

# A Traditional Precolonial Practice and Its Ecological Value: A Case Study of Quickset Hedge

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## ABSTRACT

Made of bushes, creepers, bamboos, stakes, thorn bushes or intertwined branches, the quickset hedge is an art, a practice observed at the colonial time in grass-field people. Reserved for man only, this practice with incontestable advantages and is transmitted through the generations, required a great skill and master of technique. This article presents on the basis of empirical data the relevance of this practice as well securely and ecologically as medicinal and economically. The quickset hedge considered as a traditional landmark which prevented any land dispute. It secured houses against any nasty person, prevented the small livestock from escaping. Ecologically, let us note that the trees of the quickset hedge shaded the place where people could stay in case of great heat. The roots of these trees served to fix and solidify the ground and even prevented erosion. As for branches and leaves, these prevented windmill erosion. Economically, let us note that rafters grounded during the string helped to establish the roofs or the opening up of future huts. While fresh leaves and barks were used as food for livestock, the dead leaves were used as droppings. Trees of quickset hedge were used to make potions which help to eradicate several diseases in the community. This is its medicinal aspect/side. Apart from this, this article also underlines the substitution of this practice with modern fences made of breeze-block, reinforced concrete and bricks. That is why a real plead is required for a return to the quickset hedge. That return will contribute not only to maintain dips which are the real biotopes of creepers and bamboos but also to favour the ecosystem balance.

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**Key words:** *quickset hedge, colonial time, grass-field, biotopes, ecosystem*

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## Introduction

Among several practices found in Grassfield people before the colonial time and rarely noticed today (KOYEU, 2012), we can carry out our study to a case which seems to be major for us, the quickset hedge. According to the universal dictionary, it is a fence made of trees, thorns bushes or intertwined branches. In practice, it refers to an art (KOYEU, 2014). But, we talk of the hedge. Its life can be defined as the set of phenomena ensuring the evolution of all vegetal and animal organisms from birth till dead (KOYEU, 2007). The question which arises here is to know how the hedge maintained and continue to maintain life for those who kept the old tradition? In other words, does it exist any relationship between the life in general animals and plants) and the hedge? The answer to this question will firstly be based on social and ethic aspects of the hedge, then its ecological aspect and finally based on different consequences that the absence of such practice can generate to the today population.

## The Hedge: A Technique With Ethic And Social Character

The hedge known as an opened fence and aired with a living space was and continues to be in rare cases, a technique of delimitation of concessions. Actually, it was eruditely conceived by the Grassfield inhabitants as the bounds of their land properties. That is why after purchasing a land, here considered as the wealth for an individual, a committee of wise people would be held, choosing a day (which would not be a prohibited one in the village) for the meeting and proceed to what is called today boundary marking, that is to say the delimitation of the part of that individual. For this purpose, how to practice quickset hedge?

## The know-how and good use of the hedge

As we start this part, let us recall the tools used in making fence. Actually, a cutlass was important in cutting grass to show the limit of the farm and in cutting branches which were to be used as framework. Thanks to it, one could cut

