carried out in the region. The survey was conducted among 104 households in the work area, the majority of whom were women. This study target profile is the one observed in most culinary research, confirming the mastery of therapeutic meals by the female sex. The observation is that traditional meals contribute greatly to the healthcare system among the Beti. Among the plants with the most therapeutic importance, Okok (*Gnetum buchholzianum*) is at the top, which treats around thirty illnesses. This plant is followed by Omen'd, Ndong, and Kola nut (*Kola vera acuminata*).

What meaning can be given here to traditional medicine with regard to food security among the Beti? It is clear that food among these people constitutes in its own way a form of therapeutic heritage that reveals a deep social legacy. It is established in this study that nearly 75% of species recorded are products from forest resources for the preparation of these recipes in traditional medicine. The perennial nature of these species makes it possible to have at least 10 recipes that can treat illnesses according to each identified case and each season of the year could justify this concern (Zerbo, 2007). Moreover, Mabika (Mabika, 1983), Womé (Womé, 1985), Bitsindou (Bitsindou, 1997), Betti (Betti, 2001), Olivier and Sanou (Olivier and Sanou, 2003), Nana-Sanon (Nana-Sanon, 2005) as well as Ilumbe (Ilumbe, 2006 and 2010) have also noted their extensive use in their respective studies in traditional pharmacopoeia. The bark of the trunk and the leaves are more used in the treatment of illnesses (Kalanda et al., 1995; Ilumbe, 2006). Therefore, the first perception of food refers to the domestic culinary ideal which is reproduced identically. Regardless of what people eat in their daily lives, food serves as medicine and evokes this ideal.

4. THE ADVANTAGES OF THE NATURAL AND HUMAN ENVIRONMENT FOR FOOD PRODUCTION AMONG THE BETI

The living environment of certain peoples has often maintained close links with certain aspects of their social, political and economic life. When it comes to cultural history, these relationships become more binding. To this end, this reflection requires highlighting the influence of the geographical environment on food production and making a physical examination of the environment in its potential relationships with the dynamics of the Beti and Fang-Beti population (Mantsana Ndeme, 2015). Thus, this part aims to present the influence of the geographical environment on food production in these two entities.

4.1. An environment with plant covers rich in nutritional and therapeutic benefits

The geography of the Central and Eastern region in general has significantly influenced food production. This is precisely the relief and soils. It covers areas with very different appearances: wooded hills and forest galleries along the rivers, but also immense dense forest (Mantsana Ndeme, 2015). The vegetation of the Beti country includes both forest and savannah. It is therefore a contact zone. The natural environment of these regions offers a plant carpet characterized by an invaluable flora that is very rich and varied. The vegetation includes a grassy savannah in the North and a lush forest in the South. The presence of alternating grassy savannahs, forest galleries that give way in the South to the large forest on a peneplain that descends from the Northwest to the Southeast at an average altitude of 700m. It presents certain families of trees at the feet of which grasses grow. Among other things, we have precious trees such as Iroko and Mahogany (Mantsana Ndeme, 2015). This flora also offers fruit trees including wild mango trees, Safoutier, and Carité. In fact, we find three major vegetation zones :

The dense humid forest is characterized by plant formations described as dense humid forest and is dominated by two large families, those of Ulmaceae and Sterculiaceae. These alternate with the semi-old forest with large areas of swamp forests. The dominant families are: Combretaceae, Sterculiaceae, Meliaceae, Ochnaceae. The clay-sandy soils that characterize this area make it a fertile forest area because it is very rich in organic matter (C Lemoupa Fotio, 2014: 42).

