SOUS LA DIRECTION DE

Peter Geschiere et Piet Konings

Itinéraires d'accumulation au Cameroun

Education, economics and "the good life": women in Ngaoundéré, Northern Cameroon

Lisbet Holtedahl

Introduction

This article presents material from Ngaoundéré, a multi-ethnic town in Northern Cameroon. It focuses on how women negotiate their positions and identities when faced with a conflict between new opportunities and traditional cultural values. The recent transformation of Cameroonian society has led to a fundamental change in the lives of men and women alike in Ngaoundéré. The growing impact of Western education has transformed their economic careers and access to social rank. Thus, to a greater extent than a generation ago, Christian and Moslim women and men now have to take into account not only the value but also the potential risks of new knowledge. New kinds of knowledge often imply the marginalization of traditional knowledge. Using new knowledge means adopting new forms of male and female behaviour. As social acceptance and rank are still to a certain extent tied to traditional notions of proper male and female behavior and knowledge, women and men are both facing new dilemmas.

What can everyday life in Ngaoundéré reveal about this transformation of men's and women's repertoire of knowledge and their chances for a good life? My approach views society as a market of knowledge. It is in this perspective that I shall address the modes of accumulation open to women and the problems and choices they face. The focus will be on modern education as a key aspect of recent societal transformation.

Everyday life in Ngaoundéré provides important clues relevant to my approach. From whatever direction you arrive at Ngaoundéré, in the early morning you see women and young girls carrying their goods on their heads. You also see men walking though usually without carrying anything. When men carry goods, they generally do so by bicycle, mobilette or car.

At the big market, Luumo Manga, the women and girls sit on their mats in the middle of the market place and spread out vegetables, condiments and other products in front of them. They are directly exposed to the sun. Around the market place, there are lots of small shops with plenty of shade. Here you find the men sitting on small chairs and selling their commodities: knives, clothes and so on.

As this description shows, women and men move differently and occupy different parts of the urban space when they sell their commodities. Why are the men more at ease, more confident, more professional-looking than the women when they travel or sell their goods?

Ethnocentrism may have coloured this brief account of life in Ngaoundéré. The reader may have an impression of something he could classify under "the oppression of women". It is not my intention, however, to base my analysis on either a paradigm of Western notions of male authority and female subordination, or on such notions as the oppressive power of the economic system and the modern African state (Copans, 1987; Mbembe, 1988). Factors and their impact will have to be identified in the case material and demonstrated in the empirical context.

The women sitting in the burning sun are not the wives of the men in the comfortable shops. In Ngaoundéré you find numerous different ethnic groups. To a certain extent, ethnic background determines men's and women's activities. The men in the shops are urban Moslims: Fulani, Hausa and Kanuri traders. On the mats we may find rural women: Moslim Mboum or Christian Gbaya and Duru. We may also find urban women from the same groups. The girls may be the daughters of the Moslim traders in the shops, or of unmarried "elite" women who work and earn a regular income at the local state hospital. If you want to meet the wives of the traders, you will have to go behind the walls in the Moslim quarters of the town. If you are interested in meeting the husbands of the women in the sun, you will have to look in the fields, under the trees in the neighbouring villages, or at the places where salaried jobs are offered. Last but not least, you will have to search the local bars for their unemployed husbands and lovers.

To discover the new avenues to power expressed in men's and women's performance in the urban arena, one has to study social life in Ngaoundéré, especially the "negotiations" involving position and

identity. Men and women can be seen trying to improve and secure their positions and identities in the complex setting of urban Ngaoundéré. I see the urban context as consisting of various "social fields" of different scales (Grønhaug, 1978). Men and women act within these fields, and in each field they encounter different propositions about what their positions and identities are supposed to be.

At the local level, in the household and the quarter where one lives, the expectations are part and parcel of different ethnic traditions. They prescribe rules for tasks, division of labour, masculinity and femininity. Through family relationships, each individual is also tied to the expectations of relatives in the villages in the area or in the south. Men and women also have to take part in urban social fields with conflicting expectations and "relevance rules", which severely complicate their negotiations on positions and the meaning of gender. When women go to the markets or shops, they encounter an economic system directly linked to national and even international levels. The educational system and institutions of local authority are also connected to a national or international scale. When women participate in religious arenas, they enter the global fields of Islam and Christianity.

In each of the various fields, different rules of relevance are negotiated as a result of power mechanisms specific for the respective dynamics (Barth, 1981, and 1978; Grønhaug, 1978; Holtedahl, 1986; Fardon, 1985). These rules of relevance stipulate what is relevant knowledge and behaviour, and for whom - in short the convertible resources and assets for the attainment of a "good life". These assets can be either material or symbolic. The relevance rules for femininity in many Moslim families are incompatible with the behaviour rules in the modern school arena, which has "inherited" much of the West's formal insistence on the "neutrality" of gender. So if a father decides to send his daughter to school, she is very apt to experience difficulties relating to the contrasts between these arenas.

