

Nguon Rituals of Bamoun Cosmology: Artistic Performance and Psychosocial Healing through Medical anthropological lens

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Abstract

This study examines the Nguon ritual of the Bamoun people in Cameroon as a multidimensional practice integrating healing, cosmology, and artistic performance. Drawing on ethnographic methods and medical anthropology frameworks, five themes emerged: ritual healing, cosmology and identity, artistic performance as therapy, collective cohesion, and intergenerational transmission. Findings reveal that Nguon functions simultaneously as cultural heritage, psychosocial intervention, and community development strategy.

By aligning participant narratives with theories of ritual transformation, medical anthropology, African cosmology, and performance studies, the study demonstrates how collective performance challenges biomedical paradigms and affirms heritage as cultural medicine. While limited to one cycle of the festival, the research highlights broader applications in healthcare, education, and peace building.

Ultimately, Nguon exemplifies how indigenous rituals can inform global approaches to resilience and unity. It stands as a living testament to the power of embodied aesthetics to restore balance, transmit values, and sustain communities across generations, positioning Bamoun cosmology within global debates on healing and heritage.

Keywords: *Nguon ritual, Bamoun cosmology, Indigenous healing systems, Ritual aesthetics, psychosocial resilience, Medical anthropology, Performance theory, Heritage preservation, Intergenerational transmission, African ritual studies.*

Résumé

Cette étude examine le rituel Nguon du peuple Bamoun au Cameroun en tant que pratique multidimensionnelle intégrant guérison, cosmologie et performance artistique. S'appuyant sur des méthodes ethnographiques et des cadres d'anthropologie médicale, cinq thèmes ont émergé : guérison rituelle, cosmologie et identité, performance artistique comme thérapie, cohésion collective et transmission intergénérationnelle. Les résultats révèlent que le Nguon fonctionne simultanément comme patrimoine culturel, intervention psychosociale et stratégie de développement communautaire.

En alignant les récits des participants avec les théories de la transformation rituelle, de l'anthropologie médicale, de la cosmologie africaine et des études de la performance, l'étude démontre comment la performance collective remet en question les paradigmes biomédicaux et affirme le patrimoine comme médecine culturelle. Bien que limitée à un cycle du festival, la recherche met en lumière des applications plus larges dans les domaines de la santé, de l'éducation et de la consolidation de la paix.

En définitive, le Nguon illustre comment les rituels autochtones peuvent inspirer des approches mondiales de la résilience et de l'unité. Il se présente comme un témoignage vivant du pouvoir des esthétiques incarnées à restaurer l'équilibre, transmettre des valeurs et soutenir les communautés à travers les générations, positionnant la cosmologie bamoun dans les débats mondiaux sur la guérison et le patrimoine.

Mots-clés : *Rituel Nguon, cosmologie bamoun, systèmes de guérison autochtones, esthétiques rituelles, résilience psychosociale, anthropologie médicale, théorie de la performance, préservation du patrimoine, transmission intergénérationnelle, études des rituels africains.*

Introduction

The Bamoun people of Cameroon possess a rich cultural heritage in which rituals, cosmology, and artistic performance are deeply intertwined. Among these traditions, the Nguon ritual stands out as a central practice embodying Bamoun identity, spirituality, and psychosocial healing. Historically celebrated as both a royal festival and communal gathering, Nguon reinforces ties between the king, ancestors, and the living community. It is simultaneously religious, cultural, and therapeutic — reflecting the holistic worldview characteristic of African cosmologies.

Situating Nguon within broader African ritual studies highlights its unique features. Comparative practices such as the Yoruba Egungun in Nigeria, which honors ancestral spirits through masked performance, and the Zulu umkhosi womhlanga in South Africa, which emphasizes communal renewal and identity, demonstrate how African rituals function as systems of healing, heritage preservation, and social cohesion. Nguon shares these dimensions but is distinctive in its synthesis of indigenous Bamoun cosmology and Islamic traditions, reinforcing royal authority while serving therapeutic and communal purposes.