creepers and bamboo which could serve as the main element in practicing this exercise. An art knife, as its name shows, would help to tie the hedge, because the creeper is used thanks to it. It is the most appropriate and the most delicate instrument, because its misuse could bring the loss of the creeper. Whether it is the cutlass, thorn bush, bamboo, art knife and creeper, none of these elements would be replaced by other, because they are unique. Let us note that if the activity has to be done in dry season, the presence of a great container is essential. Once these elements are put together, recognized technicians have a meeting and do the exercise. They will firstly start by clearing the ground which consists in weeding the surrounding of the land to make limits more and more visible of the estate in order to properly do the exercise. After orderly planting the rafters which will visibly mark the land and will serve as a support for the future hedge, our technicians without any modern technical tool had problem with the honesty and truth in the work. What is curious is that those people neither had string, decimeter nor set square to work and succeed as it was the case in their works. Frankly speaking, the alignment of rafters and branches could show the workers' state of soul and their spirit quality already of that period and also witness the quality of their great scientific mind. On the whole, let us say that the major part of branches and rafters planted were to grow up. They were the future trees. But, the concept of otherness being at the center of the work of this people, rafters would not be planted just at the limit of the concession or the estate. They absolutely and without any obligation have to think about the right of way, as the practice of the hedge was also made from outside, that is to say out of the concession. That is why between two concessions there was always a concession marked by its perfect property to an extent that it has to be maintained by the landowners. This constraint also played the role of path for the bordering people. The tying process needed a great thought because the poor layout of bamboo could weaken the hedge. That is why we noticed a certain alternation. Technicians had to alternate the bottom (where the bamboo is cut on the raffia root) and the up (the bamboo tip after its cleaning). Let us remind that straw moved from bamboo helped to weave mats for roofs or to clean the floor thanks to the straws' nervures. A particular care had to be taken of the creepers because it was to be used as string thread. The creeper thus played the role in the solidification of the hedge and its inside, that is to say the pith was also used to tie when there were not creepers, and the difference is that the pith could not last. The layout of bamboo on the hedge also helped to understand the workers' mind concerning the security of poultries and small livestock for which a particular pen was to be done, because their escape could cause problem to people engaged in agriculture. Now, whether it is poultry or livestock, all this belong to the private property of the landowner, the concession owner. During the hedge tie, he had to take into account the damage which could be caused by those beings if it happens that they leave their place. We understand why he is careful about spacing bamboos. Then, he worried about other people's property and keep of the latter.

### **Quickset hedge as a cyclic art**

Few months later or one year later after the tie of the hedge, it automatically has to renew it. That was for multiple purposes, notably the security of the concession, the renewal of creepers and bamboos with the aim of bringing splinter, the beauty to the concession; and also replaces the rafters or branches destroyed by nature or which have not been adapted. The renewal of old bamboos was also required. Thus, the same scenario started again at every renewal of the hedge and this kept the workers' mind in good sense of the work, driving away laziness. They have to start again looking for bamboos, creepers, rafters and if it is possible as it was the case for the owners of great concessions, bring together again a labour which has to be fed.

The tie of the hedge is a joking time better than evenings around firewood. It is also the time of information and training of young boys who are to be the future technicians to who the witness for that purpose, no error was forgiven, especially concerning the join of the creeper. That is why it was punished by a boost given by the tip of the creeper. The young girl has to master the art of the culture of the farms and how to manage a kitchen. As for the young boy, he will be able to assure the tie of the hedge which implies at the same time security and delimitation of the concession. In addition, the main entry will be blocked by a ladder, a kind of traditional steps imposing certain positions, at the entry as well as at the exit of the concession. One could not enter quickly in a concession and get out easily. It was a putative wisdom likely to impede any suspected stranger. In this case, sons-in-law know the torture, as they will break calabashes filled with wine they brought to their parents-in-law, without forgetting the suffering they have while transporting firewood. This confirms their desire cherished for the young girls of the concession. Many of them go back with a stoop, because of an involuntary fall. We can also say that the ladder showed the high of the hedge which had to be a problem for any stranger. Night and day, no one had to escape the constraints of the ladder. Understanding or misunderstanding between people of neighboring concessions was simply known through the presence of a lateral ladder, facilitating different company. It was described as the ladder of communication, brotherly visits and shortcut, as it had no effort to make in order to meet the neighbor in case of joy or pain, or simply to pay a visit. Its absence is noticeable. However, let us remind here that even when there is misunderstanding between two concessions, this would not prevent the preservation of the right of way.

With regard to what we said before, we notice that the hedge, far from securing a concession and prevent an animal to cause problem to other, was used to bring splinter and beauty to the concession. It also favoured reunions between several generations and the share of life experiences. The presence or not of the ladder on the hedge and especially the lateral ladder, showed the understanding or misunderstanding between neighbouring concessions. Now, the question is to know the ecological aspect of the hedge.