Men and women constantly react to the relevance rules the various fields present them with. Moslim bureaucrats express different ideas of maleness in their bureaucratic roles than Christians (Geschiere, 1982). Through their participation in different fields, men may well create relevance rules for male and female attraction or for male and female knowledge as symbol or economic asset which do not necessarily

correspond to women's current identity management. Men's actions may thus represent a constraint on women and vice versa. In a way, one can say men's and women's acts represent interventions in a constant debate on male and female positions and identity as well as on the relevance of being Moslim or Christian, Fulani or Mboum, bureaucrat or trader (Rudie, 1985; Holtedahl, 1986).

I shall focus here on some women who are differently positioned in Ngaoundéré's urban context. They have different religious and ethnic backgrounds. Some of them have a modern education. All of them live in a context where modern education is on the increase. In their careers, women acquire and produce different kinds of knowledge and experience - different relevance rules - in the various fields where they are active. This knowledge is integrated into their personal identities as women and as producers. I am especially interested in what women think when they are confronted with the dilemmas generated in this new "market of knowledge" and the impact on their life situation.

Women's ideas about "the good life" vary in accordance with their identity. Motherhood is essential to all the women we shall meet, but a Hausa woman's perception of motherhood includes children's cooperation in income-generating activities and a Fulani woman's does not. A good network or a relevant kind of autonomy are perceived differently by different women.

It follows that women perceive the changing "market of knowledge" differently and have to pay varying process and use varying methods to attain "the good life". I devote special attention to contrasts between Moslim and Christian women's perceptions and strategies.

Ngaoundéré town: Recent history and present context for men's and women's lives

Ngaoundéré (around 60,000 inhabitants) has recently become the provincial centre of Adamawa province. Ngaoundéré was originally the urban centre of the Mboum people (Eldridge, 1981; Faraut, 1981). They were primarily farmers scattered on the Adamawa plateau in northern Cameroon. They interacted in various ways with other ethnic groups such as the Duru and the Gbaya, who were also farmers (Hino,

1984). In the nineteenth century, the Mboum hegemony of Ngaoundéré was eliminated by the Fulani *jihad*, the holy war.

When German colonizers seized Adamawa around the beginning of the century, Ngaoundéré was a commercial centre based on trade: slaves, cattle and goods such as cloth and cola nuts were of great importance. Trade was mainly conducted by Moslim Hausa and Kanuri from Nigeria. Later the Fulani, gradually becoming more urban, also started trading, mainly in cattle. Hausa and Kanuri women managed the local petty trade from behind the walls (Hill, 1969; Cohen, 1971). Fulani women were generally not allowed to trade, as it was considered an expression of the husband's lack of economic responsibility (VerEecke, 1989).

Ngaoundéré had become a Moslim town with an aristocracy composed of three prestige and power groups. Leading Fulani held military and political control. Another Fulani group based their power on religious prestige and Koranic knowledge. A separate power base had to do with social networks for the accumulation of goods and money: the rich traders were Hausa, Fulani and Kanuri (Azarya, 1978; Gondolo, 1978).

Social life and rules governing marriage, familial relations and property rights among the Moslims of Ngaoundéré were mainly based on the code of the Koran blended with traditional values and perceptions. In spite of the specific features of the Hausa, Kanuri and Fulani, mainly based on specialization in trade and cultural diversity, intermarriage became frequent. These inter-ethnic ties consolidated the hegemony of the Moslim elite.

The Mboum, Duru and Gbaya in Adamawa and Ngaoundéré mainly remained subsistence farmers. Until quite recently, especialy in the countryside, they continued to oppose islamization. Thus religious idioms became ethnic diacritica in the process of political opposition (Burnham, 1972, and 1980; Christiansen, 1956). By introducing first a new form of military control and then an administrative bureaucracy based on Western education, the colonizers became a threat to the local Moslim hegemony. In the past sixty years, various Catholic and Protestant missions settled in the area. They founded the schools where the first generations of incumbents to the modern bureaucracy were recruited (Burnham, 1980).

To the Moslim aristocracy, knowledge acquired by modern schooling represented a different spiritual and ethnic culture. They felt that their own influence, knowledge, morality and identity were questioned and threatened. This is why the Fulani sent their slave children to school when forced to do so by the local authorities. To the Gbaya and Duru, however, schooling and Christianity presented a potential alternative to their life conditions as poor farmers and an expression of opposition to the Fulani hegemony (Endresen, 1954; Budal, 1962).

The majority of the Mboum population followed a different trajectory. Through marriage contracts between the families of the *LamiiDo* and the *Bellaka* (the head of the Mboum), they had been incorporated into the Fulani political hegemony. In addition, they had been given key positions in the *fada*, the *LamiiDo*'s court. This was why they resisted the influence of the missions (Faraut, 1981). But they also felt oppressed by the Fulani conquerors, who tried to restrict their access to Koranic knowledge. Since independence, the Mboum made a concerted effort to acquire this religious knowledge. During the last twenty or thirty years, a radical islamization and fulbeization of the subdued Mboum population has taken place in Ngaoundéré. Most urban people of Mboum descent have "become" Fulani and the Fulani language has become the *lingua franca* in Ngaoundéré.