From a medical anthropology perspective, Nguon challenges biomedical paradigms by foregrounding collective performance as legitimate therapy. It resonates with Kleinman's explanatory models, which emphasize cultural meaning in healing, and aligns with contemporary debates on psychosocial resilience and heritage preservation. In this sense, Nguon is not only a Bamoun ritual but also a contribution to global discussions on how indigenous practices sustain identity, foster resilience, and provide culturally embedded forms of therapy.

By connecting Bamoun cosmology to contemporary discussions of heritage preservation and psychosocial resilience, this study situates Nguon as a living system of cultural medicine. It demonstrates how indigenous rituals can inform global approaches to healing and unity, positioning ritual aesthetics as both cultural heritage and psychosocial intervention.

Literature Review

Ritual as Transformation

Victor Turner's theory of ritual as a transformative process remains foundational in anthropological scholarship. His concepts of liminality and communitas (1969) describe how participants enter a threshold space where ordinary structures are suspended, enabling renewal and reconfiguration of identity. Applied to Nguon, Turner's lens reveals how Bamoun participants experience collective psychosocial relief and reaffirmation of identity through ritual enactment. This situates Nguon within global debates on ritual as a site of transformation, while highlighting its distinctive grounding in Bamoun cosmology.

Healing and Cultural Mediation (HCM)

Medical anthropology provides a second pillar for this study. Arthur Kleinman's notion of explanatory models (1980) emphasizes that healing practices derive efficacy from their cultural resonance. Illness and recovery are mediated through shared meanings and therapeutic success depends on alignment between cultural worldview and healing practice. John Janzen (1992) extends this by showing that African healing traditions are integrative while combining spiritual, social and medical dimensions. Together, these perspectives frame Nguon as a culturally embedded therapeutic system where psychosocial healing is inseparable from communal identity and spiritual authority.

African Religious Scholarship (ARS)

African religious thought deepens this analysis by situating healing within cosmology. Mbiti (1990) argued that African cosmologies are holistic while linking religion, health and community. This perspective underscores that Nguon is not merely performance but a ritual embedded in Bamoun cosmology where health and identity are inseparable. Geary (1988) and Warnier (1993, 2007) further demonstrate how Bamoun rituals synthesize indigenous and Islamic traditions reinforcing royal power while serving communal functions. This scholarship highlights the dual role of Nguon as both spiritual practice and socio-political institution.

Performance as Embodied Knowledge (PEK)

Performance studies add a crucial dimension by framing ritual as embodied knowledge. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) conceptualized performance as a mode of knowing enacted through the body, while Schechner (2003) emphasized its aesthetic and social effects. Byron Good (1994) highlighted how narrative and symbolic enactment can alleviate psychosocial distress by reconfiguring meaning. These perspectives allow Nguon to be analysed not only as spectacle but as therapeutic performance where dance, music and symbolic enactment produce healing effects. In this sense, performance is central to the ritual's therapeutic power.

Comparative Rituals in African Context

While Nguon is deeply rooted in Bamoun cosmology, its therapeutic and communal dimensions resonate with other African ritual traditions. The Yoruba Egungun festival in Nigeria, for example, honours ancestral spirits through masked performances that embody healing, continuity, and social regulation. Similarly, the Zulu umkhosi womhlanga in South Africa emphasizes collective renewal, identity reinforcement, and intergenerational transmission through ritualized gathering. These comparative cases highlight how African rituals function as integrative systems of heritage preservation, psychosocial resilience, and communal healing. Yet Nguon is distinctive in its synthesis of indigenous Bamoun cosmology with Islamic traditions, reinforcing royal authority while simultaneously serving as a therapeutic performance. This uniqueness situates Nguon within broader debates in medical anthropology and heritage studies, while underscoring its contribution to global understandings of ritual as cultural medicine.