### **The Hedge And Its Ecological And Economic Value**

The inhabitants of Grass-field in the postcolonial period had no need of a report or external support to find out how life was precious and how it was to preserve. One way to preserve life in the concessions was precisely maintaining trees around the concession. We dare say they know indeed the photosynthesis theory but rather we dare to say that they were perfectly well aware of the symbiosis between nature and man. As rightly said Edgar MORIN, they were aware of the concept of "co-pilot" and did not believe in **no case** above nature. Maintain a tree was synonymous with support life because it is fruit, it will produce fruit for food not only for the members of the concession but also for the neighborhood and from all foreign come into the dealership without forgetting the passers-by. If it is not, then the branches will shade where you can take shelter against the sun, keeping in mind that the birds can make their nests. The birds in turn bring their songs to the tune of Men at work since the dawn of day they invite men not only to wake up but to the praise given to the creator. Their return to the nest, regardless of the presence of the day and the sunlight, the end of the day and at the same time the work stoppage.

The different rafters planted during the attachment of the hedge, as we mentioned above, was a tree that will be used for the establishment of the roofs and openings of future huts in the concession. This is what imposed the selection of species to use. Moreover, the roots of these future trees were used for fixation and solidification of the soil, preventing soil erosion, while the branches and the foliage prevent the wind erosion. It is obviously the foliage of the trees that would cushion any strong wind which could entail a roof in the concession.

### **Quickset hedge as the source of the pharmacopoeia**

Several trees of the hedge were used to make potions which favored the eradication of several illnesses in the community. If it is not the bark, it is the foliage or the roots. We understand in this regard that the tree itself was the secret of life, for having absorbed the carbon dioxide released by Men and their flocks; he recycled them in their turn the needed oxygen to health, life. Now, bark, roots or foliage of trees, far from eradicating illnesses in men, should be used in part (leaves, bark) of food in small livestock. The flock here has something to give to maintain the cycle: it is his droppings. Dead leaves of the hedge will be gathered into piles and burned and the ash is also used to enrich the soil in order to obtain organic products guaranteeing the health of individuals and their flocks. It was not a chance for these men to have as many considerations for a tree, both on the hedge and the concession. Indeed, a tree meant the purification, that is to say the health of men and the same time a department store for what is harmful to the health of men and the rest of the animal kingdom. The tree absorbs carbon dioxide, in stores and saw more than human, curiously with the evil of man buried in its essence. Let us mention that in most cases today, many people, even the conservatives of plant species are not aware of the absence of the tree, worst still of the cutting of it as the opportunity allows us ask ourselves the simple question but not trivial to know where does the carbon dioxide go after cutting a tree? Worse, how can we cut a big tree without having previously planted a shrub likely to store carbon dioxide that reject the old cut tree, even if it will do it roughly? We understand that for this purpose the pharmacopoeia mentioned here is not only the decoction of the product concocted by men, putting together, roots, bark and leaves of the tree, but it is something greater than that: pharmacy of life elaborated by a tree in a living space. What could be greater than oxygen so vital to the lives of beings of the animal kingdom and only the love of the tree gives us? Moreover, what a good news to know that the presence of a tree is saving, since it is the store the first disease of man. Disease of which the latter would suffocate? There is thus following the above two types of pharmacopoeias. The first is made by men in their relationship with nature while the second, which seems the greatest and most effective to us, is the product of nature itself. She/it is generous in this case, maternal and aware of the importance of the presence of man. As such, we give reason to HANS Jonas, who in one of his reflections, said, "The nature comes before man while the man comes before nature."

### **Hedge as an economic guarantee**

While it is true that "nature abhors a vacuum," we would say that the Man of the postcolonial period was so well integrated that thought. It is rightly he held his living environment and especially the perimeter of its living space of trees that could not only promote the health of its existence, but it also be a source of wealth **to the extent of the cut** a tree could be arranged in bundles and sold to those who were in need. Let us mention here that it is cutting a tree at a time and not the logging. Here again, we see a need for survival and which establishes the **cause** of a tree while his replacement is already growing somewhere in the concession. That is why even at 90 years old, an old man still had the sense of planting a tree or other cola tree without asking who will be the lucky recipient.

