

The Prestige Economy: Veteran Clubs and Fixing the City through Male Youth Competition in Bamenda, Cameroon

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My paper examines attempts by young men in Bamenda, Cameroon, to transform their city through the creation of prestige associations called veteran clubs. The basic question is how male youth in African cities copes with the many challenges that the weakness of the state, the economy and the many aspects of the ongoing processes of globalization provoke. I explore how urban young men develop new modes of agency that allows them to maintain an active attitude despite the permanent difficulties of finding a place in a society that apparently does not have one for them. Thus, I focus on the strategies used by young men in an impoverished community to ‘manage impressions’ and win the respect of other neighbourhoods. And, how such competition serves to ‘fix’ communities, lifestyles and young men’s positions within the city. With little possibility of accumulation and redistribution, young men in Old Town create myriad spaces to play, negotiate and enhance their identities. In what is herein referred to as competing for attention, young men engage in performative acts, seeking each other’s attention and subsequent confirmation as accomplished. Even though they are culturally constructed as ‘empty vessels’, they struggle to represent themselves as social adults with essence through conspicuous consumption.