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The sacred king as a waste heap in northern Cameroon

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Abstract

In this article, the author considers waste (bodily excreta, the remains of daily activities, discarded artefacts) as the result of a process whereby material items are disembodied or excorporated. In the ancient kingdom of the Guiziga Bui Marva in northern Cameroon, the waste produced by each subject ended up on a large waste heap accumulated by the king. The bodily conducts of the king and his subjects were such as to identify the monarch with the heap according to the tenets of African sacred kingship. Contemporary ethnographic evidence sheds light on the history of the region and vice versa. It documents enduring bodily practices over the last couple of centuries, and the significant changes that affected them in regard to the production of given religious subjectivities.

Keywords

body, Cameroon, Islam, material culture, sacred kingship, waste

In the vicinity of Maroua, the capital town of the extreme northern region of Cameroon, one may observe large earth mounds scattered around the landscape between the Diamare valley and the Mandara hills (see Figure 1). According to the people who live in this neighbourhood, these mounds are ancient rubbish heaps. This contention is sometimes substantiated by the toponymy of the villages next to which they may be found. For example, Ouro Jiddere means ‘the rubbish heap quarter’ (see Figure 2). It is located at Mesquine, west of Maroua. Further to the East, Kongola Jiddeo translates as ‘the small rubbish heap’. Both names are derived from the Fulfulde *jiddugo*, meaning to pile up, hence *jiddere*, to designate a large accumulation of domestic and cattle waste.

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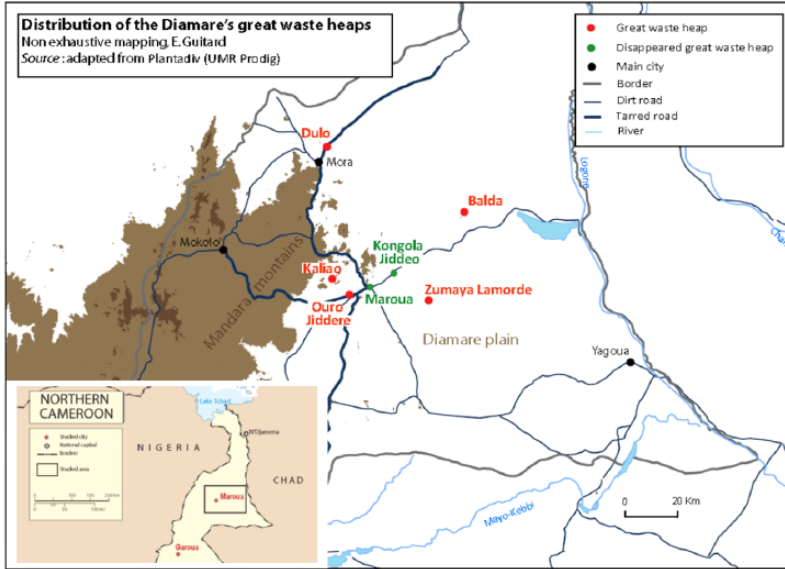


Figure 1. Distribution of the Diamare's great waste heaps. © Map: Emilie Guitard.



Figure 2. Great waste heap in front of the village chief's compound, Ouro Jiddere, March 2011. © Photograph: Emilie Guitard.

In this article, I will focus on the heaps located in Kaliao which used to be the second capital town of the Guiziga kingdom of the *Bui Marva* (that is, kings of Marva), after the first one located at Marva (present day Maroua) had been stormed and subjugated at the end of the 18th century by Muslim Fulani raiders from present day Nigeria. Between

2008 and 2011, while doing field research in Kaliao, I had the opportunity to collect oral accounts of the local *kuli* cult from its priests. This cult was practised, prior to the spread of Islam and Christianity, in connection with the large heaps of rubbish piled up next to the king's compound at the heart of Kaliao. The descendants of the Guiziga kingdom of the *Bui Marva* draw the unlikely portrait of a king intent on piling up his waste in front of his abode to which was added the waste of his subjects and a motley collection of polluting or powerful objects and substances. Such a practice did not seem incidental to kingship but constituted one of its basic tenets. Could kingship thrive on rubbish, and how? In line with the theme of the present special issue of the *Journal of Material Culture*, I shall consider waste as the product of the specific material culture pertaining to the bodily conducts of the king and his subjects.