4.2. A cultural environment conducive to human settlement

The central region is made up of ten departments, the main ones being: Yaoundé, Eséka, Akonolinga, Nanga-Eboko, Monatélé, Mbalmayo, Mfou, Bafia, Ngoumou, Ntui. The city of Yaoundé, the political capital of Cameroon and seat of institutions, is the center of Cameroonian administration. As a result, it attracts all economic operators seeking approvals and various other authorizations. On the human level, the central regions, a place of mixing of peoples par excellence, are partly composed of indigenous populations. These populations have fishing, agriculture and hunting as their main activity. Contact with other cultures, however, has had to modify and considerably extend these activities and practices which date back to the pre-colonial period (Imbert Jean, 1973: 13).

In the Centre region, the most representative indigenous group is the Beti group, within which we find subgroups such as the Ewondo, the Eton, the Yebekolo, the Akonolinga, the Manguissa. We also find the Bafia, the Yambassa, the Banen, among others. Today, the indigenous populations of these areas carry out multiple and varied activities, affecting all areas of active life in this region of the Centre region. In this part of the country, we also find a whole group of populations coming from different regions of

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the country and the sub-region, attracted in part by the pots. We also observe the presence of migrants and expatriates coming from the Central African sub-region, Europe, America, Asia.

5. PERCEPTION OF THE FOOD PHENOMENON IN THE BETI HEALTH SYSTEM

Food is any substance used to nourish living beings. It is perceived in different ways depending on the context in which it is used.

5.1. Scientific perception of food

Agri-food science understands food as any substance taken in by mouth that is capable of providing energy and material for the body's growth and repair. Trémolière sees it as a commodity containing nutrients, such as proteins, carbohydrates, lipids, mineral salts, and vitamins, capable of satisfying appetite and growth. Food must be pleasant and tasty. It must also have nutritional qualities, that is, be capable of ensuring growth. Finally, food must have characteristics favorable to generating good health. This is concretely observed by its capacity to ensure fertility, efficiency in activity, and longevity.

Recognize the importance of diet on health. Thus, the Beti ancestors recommended strict diets to strengthen the body, to find the right balance between body and soul; it is this same balance that the school of Pythagoras, in its mystical dimension, enjoins to achieve through a highly codified diet. Faced with new health problems linked to an unbalanced diet (diabetes, cholesterol, obesity, etc.), industrialized countries have been rediscovering for several years, alongside basic dietary advice, the positive, even curative action of certain foods or plants. Moreover, for about ten years, a new generation of products has appeared on the food market: functional foods.

5.2. Perception of food among the Beti

In Cameroonian societies, particularly in Beti country, there are various representations related to food. Among the Eton and Yambassa, for example, Okok plays a very important therapeutic role. It should be noted that for the Beti, diseases are classified into three categories. There are so-called natural diseases, resulting from the wear and tear of the body or anything else; diseases whose origin is linked to the bad actions of the individual himself, consequences of the shock in return of his evil spells, and finally diseases that come from evil spirits and are governed by evildoers. The ethnography of the diet of Beti and Bamileke migrants shows an example of the diversity of "traditional" cuisines. The Bamileke come from West Cameroon with maize as their staple food. While the Beti occupy the Central region with cassava as their staple food. All of them are cultivators of tubers, cereals and many other species of plants which they use to treat certain diseases that are common in the region.

6. FOOD CULTURE AND DISEASES AMONG THE BETI PEOPLE: THE EXAMPLE OF OKOK AS A FUNCTIONAL FOOD

Culinary ethno-codes represent the set of internal cultural principles used in the field of cuisine. They are associated with a value system, an endogenous food culture. In other words, cuisine, like language, is a form of expression: it is made up of signs, sounds and meanings, of what is said and what is not said, of words and silences. Cuisine, like language, evolves, but not in just any way.

6.1. Functional foods as a health system among the Beti

The typical Beti dish is Okok, usually served with tubers. Okok is made from very finely chopped Gnetum leaves, boiled with peanut butter and palm nut juice. Another typical dish is Kpwem, made from cassava leaves and peanut butter. Another way to eat Kpwem is to replace the peanut butter with palm nut juice, in which case it is called Kpwem Isouk. Traditional cuisine is contrasted with urban cuisine. Both convey representations laden with symbolic values specific to each culture. Beti dishes, such as peanut sauce, Kpwem, nnam wondo, etc., are no longer the same when prepared in the city, even by the Beti and, even more so, by the Bamileke. The same applies to the preparation of Bamileke dishes such as koki, pilé, yellow sauce.