Integrative Framework and Contribution (IFC)

Altogether, these comparative insights not only situate Nguon within a wider African ritual landscape but also reinforce the need for a robust theoretical framework that integrates ritual transformation, medical anthropology, African cosmology, and performance studies. By drawing on both classical and contemporary scholarship, the framework ensures that Nguon is analysed not only as a local practice but as a globally relevant system of healing, heritage preservation, and psychosocial resilience.

Building on these comparative and theoretical insights, the study's methodology was designed to capture Nguon not only as a localized Bamoun practice but also as part of a wider African and global discourse on ritual, healing, and heritage. By employing ethnographic immersion, purposive sampling, and thematic analysis, the research ensures that participant voices are interpreted within the overlapping lenses of ritual transformation, medical anthropology, African cosmology, and performance studies, thereby grounding the methodological approach in both cultural specificity and global relevance.

Theoretical Framework

Ritual and Transformation

Building on Turner's foundational concepts of liminality and *communitas* (1969) more recent scholarship emphasizes ritual as a dynamic negotiation of identity in modern contexts. Catherine Bell (1997) reframed ritual as a practice that constructs and maintains power relations, while Birgit Meyer (2010) highlighted how ritual mediates between tradition and modernity in African religious life. Applied to Nguon, these perspectives show how Bamoun participants not only reaffirm identity but also negotiate continuity in the face of globalization.

Medical Anthropology and Cultural Mediation (MACM)

Arthur Kleinman's explanatory models (1980) remain central, but newer work expands the scope. Didier Fassin (2007) introduced the concept of "humanitarian reason," showing how healing practices intersect with politics and morality. John Janzen (1992) extends this by demonstrating that African healing traditions are integrative combining spiritual, social and medical dimensions. His work situates Nguon within a broader tradition of holistic healing where psychosocial distress is addressed alongside social cohesion. Recent studies in global health anthropology (Nguyen, 2010) demonstrate how local healing systems adapt to modern pressures. Situating Nguon within this discourse underscores its role as a culturally resonant therapeutic system that resists reduction to biomedical paradigms.

African Religious Scholarship (ARS)

Mbiti's (1990) argued that African cosmologies are holistic linking religion, health and community in inseparable ways. This perspective situates Bamoun cosmology as the spiritual bedrock of Nguon where healing is embedded in collective identity and spiritual authority. Scholars such as Geary (1988) and Warnier (1993, 2007) further demonstrate how Bamoun rituals synthesize indigenous and Islamic traditions reinforcing royal power while serving communal functions. This scholarship underscores that Nguon cannot be reduced to performance alone; it is a ritual deeply tied to cosmological and political structures. Contemporary

scholars such as Rosalind Hackett (2012) and Jacob Olupona (2014) emphasize the plurality and adaptability of African religious traditions. Their work shows how rituals like Nguon synthesize indigenous, Islamic, and modern influences while sustaining communal identity. This situates Bamoun cosmology as both rooted in heritage and responsive to evolving cultural landscapes.

Performance Studies and Embodied Knowledge (PSEK)

Schechner (2003) and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) established performance as embodied knowledge and Byron Good (1994) highlighted how narrative and symbolic enactment can alleviate psychosocial distress by reconfiguring meaning but Diana Taylor (2003) advanced this with her concept of the “archive and repertoire”, distinguishing between written heritage and embodied practices. In the context of Nguon, dance, drumming, and costume function as repertoire — living practices that transmit healing and identity across generations. Recent performance studies also highlight ritual as a form of cultural resilience (Conquergood, 2013), reinforcing the therapeutic power of collective enactment.

Integrative Contribution

By weaving these updated perspectives, the framework positions Nguon as:

- A transformative ritual negotiating identity and modernity.
- A therapeutic system embedded in cultural meaning and resistant to biomedical reduction.
- A cosmological practice synthesizing indigenous and Islamic traditions while adapting to change.
- An embodied repertoire transmitting resilience and healing across generations.

This expanded theoretical grounding situates Nguon not only within Bamoun cosmology but also within global debates on ritual, health, and heritage, strengthening its relevance to contemporary scholarship.