Waste as the result of an embodiment/disembodiment process

From a praxeological perspective, rubbish can be considered not only in terms of a symbolic and spatial order or classification (Douglas, 2001[1966]) or as the final stage in the biography of things (Kopytoff, 1986), but also in relation to the body, as things that have been detached from it. This perspective offers at least four advantages. First, bodily excreta and discarded artefacts (personal belongings, clothes, tools, furniture, etc.) can be grouped together and addressed within a single framework as materials and substances detached from the body (because of their loss of use and/or value) or fallen from it (such as bodily waste).

Second, this process raises the question of the physical separation from discarded things and bodily substances that we can call disembodiment or excorporation, and of the ability for a subject to part from them. Yet, concerning the Guiziga *Bui Marva* context, the things that used to belong to a given subject and to be in frequent use keep being identified with him or her as Mauss (1968[1902–1903]) underscored when analysing the notion of *mana*.

Third, I will take the process of incorporation/excorporation as a technology of the self, in other words, as a means to govern the self and others, to shape one's identity, that is, in Foucauldian parlance, as a medium of subjectivation that includes the detachment from waste and the techniques pertaining to its disposal, while abiding by a set of given norms, and the implementation of ritual gestures observed to manipulate such powerful substances, in order to acquire some of its potency or to shield oneself from any harm.

Finally, it allows one to take into account the spatial dimensions of this process. When one wants to get rid of one's trash, the question that must be unavoidably raised is 'Where may one dispose of it?' Thus, a cartography or geography of waste disposal (Epelboin, 1998; Jewitt, 2011) enables us to grasp the different scales according to which individual and collective techniques of the subject are put into play: at the level of the habitation, the street, the village or the kingdom as a whole.

From the small domestic waste heap to the large royal one

In the Guiziga rural context, until today, the most common way to manage the objects expelled from the bodily schema and the remains of daily activities consists of gathering

them in large heaps. Every morning at dawn, just after the call for the prayer chanted by the imam of the small mosque at the entrance of Kaliao (next to the Fulani chieftaincy established there in the wake of the Islamization of the Guiziga kingdom of Marva at the beginning of the 20th century), a soft scratching noise may be heard from within each compound. Using short brooms made of a bunch of twigs tightly bound together, daughters and wives bend over double to sweep the dirt floor of the yard and of the buildings around it. With brisk and short motions of their wrists, they collect kitchen refuse, remnants of food, the excrements of small livestock and poultry, together with leaves and vegetable matter left by daily domestic activities mostly connected to sorghum cultivation and cooking as well as small livestock husbandry.

Most of the time, sweeping is performed from within each house towards the courtyard, by putting together small heaps of rubbish and dust, later consolidated with other small heaps, ending up in a larger heap to the side of the courtyard, containing mostly dust and organic matter. The latter will be eventually dumped out of the compound – nowadays on the common rubbish heap of the residential quarter, and, in the past, on a small dump by the gate of each compound. In Guiziga language, those domestic heaps are called *kitikil sia* meaning ‘simple waste heaps’, or *na taran*, meaning ‘worthless’ by contrast to the large mound that is always found at the heart of the settlement, close to the old royal compound of the *Bui Marva*, referred to as *kitikil madadang* or ‘large waste heap’, or preferably as *kitikil a Bui* or ‘waste heap of the king’. In the past, one could also see, in front of the compound of each village chief of the kingdom, usually appointed by the king from among his kinsmen (see Seignobos and Iyebi-Mandjek, 2004: 57), a *kitikil madadang sia*, meaning a ‘large simple waste heap’. It signalled to incoming strangers the compound of the village chief, but also, in the flat plain landscape covered with short and scanty vegetation, it provided an enduring materialization of the expanse of the kingdom. At the time, ordinary subjects were forbidden from accumulating large domestic waste heaps in front of their compound, at the risk of being accused of challenging the leadership of the village chief, or else – a far more serious offence – that of the *Bui Marva* himself.

According to oral history as reported by the elderly notables of Kaliao at the time of my field research around 2010, the large heap of the king would have been accumulated after the conquest of Marva, the older capital town of the kingdom, at the hands of Muslim Fulani raiders towards the end of the 18th century. Just as the large heap of Maroua that predated it, the large heap of rubbish of Kaliao would have been erected right in front of the king’s palace, seen as the heart of the kingdom, using the refuse of his large household comprising numerous wives, many offspring, and a vast retinue of slaves. It was also fed with the dung of his horses and cattle, and with the contributions of his notables, his subjects and his political allies of the neighbouring kingdoms, notably Mofu and Zumaya.