In fact, dishes, whether prepared by Beti or Bamileke city dwellers, have one thing in common: they are not "isolated atoms," to use Syfia's expression, speaking of food products. Indeed, dishes, meals, are related to other meals and dishes, also charged with symbolic value. Likewise, they are related to the men who prepare and eat them, to their beliefs and their ethno-codes. From this point of view, cooking in urban areas in Cameroon is also evolving methodically. Here we will focus on the genus Gnetum which is one of the most used plants among the Beti, this variety of vegetable is eaten fresh and is present during all periods of the year. Humans in all the environments in which they live each select from their environment a large number of substances that they consider as food, medicine or functional foods. But not all of them have the same symbolic or taste value, like the Okok present throughout the study area.

6.2. Okok as a medicinal food among the Beti

The genus Gnetum is a product of spontaneous vegetation which, in Central Africa, occupies a very important place in the diet of many populations, even all social classes. Very widely known among the Beti under the name of Okok, it occurs in two species: Gnetum africanum (with small leaves) and Gnetum buchholzianum (with large leaves).



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The importance of this study is all the more justified since traditional pharmacopoeia and medicine are becoming a significant alternative for African populations in general, and those of the Beti of Central Cameroon in particular, in terms of health coverage. This is all the more evident since, despite the opening to modernism, the increasingly difficult socio-economic situation today favors the resurgence of disadvantaged social classes in many respects on the one hand, and makes pharmaceutical specificities inaccessible for a large segment of the population on the other.

Furthermore, due for example to the ineffectiveness of certain treatments relating to modern medicine, administered in hospitals and/or secondary health centers sometimes due to the emergence of resistant microbial strains, responsible for certain pathologies, or even the effect of habits or organic intolerance to administered pharmaceutical products, the Cameroonian populations in general and Beti in particular are increasingly resorting to recipes from the pharmacopoeia and traditional medicine without however forgetting therapeutic foods.

7. OKOK, A PLANT WITH THERAPEUTIC VIRTUES: ILLNESSES, DOSAGE AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

The survey made it possible to identify, on the one hand, forty-two diseases that are treated with remedies prepared from Gnetum. Remedies prepared and administered in a variable manner depending on the case and on the other hand, to highlight its preventive virtues. For each disease, the type of leaves used, the method of preparation of the remedy, the method of administration and the different Beti societies of Cameroon where the said remedy is used are indicated.

7.1. Men's Diseases

- Hemorrhoids

Okok leaves are combined with other leaves or plants that the informants did not want to reveal. Everything is ground to obtain a juice. The remedy is given to the patient three times a day in a teaspoon or a quarter of a glass, once a day depending on the patient's age.

- Nerve pain, stomach pain and deep chest organs

It is a set of pains that relate to the nerves of the stomach, spine and thoracic organs. This disease often causes physical deformation, particularly of the spine, in both young people and adults. The treatment is based on a preparation of Gnetum or Okok leaves combined with other ingredients not revealed by our informants. The method of preparation is part of a certain ritual that is also not revealed. The remedy is taken in the form of a meal. The duration of the treatment varies depending on the case. At the end of the treatment, the patient is forbidden to consume meals based on Gnetum to avoid possible relapses. The use of this treatment is common in this part of the country.

- Diabetes

No details have been given as to whether it is fatty or lean diabetes. Okok leaves are first dried and then pounded and the powder thus obtained is passed through a sieve before being introduced into the patient's daily diet in a quantity equivalent to a teaspoon. The treatment is only stopped when the patient is cured. This remedy was much more widely used among the Yambassa.