Transition to Data Analysis

Building on this theoretical foundation, the study's analysis of Nguon is guided by the interplay of ritual healing, Bamoun cosmology and performance aesthetics. The literature reviewed demonstrates that rituals are transformative processes (Turner), therapeutic systems embedded in cultural meaning (Kleinman, Janzen), cosmologically grounded practices (Mbiti, Warnier, Geary), and embodied performances with psychosocial effects (Schechner, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Good). These insights inform the methodological approach by shaping the coding framework and thematic analysis. In reality, the data are examined through these overlapping lenses ensuring that participants' narratives and observed performances are interpreted not only as cultural expressions but also as therapeutic enactments. This transition from theory to method guarantees that the analysis remains firmly anchored in established scholarship while highlighting the originality of this study in bridging medical anthropology and performance studies.

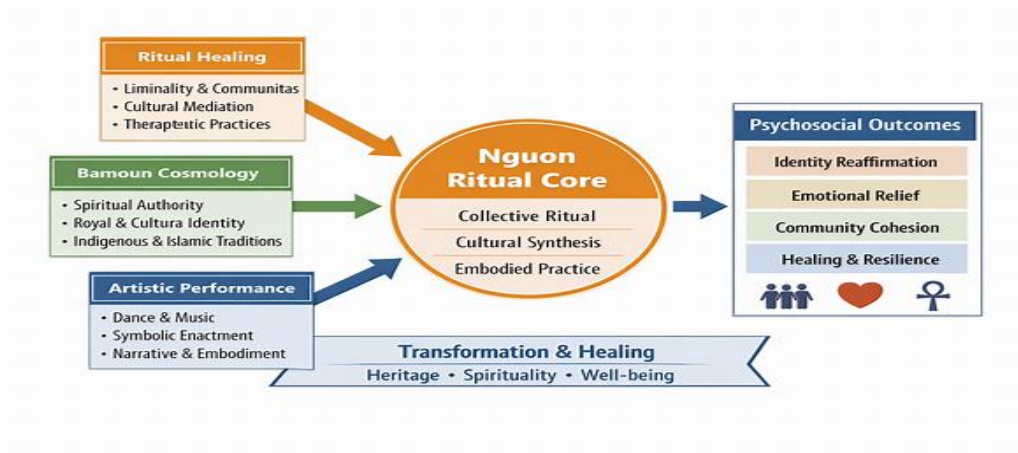
Data Analysis Strategy (DAS)

Guided by the theoretical framework outlined above, the analysis of Nguon was conducted through a thematic analysis that integrates medical anthropology, Bamoun cosmology and performance studies. This approach ensures that the data are not treated as isolated narratives but as expressions situated within broader cultural and theoretical contexts. The process began with careful transcription of interviews, focus groups and field notes from participant observation, followed by repeated readings to achieve immersion in the material.

Coding was developed inductively, but organized around the central domains identified in the literature review: ritual healing, Bamoun cosmology and artistic performance. Within ritual healing, codes captured narratives of psychosocial relief, collective renewal and therapeutic transformation drawing on Turner's notion of liminality and Kleinman's explanatory models. Within Bamoun cosmology, codes highlighted symbolic references to spiritual authority, communal identity and the synthesis of indigenous and Islamic traditions following Mbiti and Warnier. Within artistic

performance, codes focused on embodied practices such as dance, music, speech gestures and symbolic enactment interpreted through Schechner's performance theory and Good's emphasis on narrative healing.

Figure 1: Visual conceptual model



Process Diagram Narrative

Ritual Healing: Liminality and communitas (Turner), Cultural mediation of illness (Kleinman), Therapeutic practices (Janzen) — these processes initiate transformation by opening a threshold space for renewal.

Bamoun Cosmology: Spiritual authority (Mbiti), Royal and cultural identity (Warnier), Indigenous–Islamic synthesis (Geary) — Provides the worldview and legitimacy that anchor healing in collective identity.

Artistic Performance: Dance and music (Schechner), Symbolic enactment (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett), Narrative embodiment (Good) — Translates cosmological meaning into embodied, aesthetic practice.