Once every year, after the harvest, that is, at the end of the agricultural cycle, each village chief included in the Guiziga *Bui Marva* territory was under the obligation to bring together a delegation of notables and villagers and lead them all the way to the large royal heap of the king, carrying baskets filled with some of their own domestic refuse on their heads. During three days of feasting, village chiefs and their subjects had to present their rubbish offerings to the *Bui* and dump them on his large rubbish heap as

a token of allegiance to his authority, thus contributing to its increment. Some villagers of the Diamare valley, today aged around 70, still remember that in their childhood they could see their parents walk with a load of waste to present it to the Zumaya king, a neighbour of the Guiziga Bui Marva, to the East in the Diamare valley. This practice is by no means restricted to northern Cameroon. It has also been recorded at the court of the Mogho Naaba, the Mossi king, next to Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso (Deverin-Kouanda, 1993: 125).

According to the comments volunteered by the descendants of the Guiziga Bui Marva kingdom, such an accumulation of waste was meant to ostentatiously demonstrate the precedence of the local people on their territory in a frontier situation (see Kopytoff, 1987), open to the mobility of large numbers of people and to political reconfigurations over the past two millennia (Seignobos and Iyebi-Mandjek, 2004: 44). Still, according to verbalized comments, the accumulation of a large quantity of rubbish coming from his own compound but also from those of his vassals, notables and subjects would have allowed the king to exhibit his wealth in material belongings – notably in prestigious items such as horses and iron artefacts – and in people such as wives, children, notables, allies, subjects and slaves. Foundation narratives tell of a Guiziga chief hunter, coming from elsewhere, striking an alliance with an autochthonous Zumaya chief smith, instructing him in the art of piling up vast quantities of rubbish at the heart and around the periphery of the coveted territory at the expense of a third – Mofu – contender, incapable, in such a contest of waste, of producing more than a small heap of sheep dung.

However, besides such vernacular, emic, interpretations, I propose considering this particular kind of monarchical waste disposal from a praxeological point of view in line with the approach advocated in the present special issue since waste disposal belongs with bodily techniques ‘propped’ on material culture.

Indeed, in Guiziga country, as elsewhere in many African rural and urban contexts (Guitard, 2014, 2017), substances and objects fallen from the body (such as clothes and other belongings in daily use) have been until today conceived of as being in an irreducible continuity with the body, despite their excorporation. As such, they are thought to contain the vital force of those they have been separated from. That is to say, a person’s waste is taken to embody the person himself or herself not only in mental representations, but also in handling and touching them. This difficulty in detaching oneself from one’s bodily excreta and personal belongings, even if they have been expelled from the bodily schema, is attested by the fears of, and attempts to protect oneself against pollution and sorcery. Urogenital excreta, such as menstrual blood and sexual emissions especially, are seen as vectors of a harmful pollution and thus adverse to the state of purity required to pray, but also as affecting health and good luck. In the Guiziga context, it particularly affects ritual specialists, the *miki kuli*, ‘those who make the *kuli*’. Today, these ritual specialists are still reluctant, for instance, to put latrines inside their compounds, as this would collect and bring together many polluting substances (mostly from women) that are deleterious to their office. As a result, they prefer to relieve themselves in unoccupied and uncultivated areas on the fringes of habitations. The other concern is to avoid the recovery of such waste objects by evil-minded persons capable of bewitching the subjects who produced them (Evans-Pritchard, 1976[1937]) – a kind of sorcery practised by the Guiziga *bui salak*, or ‘chiefs of the barks’. These specialists are said to

use both bodily excreta and discarded personal belongings to attack their victims at a distance, a type of instrumental and acquired sorcery different from the *mijure* which is an organic and hereditary anthropophagous witchcraft. In this evil kind of magic (perceived as sympathetic), the recourse to bodily waste is guided by a contagious logic (Frazer, 1911–1915): hair is said to be used to drive its owners crazy, a woman's menstrual blood to cause her to haemorrhage, or placenta to bring on sterility in the mother. To protect themselves against the evils of their bodily waste, Guiziga people living in villages had recourse to practices of destruction or concealment, such as burial, burning, or hiding in trees and rock crevices.