Many parents in the Grass-field villages were known as sellers of firewood while others were recognized by their finesse in practicing the art of the attachment of the hedge. Moreover, the economy we mention was not only financial, it was recognized in its social aspect, since the collective sense of mutual aid of a member of the community in the task, for example of constructing a box, morally obliged a member to make available a large tree he would use for his frame. The value of man did not lie in his suit, something that did not even exist at the time, but in its multiple works and especially in the construction of its residential space. We can also discuss among others the wealth of human resources that proved both in the organization of society and in the respect accorded to Community noble people; because once the observation of their dilapidated fence was noticed, he had to mobilize as soon as possible the local population and its

organization in the reconstitution of the closure. This is also noticed for queens' concessions of these localities. Here again is proving a concern for the other and saving a few emblematic figures of society. Do not forget that we are in a purely African context where the concept of compensation is not prohibited. That is why these dignitaries of traditional society know indeed what was left for them to do in return, especially since in most cases, what these people expected them was not something else than their sense of responsibility and consideration. Let us recall also that these concessions were used as framework for several folk associations and meetings for people who in their turn only needed the wisdom of these dignitaries. Their speaking was censored by dead silence, reflecting advice and wisdom that they could convey. We understand in this respect that the practice of the quickset hedge, far from being an art as to make was also a good opportunity for youth to learn the art of living, as the reunion of several generations, far from generating what is known nowadays generation gap, was rather a space for information, learning and maturity test. That is why at the end of these meetings, several projects could be setting up as the initiation of boys of the same age or marriage project following a gesture made by those who would have seduced some adults in the group. In view of the foregoing, what can we give advocacy for the cause of the return of this valuable practice?

### **FROM MODERNITY TO LAZINESS**

If the routine work that was founded yesterday in a way the authority and respect of men in Grass-field society, it remains true that today what matters is the job done once and for all. To this end, the hedge is replaced by stone fences reinforced with concrete or breeze-blocks stuffed or mud bricks. The man who managed to surround his concession of a fence is free from all evil, he thinks, because at home would have access only who he wants and especially one who comes by appointment. If necessary, he lives in solitude and proven indifference. Resistant to any foreigner, he is in his world and to too bad for the other. The notion of solidarity is so scorned and enthusiasm to periodical work is out. Everything is increasingly deteriorated that the latter, natural being, tends to break with nature by creating a new unnatural framework but curiously in nature. A fortiori, the new framework is not always for the good of nature, and the question that comes to mind is whether the nature remains indifferent.

Laziness discussed here is justified on several levels. First, at the level where wealthy people nowadays refuse any contact with the ground, generating all good, as to afford to cement their residential yard or to put the paving stones. Thus, the concept of grass and especially the grass cut is brought into bushel. For this purpose, it is becoming more artificial than natural, and this state is more justified by the lack of any effort. Moreover, the refusal of any activity generates several ailments that simply walking towards the hollows in search of bamboo and taking loads on the head followed by transport to the house allowed the organism through sweat to eliminate more waste that can damage the body. This simple walking for hours and repeatedly competed for the welfare of men of that time, because after looking bamboo, was that of the vine and finally cutting the rafters that generated the tie of the hedge: what mobility unlike creationism observed today. Parents in the postcolonial era were disturbed and this disturbance was not less important with regard to their health insurance. Each man rose up to tackle multiple tasks in order to regain his bed late at nightfall. It thus respected the Chinese principle that "the land belongs to those who wake up very early to go to bed very late." The earlier the modality won wide the earlier the life expectancy will be waning. Nowadays we notice that, , people consume more than they produce, and therefore they have a certain imbalance which is reflected increasingly in his health and one can record for this purpose deposits of cholesterol, glucose, etc. which are the cause of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, hypertension, etc. We see in this regard men dead as gendarme birds following an outbreak. Is this not an opportunity for us to invite our humanity to this Chinese policy consisting in consuming a cricket to endure a day of work? How much are the ancestors who had suffered from these ailments while today, there have been the so-called old age ailments. They are real in our time and can be considered without any ambiguity as a consequence of modernity tearing the human being from its living environment and natural practices. How much are those who during a migraine first think to natural products? Artificial took off and fashion would like each person to have a first aid box, we would say a poison box, because chemical medicines involve side effects, that is to say poisoning. Moreover, another phenomenon lie ahead, the use of herbicides that daily only pollute the environment. Almost no one pays attention to realize the non-existence of several plant species due to the use of these products, son of industrial practices. But our parents in the postcolonial era, once aware of the existence of a harmful plant or boring grass, destroyed it by uprooting without prejudice to the neighboring plant. This notion of selection seems to have deserted the today people spirit. If it were a tree, they would dig the soil in order to uproot it from this space. Was not this a physical work full of meaning of sport? Speaking of sports, remember that nowadays it is relegated to second place because, being the daily lives of our parents yesterday, almost two hours assigned to him today and worst still days of the week. Is this not the secret of longevity of the Men of the pre-colonial period?