7.2. Women's diseases

- Sterility

In this specific case, a special preparation called Olaàmi in Beti, Tégué and Mbochi, made according to a certain rite by the initiates, is presented to the patient in the form of a remedy. The latter is composed of Okok leaves (*Gnetum buchholzianum*) cut into thin strips and river fish, that is, small freshwater shrimp fish due to the (popular) recognition of their very remarkable fertility.

Despite the minimal differences that can be observed between the different tribes concerning the method of preparation and administration of the remedy on the one hand, the duration of the treatment and the habits of the therapist on the other hand, the

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remedy is generally administered, throughout the region in the form of a meal that the patient takes alone or with her husband, with or without manioc, in a canary used to prepare it.

This is daubed with red and white marks, a sign of invocation and/or convocation of benevolent spirits, favorable to fertility, in order to give the remedy, the desired power.

- **Easier or less painful childbirths**

In, the use of *Gnetum* or *Okok* is preventive. A herbal tea is obtained from the vines of *Gnetum buchholzianum*, cut into small pieces and prepared in a saucepan and administered to the expectant mother. This herbal tea makes childbirth easier and less painful. It is offered to women with high-risk pregnancies and very often around the eighth month. A quarter of a glass, three times a day, is the dose prescribed by the Traditional Therapist. This practice is still observed in certain villages in the central region of Cameroon.

- **Asthma**

It is treated in almost the same way in all regions of this part of the country. The juice is collected from crushed or pounded *Okok* leaves and administered to the patient according to the following dosage:

- One teaspoonful, twice a day (morning and evening), for a child under one year old;

- One tablespoonful, three times a day for children over one year old, or even four years old;

- A quarter of a glass, three times a day for an adult.

At the end of treatment, the patient is strictly prohibited from consuming meals containing *Okok* to avoid any possible relapses¹.

7.3. Childhood Illnesses

- **Fever**

Simply place an *Okok* leaf in a bottle of water intended for the child or in their baby's bottle. Through a diffusion effect, the leaf releases chemical properties that contribute to the healing of the young patient. This recipe is proposed in the same regions as for cases of ear infections.

- **Splenomegaly or "spleen disease"**

In the central region of Cameroon, among some Beti, young leaves of *Gnetum africanum* are cut into thin strips and simply mixed into the food when the patient is aged between four months and five years. However, among the Yambassa, regardless of the patient's age, the remedy called *Olaami* is prepared from leaves of *Gnetum africanum*, cut into thin strips, but associated with the poison called *Mbessé* according to certain rites, by men and women with a natural or supernatural gift of healing. The treatment is administered in the form of a meal taken with or without cassava, either on a banana leaf softened by the flames of fire or on a *Marantaceae* leaf, or in a canary used to prepare the remedy. The duration of the treatment varies depending on the case.

- **Constipation**

Les combined with okra. Generally, *Gnetum africanum* leaves are preferable to those of *Gnetum buchholzianum*. Thus, in the Central Cameroon region, a distinction has been established between two types: one with very dark green leaves, soft and sticky to eat, and the other, less sticky, with less green leaves, tending to burn under the effect of heat during preparation; the former is preferred.

7.4. Mystical Illnesses

- **Night Meals**

As in the case of incubus spirits, succubus and spells, the preparation of the remedy and its intake are done according to a certain rite of style specific to the Traditional Therapist. However, in the preparation, one always associates the type of food that the mythical assailants or aggressors made or make their victim eat at night. This practice is still practiced today.

- **Incubi, succubi spirits and spells**

To combat these evil spirits, commonly called "night husbands" and "night women," and bewitchments, victims turn to initiates. The remedy is prepared in a canary according to the rite specific to the Traditional Therapist. But generally, despite the difference in style among therapists, the method is to combine *Gnetum* leaves cut into thin strips with those of *Amaranthus* sp, commonly called "djomb," and cassava. Other ingredients are added, such as rock salt, tarot cards or plantain, small freshwater carp, and palm oil.