To summarize our findings from a purely praxeological point of view, and putting aside for the time being verbal comments and the representations attached to waste, we can construct the following description: all subjects of the kingdom regardless of gender, age and condition incorporate substances and items of material culture in their bodily schema in the course of their daily activities. Then they excorporate such substances and objects as waste. The rubbish they produce is the result of their routine bodily techniques. It contains almost everything they have subtracted from their selves. The waste is collected every morning by the women when they sweep the house and courtyard floors. In a series of routine bodily techniques, the refuse is collected at the levels of the rooms, buildings, households, residential quarters and villages. Then, once a year, a fair quantity of it is dug out, loaded into baskets and carried all the way to the king's waste heap. The whole process is summarized in Figure 3.

Waste is identified with the bodies of the subjects who have expelled it. Collecting the waste amounts to collecting something of the subjects' bodies – a kind of left over, a part, a substance imbued with their subjectivity. Piling together the waste achieves a totalizing of the subjects of the kingdom and fuses them with the refuse of the king himself and of his household within the royal heap. This abides by one of the most important tenets of African sacred kingship whereby the body/subjectivity of the king is equated to the sum total of his subjects and ensures their wellbeing, prosperity and reproduction. In Guiziga practice, this warrants a large production of refuse that is emblematic of the king not only in praxeological terms but also in terms of representations.

The large waste heap as the object of ritual practices

Based on these observations, it is no wonder that the royal waste heap is the object of ritual practices. It is called *kuli*. In the Guiziga language, this word designates a force with which the heap and some particular items of the kingdom's territory such as remarkable trees, rocks, streams and hills are imbued. This force has been compared to the West-African *nyama* and to the Melanesian *mana* by Seignobos and Tournoux (2002: 159). The word *kuli* also refers to the cult performed by ritual specialists by way of sacrifices described by Pontié (1973: 176).

The rituals address the waste heap in which dangerous or powerful things are buried to capture their *kuli* ambivalent forces for its benefit: the excreta of little children, the carcasses of certain animals such as the donkey, worn-out modesty aprons, the blood of incestuous couples executed at the foot of the waste heap. Some other objects were deemed heavy with *kuli*, such as the skulls of persons who had died of smallpox, iron

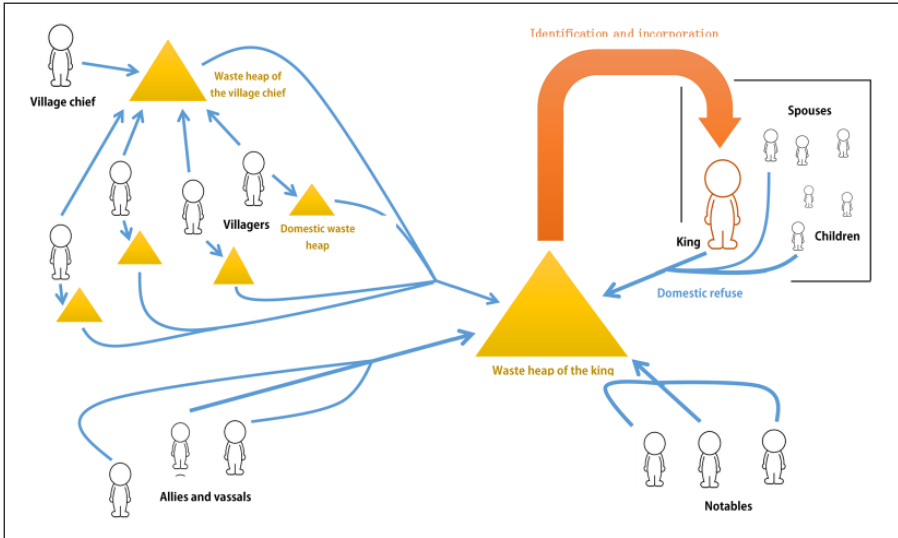


Figure 3. Creation process of the waste heap of the Guiziga Bui Marva king. © Diagram: Emilie Guitard.

tools that reminded one of the king as a blacksmith, or the heads of royal game such as the hippopotamus, the python and *naja* snakes, and, above all, the leopard whose capture on Marva land used to be ritualized. The successful hunter was greeted at the gate of the capital town by a crowd of people dancing to celebrate his achievement. The animal was escorted all the way to the palace of the king and laid on the ground at his feet, next to the large waste heap. A notable, member of the *kuli* cult who enjoyed the trust of the monarch, pulled the moustache of the feline under the close surveillance of the king. Then the head was severed and buried into the waste heap by a *kuli* priest. The addition of such a multitude of components to the heap turned it into a kind of ‘god thing’ (Bazin, 1986), pervaded with the consolidated powers from a multitude of substances, subjects, bodies and things from every part of the kingdom and beyond.