### **Plea for a restoration of the hedge**

The absence of hedge today makes us lose the sense of the periodic work and especially the sense of natural cleanliness and maintenance of life. Since they had known how life was sacred, they put everything at stake for its preservation, maintenance and even its improvement. The presence of hedge thus allowed pre-colonial men to conduct a bio livestock and a bio culture. They produced not only a small livestock and poultry uncorrupted by chemical substances but also pure food for the maintenance of their health. But nowadays, how many are organic chickens we meet, to name just this case. Almost everything we consume is a slave with us of chemicals. The concept of patience left modern man.

That is why we are left to eat without concern a hen after a month of living and in the farming area are swarming GMOs. All of them are immersed in the test of timeliness, source of deception and big financial outlay, we are shorting life. Now life is nothing but nothing's worth. Fastening a hedge is less costly to our opinion than the construction of a fence, regardless of the hardware that comes in.

Returning to the old practice of dying hedgerow, we indirectly contribute to ecosystem balance, because we are called to maintain the hollows for permanently bamboo and vines, favouring an auspice for endangered critters (porcupine, rat, hedgehog, snake ...). Finally our notables still find safe places to keep their totems, our rich culture. Through small maintenance works, we might disturb the body, thus dissipating energy and by extension any surplus could damage our body. A concession surrounded by hedgerows calls for solidarity, altruism, brotherhood, direct communion with our surroundings. And access to such a concession required a little difficulty as the gatehouse or ringer which unfortunately is conditioned by the momentarily available power. Major fences are also the reason of the distance from each other. We think of this, and this is what is already done, that nowadays the absence of ladders once found at the entrance of the concessions surrounded by the hedge is laudable, because it marks the end of accidents. We believe in this regard that every Grass-field son should review its way of embracing modernity and understand that in traditional practices such as the tie of the hedge, hides a great value, namely the love of the other, solidarity, education and more.

### **Conclusion**

At the end of this analysis, let us remember that from the beginning it was question of showing the relationship existing between life in general and hedge. To this end, we demonstrated how the hedge was saving for grass-field communities emphasizing its economic importance. With the tie of the hedge, many soils are solidified and many roofs saved. Then we realized that the hedge maintained the life within the concession by the phenomenon of photosynthesis. Yet it is this same hedge that after the growth of trees gives us shade, a place of refuge in case of a heat wave. Moreover, through the hedge, solidarity and mutual respect are created between people of several generations. It defines not only a concession, but it also calls many people who have a concern for art and beauty. Trees from the hedge offer to us, unlike concrete blocks and stone fences, drugs to ensure our well being. And we mentioned that the practice of hedge makes us more and more mobile, while the fence plunges us into a fixity that generates several ailments like diabetes, cardiovascular disease and hypertension ... That is why we advocate for a return to origins, that is to say, a return to the tie of the hedge as our participation in the revitalization of the ecosystem because man, being of nature, cannot conflict with it.

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