Nguon Ritual Core: At the middle these three domains converge into: collective ritual, cultural synthesis and embodied practice.

Psychosocial Outcomes: Flowing out of the ritual core are the healing effects: Identity reaffirmation, Emotional relief, Community cohesion, Healing and resilience.

Methodology

Paradigmatic Orientation

This study is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, emphasizing meaning-making and lived experience. Ethnography was chosen because it allows immersion in Bamoun cultural life, making it possible to capture Nguon as both ritual performance and therapeutic practice. This approach bridges medical anthropology and performance studies by privileging insider perspectives and embodied knowledge.

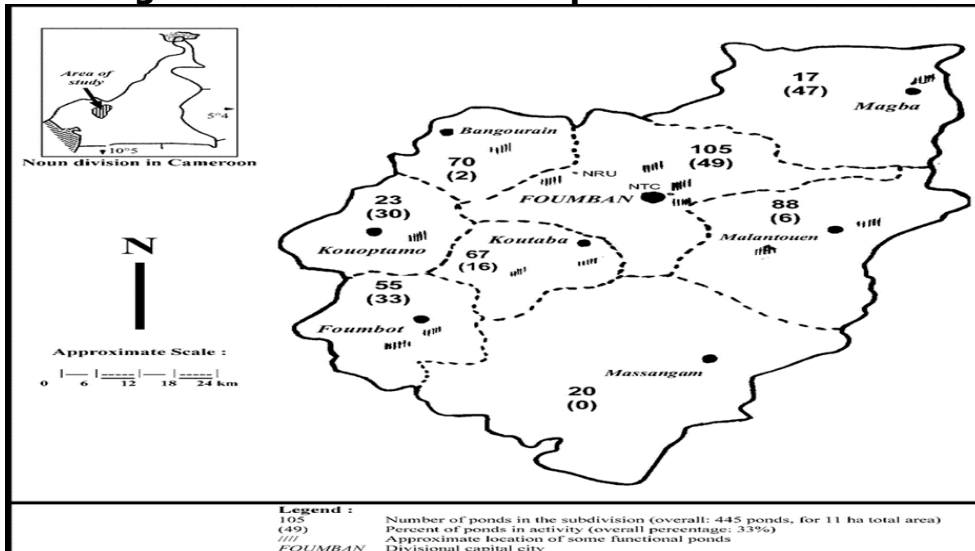
Research Design

The design follows a case study ethnographic approach, focusing on Nguon as a bounded cultural phenomenon. This choice prioritizes depth over breadth, enabling nuanced analysis of how participants articulate Nguon as a system of healing, identity reinforcement and artistic performance. The case study design also ensures that findings remain culturally contextualized rather than generalized.

Study Setting

Fieldwork was conducted in Foumban, the historical capital of the Bamoun kingdom of the Noun Division in Cameroon from November 29th to December 8th, 2024. As both political and spiritual center, Foumban provides a unique vantage point for observing the convergence of cosmology, authority and healing. The royal palace and communal spaces served as symbolic and practical loci for data collection.

Map 1: Healing Waters of the Bamoun Homeland: Cosmological and Ritual Landscapes of the Noun Division



Source: Adapted from the Administrative Figure of Cameroon-MINATD-1992

- *Healing (directly aligned with medical anthropological lens).*
- *Waters/Homeland (situating ponds as ecological and cultural anchors).*
- *Cosmological and Ritual Landscapes (connecting geography to Bamoun spirituality and Nguon rituals).*
- *Noun Division (grounding the map in its precise geographic context).*

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling method was employed to ensure diversity across age, gender and social roles.

- Elders contributed cosmological insights.
- Women emphasized caregiving and song.
- Youth reflected on continuity and modern challenges.
- Artisans highlighted economic and artistic dimensions.

The sample size (40 participants) was determined by thematic saturation ensuring analytic depth rather than statistical representativeness.