Accordingly, the large waste heap was supposed to attract occult and powerful entities such as place spirits called *setene*. Such entities, often of an ambivalent and versatile nature, were believed to manifest themselves to the villagers by assuming an animal appearance, mostly of amphibian species such as the turtle and the crocodile, otherwise very rare in such an arid and stony environment as can be found in the foothills of the Mandara mountains. One could sometimes find such animals laying their eggs in the moist and fresh entrails of the large waste heap. Traces of claws on the slopes of the tumulus were also believed to betray the presence of *setene* spirits.

Waste heaps as sacred kingship devices

The empirical data I have described so far suggest that the Guiziga Bui Marva political organization is consonant with sacred kingship – an historical pattern that is found on a

continental scale in Africa, from the Great Lakes area to the western Sahel through the Sudan, the Congo forest and the whole of west central Africa. The annual waste contribution takes place at the end of the agricultural cycle (in northern Cameroon, after the sorghum harvest), when the rainy season has ended and the harvest is celebrated during three days of feasting at the palace, thus connecting harvest and fertility to the king and his action. Equally conspicuous is the fact that the king is in charge of achieving the consolidation and unity of all the components of his kingdom. A third characteristic of sacred kingship is the fertility bestowed on the king by his special connection to his dead elders as a source of life and prosperity, and to the forces of the cosmos, of noble game, *setene* spirits, and, usually, rain-making. The fertility and productivity of the king are embodied by his numerous wives and children, by the large production of household waste and by the sheer size of the rubbish heap of his kingdom.

Ever since it was identified by Frazer (1911–1915), African sacred kingship has been described in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa. The ‘state of the art’ as it were has been published by Feeley-Harnick (1985). Scholars have emphasized a number of widely shared principles and equally conspicuous variations in the expression of those principles. For example, since the king’s body is a kind of technological device in charge of capturing the principles of fertility coming from the dead elders and the cosmos, in some kingdoms the monarch is put to death when his own personal health and the fertility of the land are seen as wanting (Seligman, 1934). He may be put to death after a standard lapse of time or when he is diagnosed to have impaired the wellbeing of his subjects; this is done either directly or by proxy as when a slave is given his garments and slain, and the sovereign is retired and replaced by a younger, healthier, successor. But the murder of the king is by no means universal in the workings of sacred kingship. Elaborate procedures and rituals may satisfy the requirements of a productive relationship between the king, his dead elders and the cosmos.

In the context of the present special issue, it is worth emphasizing another characteristic of sacred kingship which is the crucial role played by the body of the monarch. Sacred kingship is embodied in the use of the bodily substances of the king and those of his subjects. In contrast to a structuralist interpretation based on the discourse found in myths and rituals, such as the one put forward by De Heusch (1982, 1987), Warnier (2007) has provided a praxeological analysis of sacred kingship based on the bodily and material culture of the king and his subjects, emphasizing the role of the body as an envelope provided with apertures through which contents may come in or go out, thus providing embodied technologies of power. The production of waste, its expulsion from houses, courtyards and villages, the way it is put into baskets, transported, discharged and amalgamated into the royal heap, all illustrate the relevance of this praxeological approach to sacred kingship in general and to that of the Guiziga Bui Marva in particular.

In the *Bui Marva* kingdom, as in the Grassfields of Cameroon (Warnier, 2007: 201) and in the Chadic kingdom of Lere (Adler, 1982: 395), the excrements of the monarch, as bodily substances expelled by him, are considered to be particularly dangerous and powerful. Those of the King of Marva were not added to the waste heaps. As in the two other recorded cases, they were the object of such secret practices that we do not have any reliable information in this regard.

When a new *Bui Marva* was enthroned, the first thing the incumbent had to do was to bathe in a pond lying next to the large waste heap that shared the same *setene* spirits. Then he was secluded for several days in the palace, and during that period he had to keep in his hand an iron artefact such as a small bell – a material considered as especially charged in *kuli*, and for that matter, included in fair quantities as scraps into the large heap. Then, at the end of the seclusion period, *kuli* priests put around his wrist a bracelet of crocodile hide as part of the regalia. This bracelet was previously worn by the dead monarch, the crocodile being the repository of the *setene* spirits residing in the large waste heap.