To combat these evil spirits, commonly called "night husbands" and "night women," and bewitchments, victims turn to initiates. Taking this remedy is preceded by another rite. The family or village community participates, including songs and dances. The traditional healer orally invokes and/or summons the spirits of their ancestors so that they too may participate in the work of liberation or healing, for his "power" comes from them. He then traces a circle on the ground in which he places the canary containing the remedy. Reddish, whitish, and blackish marks are made, according to his style, on the canary, on the patient's forehead, temples, wrists, and feet.

¹ Medzo Akono Etienne, therapist, 52 years old, interview on 06/22/2020 in Ngaoundéré.

- The poison

Gnetum leaves are rinsed in water and eaten raw, five to six times a day, for the first ten days after poisoning. Some villages still use this practice.

8. OTHER FOODS CONSUMED AS FUNCTIONAL FOODS

8.1. The Omen'd

It is worth noting that, in addition to Gnetum, which is a plant that the Beti consume as a meal and a functional food, there is also the leaf called Omen'd in Yambassa. It provides blood to the body. With this leaf, you do not need any blood transfusion, because it gives your body all the blood it needs. In the typical traditional Beti village of the 19th century, there was no hospital. People treated themselves with herbs. They ate more natural foods and vegetables and you would hardly see anyone lacking blood².

Omen'd is used in several ways. Some use it as a tea. They collect the leaf, wash it, put it in a pot, add water, and cook it until the water turns red. You pour the water into a cup, add honey or sugar, add milk, or drink it just like that. As soon as you drink it, sweat would flow down your body profusely. You can use it and eat bread like normal tea³.



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Some people use the fresher leaf to make soup. They will add it either as a vegetable or in other types of soup after slicing it like a normal pumpkin. Some use it to cook yam porridge⁴. The most effective way is to drink it like tea. If you drink it for a week for a stretch, the blood in your body will make you fresher and plumper. Our parents and grandparents didn't know about fibroids and cancers, they didn't have surgeries, and they didn't know about blood transfusions to find who has the same blood type or the universal donor to give to a patient. Omen'd tastes sweeter than regular tea when you add honey and milk. It works like magic⁵.

8.2. Bushmeat

Just like the Gbaya, on the therapeutic level, the Beti have long recognized and still use meats as a food supplement to treat or protect themselves from certain diseases. This part appeals much more to hunters; we will simply highlight some therapeutic or medicinal virtues of certain meats. Meats have for several centuries been one of the supports of community life of all times, entering directly into the education of the young bride and especially of the pregnant woman. The latter must consume abundantly certain types of game in order to guarantee the harmonious, physical and moral development of her future child. Among other bush meat to consume, we must mention the wild cat which is not only a source of protein for the future mother, but also an important element for cleaning the skin of the fetus so that it is clean at birth, that is to say without stain or free from any other defilement⁶.

² Mengue Marie Rose, 89 years old, housewife, interview on July 19, 2020 in Ngaoundéré.

³ Magani Sylvie, 55 years old, shopkeeper, interview on June 19, 2020 in Bertoua.

⁴ Magani Sylvie, 55 years old, shopkeeper, interview on June 19, 2020 in Bertoua.

⁵ Yakana Judith, 67 years old, farmer, interview on July 18, 2020 in Ngaoundéré.

⁶ Amougou Armand, 57 years old, traditional healer, interview on July 2, 2020 in Ngaoundéré.



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The consumption of monkey meat is also highly recommended because the Beti believe that this gesture would make the future child very strong. The same is true of chimpanzee and gorilla bones, which are used to massage newborns or, hidden in the infant's pillowcases, protect them from evil spirits and further strengthen their bones.