Data Collection Methods

- **Participant Observation (PO):** Immersion in the Nguon festival allowed direct engagement with ritual liminality, consistent with Turner's emphasis on experiential dimensions.
- **Semi-Structured Interviews (SSI):** Conducted with 27 participants, these elicited explanatory models of healing and cosmology following Kleinman's interpretive framework.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Four FGDs (6–8 participants each) captured collective interpretations, highlighting reconciliation and cohesion in line with Janzen's view of African healing traditions as integrative systems.

Data Analysis Strategy

Analysis followed a thematic approach, integrating medical anthropology, Bamoun cosmology and performance studies. Coding was inductive but organized around three domains:

- Ritual healing (psychosocial relief, liminality, cultural mediation).
- Bamoun cosmology (spiritual authority, communal identity, indigenous-Islamic synthesis).
- Artistic performance (dance, music, symbolic enactment, narrative healing).

This ensured that participant narratives were interpreted not only as cultural expressions but also as therapeutic enactments.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical rigor was maintained through:

- Informed consent and confidentiality.
- Respect for cultural protocols including participation only with community approval.

- Reciprocity with findings shared back to participants to guarantee trust and honour local knowledge.

Findings with visual supports

The analysis of interviews, focus groups and participant observation revealed five interconnected themes that illustrate how the Nguon ritual functions as a holistic system of psychosocial healing, cultural identity and artistic performance.

The first theme, ritual healing, was described by participants as a therapeutic space where burdens are lifted through ritual acts. One elder explained, *"When the king blesses us during Ngoun, it is not only tradition; it is medicine for our souls."* Another reflected, *"I carry many worries, but when I join the dance, I feel my burdens leave me. It is as if the ancestors take them away."* Offerings were interpreted as symbolic acts of release: *"The offerings we make are not just gifts; they are ways of laying down our pain."* Even the public trial of the king was seen as collective catharsis: *"The trial reminds us that even leaders must face truth, and that gives us peace."* These reflections highlight the psychosocial relief and resilience fostered by ritual healing, visually represented in Plate 1.

Plate 1: Visual supports highlighting the embodied healing dimension of ritual healing.



Source: Koin snapped during Nguon festival 2024

The second theme, Bamoun cosmology and identity, situates Nguon as a living embodiment of Bamoun cosmology, linking ancestors, Islam, and kingship. A participant emphasized, *"Ngoun*

is the rope that ties us to our ancestors, to Islam, and to our king. Without it, we lose our way." Others described the ritual as a reaffirmation of identity: *"When we perform Nguon, we remember who we are. It is our identity, our strength, and our healing."* The king's presence was seen as a spiritual bridge: *"He sits as our link to the ancestors; his presence reminds us of our roots."* Without Nguon, one participant warned, *"Our cosmology would fade, and so would our identity."* Plate 2 illustrates this cosmological dimension, showing how identity and resilience are sustained.

Plate 2: Image of the King holding a ritualistic spear guarded on both sides as King and pivotal chief priest of Nguon ritual illustrating Bamoun cosmology and identity



Source: Koin Joseph, during Nguon festival, 2024

The third theme, artistic performance as therapy, underscores the aesthetic dimension of healing. Dance, drumming, and costumes were described as medicine for the spirit. One dancer explained, *"Every movement carries meaning. When we dance, we heal ourselves and each other."* The drummers echoed this sentiment: *"The drumbeat is the heartbeat of the people. It makes us forget sorrow and brings us joy."* Costumes were imbued with ancestral power: *"The costumes remind us of our ancestors; when we wear them, we feel their strength."* Another participant likened rhythm to purification: *"The rhythm of the drums and double ngong are like a cleansing river flowing through our bodies."* These accounts resonate with theories of performance as embodied knowledge and collective therapy, visually captured in Plate 3.

Plate 3: Images illustrating how artistic performance functions as embodied therapy.