As far as I know, if the new monarch was not put directly into contact with the large refuse heap in front of his abode, he nevertheless experienced bodily contacts with several of its essential components and of its might. Vice-versa, a number of bodily conducts recommended in relation with the waste heap can be taken as evidence of the identification of the king with the waste heap. For example, climbing on the heap while wearing shoes was prohibited since it was tantamount to stepping on the king with one's shoes on and therefore considered as severely disrespectful. Similarly, during the ordeal on the large waste heap on which I shall comment shortly, suspects had to present themselves at the foot of the heap on their knees, with their foreheads touching the ground and their hands crossed at the back, in the same humble and subdued attitude prevalent in front of the sovereign. Lastly, whereas amongst the neighbouring Mofu the king ate the eyes and the tongue of any panther that happened to be captured in his kingdom, thus ingesting its powers (Vincent, 1991: 683), the Guiziga *Bui Marva* achieved the same result by burying the whole head of the animal directly into the waste heap. This is a clear illustration of different local expressions of the same principles pertaining to sacred kingship. In this case, the principle applies to the king eating the head of the panther, either part of it or as a whole. The variations are found in the fact that, in one case, the monarch himself embodies the kingdom and eats parts of the royal game, and, in the other case, the waste heap embodies the kingdom and is made to absorb the head of the royal game. In the context of bodily conducts propped on material things, this is evidence of the identification between the *Bui Marva* and his waste heap with the latter achieving the status of a sacred king who incorporates the whole kingdom by means of the consolidation of the waste expropriated by all his subjects, to which were added material objects and substances deemed especially powerful. This may explain why the *Bui* was never put to death in Marva, contrary to what was learnt in several instances of sacred kingship in Africa. If the king identified with the waste heap, the slaughter of the king would have implied the destruction of the tumulus – a difficult thing to achieve.

Each Guiziga monarch had his waste heap as an alter ego assisting him with his sacred functions in protecting and reproducing the kingdom. The *setene* spirits submitted to him when electing to take residence in the large tumulus of refuse and warned him of any impending attack as had been the case when the Fulani horsemen stormed Marva. They could also protect the capital town when cutting off its ways of access by releasing a flood in the river, or else by having it disappear altogether in the eyes of the assailants.

The *Bui* could also rely on the large waste heap to fight internal threats against the kingdom, beginning with witchcraft. He could organize ordeals in front of the rubbish heap, in the course of which suspects, dressed in a simple apron of *Vitex domania* leaves,

were made to ingest some of the waste heap matter and bite into the skull of a smallpox victim and into a hoe blade buried into the tumulus. Then they had to wait for the verdict of the *kuli* cult, either to be released or executed after a lapse of time announced by one of the *kuli* specialists.

The large trash heap itself – just like the king – was perceived as the pivot of the harmony and permanence of the kingdom. Its *setene* spirits were believed to bring rain upon the country just as, in other forms of sacred kingship, the king was considered a rain-maker. The subjects of the kingdom suffering from infertility and wishing to obtain a large progeny used to make offerings of live animals to them, without shedding their blood. Accordingly, the king and his notables kept guard over the heap to make sure that no one would set fire to it, dig into it or dump substances or objects defiled by sexual pollution such as menstrual blood. Such actions were deemed to be nefarious to its *kuli* and therefore to the whole kingdom.

Compliance to the king, his ancestors, the spirits, the forces of the cosmos was achieved by what people did and practised when sweeping, carrying waste, dumping it on the royal heap, and so on. They did not have to think about the truth of the royal creed. What they had to do was to invest their bodily techniques and material culture in the practices conforming to the bodily and material tenets of sacred kingship. What they believed was in tune with what they did.

Conclusion: Marching the subjects to the sacred rubbish heap

In the case of the Guiziga *Bui Marva* sacred kingship, we cannot possibly introduce a distinction – even analytical – between religion and politics, between compliance to the sacred and to power. An ordinary, mundane, daily activity such as sweeping and disposing of waste, that is found all over the world with all human subjects, has been mustered by the Guiziga *Bui Marva* variety of sacred kingship to produce religious subjects of a certain kind, shape their subjectivity and literally, as De Certeau (2002[1987]: 57–58) would say, march them to the royal palace carrying their excorporated waste to be incorporated together with something of their own subjectivity into the totalizing royal heap. Power, according to Foucault, addresses the body in its most mundane and insignificant activities, thus transforming waste into something sacred, and, willy-nilly, each and every subject – whatever his or her age, sex, origin and identity – into a subject of the king also identified with the royal waste heap.