8.3. The *Ndong*

Ndong, a chili pepper with mystical virtues, has another important meaning in Cameroon. It primarily symbolizes protection. Some mistake it for chili pepper because of its spicy taste; others call it jujube, an edible fruit. The Dschang of West Cameroon call it Sok, a local term meaning chili pepper (Atoukam Tchefejem, 2008: 43-50). Indeed, the Beti have transformed what was once a simple food into a truly mystical and curative object. This product, whose name has predominantly Bassa connotations, for reasons that are poorly understood, has become almost a reference in certain rites, ranging from simple to more "coded" use by both novices and initiates (Mboa G, 2012). *Ndong* is increasingly used for healing. It is found in purses where it plays a "guardian" role because those who use it say they can annex thieves. Some large merchants put it in their suitcases to "petrify" thieves or protect their belongings... In vehicles, it is said to protect against traffic accidents. When kept on one's person, in one's pockets or in a part of one's clothing, the *Ndong* is said to serve as armor against spiritual attacks.

In some homes, it is said that *Ndong* drives away evil spirits or people of ill omen as soon as it is placed in a room or place... In this case, the procedure is almost always the same: start a prayer or an incantatory ceremony, chew and spit the *Ndong* in all directions. It turns out - for those who use it - that it works. However, those who claim to use it for defense are not the only ones to use its miraculous potential. Sorcerers in the villages are able to "plant" grains of *Ndong* in a part of the body; which will rot if not change its appearance. The process of implanting such a "product" in the human body obviously remains mystical... Also during births, the new ones often hide it in their diapers or under their beds so that no sorcerer "implants" anything... However, aside from this unusual use, *Ndong* is used as a raw food: eaten raw, fresh, dry or induced in meals, it does not cause death; this is why it can easily be found anywhere in Cameroonian society.



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Moreover, the photo above shows *Ndong*, an essential food among the Beti for curing multiple illnesses.

8.4. The kola nut

Like many African societies, Beti communities distinguish plants with highly evocative symbols. In Beti tradition specifically, the kola nut has a highly symbolic value. It comes from the kola tree (*Kola vera acuminata*), a tree also found in the western region. Kola is the support for conflictual and friendly relationships and rituals. It is used in religious or secular ceremonies, joyful or painful (marriage, mourning, sacrifice). This fruit is "sacred" in Africa in general and in Beti country in particular, because it is attributed various virtues. Having a strong symbolic value, it was the mediator in human relations as well as in the relationships between man and the gods and dark forces.

It remains the symbol of union and fertility. In tradition, the kola nut is an adult food (Mveng E., 1964: 64). It is not only this fruit rich in caffeine that we chew to stimulate ourselves or to stave off hunger and that we accompany with sips of raffia wine (Ongoum, 1979: 304). Beyond this nutritional function, kola is a medicine. It reflects the deep mark of esteem and sincere friendship. It is a sign of respect when given to elders. It is used for fertility purposes and when ripe, it opens in the middle and takes the form of two valves whose dividing line represents the vulva at the time of parturition (Atoukam Tchefenjém, 2009: 166).



©Photo, Mantsana Ndeme Sandrine, Obala on August 10, 2022.

The photo above illustrates kola nuts, a "sacred" food in Africa and especially during major celebrations.

9. CONCLUSION

In the process of exploiting plants, the peoples of Central Cameroon have developed a whole set of methods and techniques that have allowed them to satisfy their most basic needs. The culinary register is a privileged and moral signifier because food does not only meet a basic physical need but also a therapeutic one, and this is why Claude Lévi-Strauss calls it mediation. It remains no less true that the diet of the Beti peoples of Central Cameroon is based on *Gnetum africanum* and *Gnetum buchholzianum*, commonly called Okok, which constitutes a very valuable source of protein and mineral salts, marketed by women throughout the year in Cameroonian and Central African markets. Okok leaves play a role that goes beyond their food use, and people express their cultural identity through the consumption of its dishes. Food therefore plays a role in human relationships and receives a symbolic meaning: a symbol of life, joy, joie de vivre, fraternal life, solidarity, and interpersonal intimacy. It is in this multiplicity of meanings that the substantial and total meaning of food is developed.

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