Source: Koin Joseph, during Nguon festival, 2024

The fourth theme, collective healing and social cohesion, highlights the communal dimension of Nguon. A woman in a focus group explained, "*Nguon is where we come together. It is where we forgive, where we reconcile, and where we find peace.*" Another participant added, "*When the community gathers, we feel stronger. The ritual heals not only individuals but the whole society.*" A young artisan reflected, "*Nguon is the time when differences are forgotten. We become one people again.*" The communal gathering was described as transformative: "*In the crowd, I see my neighbors, my family, and even those I had conflicts with. We stand together.*" Collective prayers were seen as cleansing: "*They wash away bitterness and replace it with harmony.*" Plate 4 visually represents this collective healing and cohesion.

Plate 4: These images illustrate collective healing and social cohesion



Source: Koin Joseph, during Nguon festival, 2024

The fifth theme, intergenerational transmission, reveals how Nguon functions as a school of identity and healing across generations. One elder explained, *"When I dance with my grandchildren, I show them our path. They learn that healing is not only for the body but for the spirit of the community."* Another emphasized its pedagogical role: *"Ngoun teaches us who we are. It is our school of identity and healing."* Parents spoke of continuity: *"The children learn by watching us; they carry the rhythm into the future."* Elders saw ancestral presence in youth: *"I see my ancestors in the eyes of the youth when they perform."* Plate 5 illustrates this intergenerational transmission, showing elders and youth performing together as a living chain of continuity.

Plate 5: Visuals highlighting the intergenerational transmission of community healing practices across generations



Source: Koin Joseph, during Nguon festival, 2024

Synthesis

Taken together, these themes illustrate how Nguon operates as a holistic system of healing, identity and performance. Moving into the discussion, these findings will be interpreted through the lenses of ritual transformation, medical anthropology, African cosmology, and performance studies, showing how participant voices both confirm and expand theoretical perspectives while situating Nguon within global debates on resilience, heritage, and psychosocial healing.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that the Nguon ritual operates as a holistic system of psychosocial healing, cultural identity and artistic performance. By weaving participant narratives with theoretical perspectives the discussion demonstrates how Nguon expands both medical anthropology and performance studies.

The theme of ritual healing resonates strongly with Turner's (1969) concept of liminality. When a mother explained, *"I carry many worries, but when I join the dance, I feel my burdens are gone. It is as if the ancestors have taken them away,"* her words illustrate Turner's idea of ritual as a transformative space where participants experience renewal. Similarly, a youth participant's statement, *"Nguon gives us courage. It reminds us that even in hardship, we are strong together,"* aligns with Kleinman's (1980) explanatory models which emphasize that healing is effective when it resonates with cultural meaning.

The theme of Bamoun cosmology and identity reflects Mbiti's (1990) assertion that African cosmologies are holistic systems linking religion, health and community. A community elder's description, *"Ngoun is the thread that ties us to our ancestors, to Islam, and to our king. Without it, we lose our way,"* exemplifies this worldview. Warnier (1993, 2007) and Geary (1988) documented how Bamoun rituals synthesize indigenous and Islamic traditions and this synthesis is echoed in participants' voices: *"It is not only a festival; it is our medicine, our history, and our pride."*

The theme of artistic performance as therapy aligns with Schechner's (2003) theory of performance as transformative practice. A dancer's reflection, *"Every movement carries meaning. When we dance, we heal ourselves and each other,"* illustrates how embodied performance functions as therapy. Likewise, a drummer's statement, *"The drumbeat is the heartbeat of the people. It makes us forget sorrow and brings us joy,"* supports Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1998) notion of performance as embodied knowledge. Good's (1994) emphasis on narrative healing is reflected in participants' accounts of songs and dances as vehicles

for emotional catharsis, as one participant explained: *"When I cry during the songs, it is not sadness, it is cleansing."*

The theme of collective healing and social cohesion aligns with Janzen's (1992) view of African healing traditions as integrative systems. A woman in a focus group explained, *"Ngoun is where we come together. It is where we forgive, where we reconcile and where we find peace."* This illustrates how rituals heal not only individuals but entire communities, reinforcing social bonds and collective resilience.