Other religious specialists confronted with this intriguing practice did not doubt its efficacy as can be seen when Fulani *jihadists* invaded the regions to the south of Lake Chad at the turn of the 19th century, stormed the Guiziga *Bui Marva* kingdom, and discovered the king's large waste heap. They were in no doubt about its role in producing a religious subjectivity in tune with sacred kingship. In the wake of the Muslim conquest achieved under the banner of the Sokoto caliphate (now in northern Nigeria), they ruled out the practices surrounding the trash heap and its rituals and declared them pagan and idolatrous. This fact is reported by their present-day offspring and successors – the notables and residents of the Ouro Jiddere, Kongola-Jiddeo and Zumaya Lamoorde villages as well as those of the town of Maroua. The conquerors said Quranic *surah* on the

rubbish heap of Marva and built a mosque on top of it, avowedly to get rid of its pagan forces but also to deprive the *Bui* of Marva of its powers, and destroy his kingdom. It is precisely at that time, according to the grand narrative of the Guiziga Bui Marva kingdom, that a new trash heap started being accumulated at Kaliao according to the tenets of sacred kingship. But the days of Guiziga rule over the low hills of the Mandara mountains and the Diamare valley were over. It had been replaced by that of the young Fulani lamidates (chiefdoms), including that of Maroua, under the rule of Sokoto as part of the large Adamawa province.

However, in the secret confines of Sufi brotherhoods, Muslim city-dwellers and their elites borrowed some elements from the local cults, such as the Guiziga *kuli*, and included the trash heaps and their accumulated forces in their religious landscape and practices. They saw them as attracting fickle and powerful entities called *ginaaji*, from the Arabic *jiin* (Tourneux, 1999: 265). Since then, and up to this day, large trash heaps are part of the *sirri* or esoteric secrets along with waterways, certain trees, termite mounds, cemeteries, etc. that can provide benefits such as wealth and power but can also be used in evil spells by those who know how to deal with their forces or *baawde* in the proper manner, such as the marabouts (specialists in Muslim esotericism) and their numerous clients. The latter-day masters of Maroua, beginning with their Muslim Fulani chiefs or *laamiibe*, took over from the Guiziga Bui Marva and kept creating in the secret of their compounds large trash heaps, on which they performed ritual manipulations to establish their domination, thereby following the advice of their marabouts and other experts in esotericism.

At Kaliao, the large trash heap has been preserved up to the present day, as a last testimony of the bygone heydays of Guiziga Bui Marva sacred kingship, although the kingdom had passed onto the rule of the lamidate of Maroua (see Figure 4). Its kladings,



Figure 4. Great waste heap of the Bui Marva, Kaliao, December 2008. © Photograph: Emilie Guitard.

courtiers and subjects progressively converted to Islam and large numbers of subjects converted to Christianity. In this context, the trash heap has fallen into insignificance. Nowadays, elderly people and the last *kuli* priests lament the loss of memory and the way the younger generations neglect the great heap and its religious and political potential. The trial of witchcraft cases is not performed on the heap any longer but in front of the Muslim village chiefs and their notables or else in the state courts of the Meri District. Moreover, due to the massive compliance of people to Islam and Christianity and the subsequent neglect of the *kuli* cults, their old priests lament the departure of *setene* spirits from the royal waste heap, depriving the kingdom of the rains needed for the renewal of its fertility, and thus ratifying the demise of the Guiziga Bui Marva kingdom.

Nowadays, people dig into the heap of Kaliao for their own practical needs. One of its neighbours took away some of it as raw material to build a house. This is just one more perceived insult to the receptacle of Guiziga kingship and a proof of the shift in religious subjectivity. The old *miki kuli* specialists keep pretending. They dismiss the suspicion of the harmful impact of this practice concerning their *kitikil* or waste heap by stating that digging into it does not matter. 'Where they have dug, they claim, it is not really dangerous. It would be far more serious if they had dug where everything (the skull and the hoe blade) are buried.' The cavity in the flank of the heap is a clear indication of a major shift in the religious practices of the villagers. It signals the end of the large waste heap of the Guiziga Bui Marva kingship and the loss of its sacred grip on the king, his subjects, their bodily conducts and their memory in the Diamare valley.

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