Finally, the theme of intergenerational transmission highlights the continuity of Bamoun cosmology across generations. A grandmother's statement, *"When I dance with my grandchildren, I show them our path. They learn that healing is not only for the body but for the spirit of the community,"* reflects Mbiti's (1990) emphasis on the inseparability of religion, health and community in African cosmologies. This intergenerational dimension ensures that psychosocial resilience is sustained into the future.

Synthesis

By aligning participant voices with theoretical perspectives this discussion demonstrates that Nguon is not merely a cultural festival but a therapeutic system. It embodies Turner's liminality, Kleinman's explanatory models, Mbiti's holistic cosmology, Schechner's performance theory and Janzen's integrative healing systems. The convergence of these frameworks confirms the conceptual model: Nguon operates at the intersection of ritual healing, cosmology and artistic performance while producing psychosocial healing through collective participation and intergenerational continuity.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Nguon ritual is far more than a cultural festival - it is a multidimensional practice where healing, identity, and art converge to sustain Bamoun cosmology and psychosocial resilience. By synthesizing participant voices with theoretical frameworks, five themes emerged: ritual healing, cosmology and identity, artistic performance as therapy, collective

cohesion, and intergenerational transmission. Together, these show that Nguon operates simultaneously as cultural heritage, psychosocial intervention, and community development strategy.

The findings challenge biomedical models by foregrounding collective performance and embodied aesthetics as legitimate forms of therapy. They also highlight the inseparability of heritage and healing, suggesting practical applications in healthcare, education, and peacebuilding. Nguon thus exemplifies how indigenous rituals can inform global approaches to resilience, unity, and psychosocial well-being.

Nevertheless, the study's scope was limited to one cycle of the Nguon festival, with certain groups such as marginalized artisans and diaspora communities underrepresented. Future research should therefore explore comparative African healing rituals, diaspora reinterpretations, youth negotiations of modernity, and evolving artistic innovations. Such directions will deepen understanding of how rituals adapt and remain relevant in changing cultural landscapes.

Ultimately, Nguon stands as a living testament to the power of collective performance to restore balance, transmit values, and sustain communities across generations. It positions ritual aesthetics as cultural medicine within medical anthropology and heritage studies, offering insights that resonate far beyond Cameroon.

Abbreviations

ARS: african religious scholarship; DAS: data analysis strategy; FGDs: focus group discussions; HCM: healing and cultural mediation; IFC: integrative framework and contribution; MACM: medical anthropology and cultural mediation; PEK: performance as embodied knowledge; PO: participant observation; PSEK: performance studies and embodied knowledge; SSI: semi-structured interviews; NGUON: Bamoun royal ritual festival (no acronym, but defined for clarity; UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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We are indebted to our Bamoun colleagues who provided guidance throughout the research process particularly in aligning participant narratives with theoretical frameworks in medical anthropology, African cosmology, and performance studies. Finally, we extend heartfelt appreciation to our families and friends for their encouragement and patience during the fieldwork and writing phases. Their support sustained us through the challenges of ethnographic research.

Dedication

This work is lovingly dedicated to the Bamoun people whose voices, wisdom and resilience gave life to this study. To the elders who reminded us that "*Nguon is the thread that ties us to our ancestors, to Islam, and to our king,*" and to the youth who declared, "*Nguon teaches us who we are. It is our school of identity and healing.*"

We dedicate this research to the ancestors whose presence in the Nguon ritual continues to guide and heal the community. Their spirit is felt in every drumbeat, every dance, and every sound of a double gong and every blessing.

Finally, this work is offered to all communities who seek strength in their traditions, healing in their rituals and unity in their collective identity. May the lessons of Nguon inspire future generations to honour their heritage and embrace the power of ritual as medicine for the soul.

Authors' contributions

Koin contributed to the design of the study as well as acquisition of data, its analysis and interpretation and was involved in the drafting of the manuscript. Pr. Idrissou, Dr. Fotso and Ngwa made substantial contributions to the conception and design and in the drafting and revision of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared that they have no competing interests.

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