There were other changes as well in Ngaoundéré after independence. Local relations of power were exposed to the growing influence of modern bureaucracy, and the arrival of the railway from Yaoundé in the seventies brought the rest of the world closer. Cattle trading increased quickly, and many more industrial activities were generated. The "entrepreneurial" Bamiléké and Bamoum arrived from the south. The expansion of state institutions led to an influx of educated people from the south. There were few educated people from the north, and the regime deliberately strengthened the presence of southern elements to counteract potential political opposition to the state from the north (Bayart, 1979). The reduced distances created networks on a national scale.

Sector strategies

The government's Five-Year Plans and my interviews with local representatives of the state illustrate the following characteristics of what I call "sector paradigms".

Households are perceived as units always headed by men. Men are perceived as the key persons to address in projects designed to increase economic productivity. There are plans for motivating young men to start cultivating in the vicinity of Ngaoundéré or for constructing granaries and buildings for modern equipment and for teaching young men modern cooperative activities and giving them capital to start agricultural production. If women are mentioned, as in the Agricultural Five Year Plan, it is in terms of courses in nutrition and health care. Planning addresses formal economic activities, synonymous with agricultural and animal production. Distribution is to take place through the official market in Ngaoundéré.

Women's activities in the production and distribution of yoghurt, for instance, have even been thwarted by a multilateral development project organized in conjunction with the Delegation of Animal Husbandry. The aim of this project is to build a large dairy product factory where milk is to be processed and cheese and yoghurt are to be produced. The same pattern has recurred in connection with the establishment of national breweries in many African countries, which made local beer production by women largely superfluous. The Agricultural Delegation plans have no provisions for the urban women who handle local petty trade and sell vegetables on the market: there are no provisions for improving the distribution of agricultural products. The only women who interact with state authorities for economic purposes, for instance the few women who own their own shops, all come from the south. The case studies below will indicate the causes for these differences in access to formal sectors.

A market of knowledge

The above description of the recent transformations affecting urban society in Ngaoundéré illustrates the complex poly-ethnic urban

culture that has developed. Political processes governing the continuity and changes in the meaning of ethnic identity have been influenced by the spread of Islam and Christianity. Religious affiliation may or may not provide access to new strategic relationships for the accumulation of wealth and social rank. The Moslims have seen former slaves enter the local bureaucracy because they were the first to get a modern Western education. They witnessed the new paths to power and constructed a Moslim secondary school in 1987.

For a better understanding of women's lives in Ngaoundéré, we shall examine a few cases in terms of how women's management of knowledge constitutes part of their negotiations with "the world". Ngaoundéré in the eighties is a new "market of knowledge" with special rules of access, conversion and "prices". To gain access to this market, one needs to be educated. Literacy has become the currency.

It is now a general policy of most Third World states to stress the importance of modern education for economic accumulation. But there is a growing segment of unemployed people in the urban centres who are only educated up to the primary school level. This is also the case in Ngaoundéré and in Cameroon in general. Old knowledge (working in the field, producing handicrafts) has become "outmoded", i.e. difficult to convert. But new knowledge (modern education) is also becoming "useless" for many people due to the lack of jobs.

To understand the new avenues to economic careers, it is necessary to examine the combinations of knowledge and relationships that determine success or failure. In Ngaoundéré in the eighties, people believe that education can provide better chances to get a job, though at the same time they might experience the opposite. Living in these new urban circumstances means reconsidering the stategies of everyday life. And this means acquiring new knowledge.

Moslim women's strategies

Moslim society in Ngaoundéré today is highly stratified and the dynamics generating and reinforcing either power or poverty are very complex. The way Moslims perceive modern education seems to play

Their perception of education seems to differ with their ethnic background and degree of islamization. Therefore the consequences of modern education for careers and economic activities also vary.

It holds three for all Moslim women that marriage regulates their husband's economic obligations to them. The emphasis is on the moral aspects of the husband's and wife's behaviour rather than the emotional ones (Parkin and Nyamwaya, 1987). For a woman, getting married means getting an "income", while for a man it means improving his status by taking on new economic and social responsibilities. For both spouses, the relations to their own family are characterized by stronger emotional ties than the relationship to each other.

There are important differences in how female identity is defined among the Fulani and the Hausa/Kanuri, and in the kinds of knowledge they possess and regard as useful. To the Fulani, a man's rank is reflected in his wife's total economic dependence and her symbolic expression of subordination (VerEecke, 1989; Kintz, 1989). For the Hausa and the Kanuri, a husband has to provide the basic necessities for his wife (meat and rice, cloth) but her success as a wife is also based on her entrepreneurial competence, i.e. knowledge (Smith, 1954; Cohen, 1961).

Uneducated middle-aged Moslim Hausa and Kanuri women are traditionally eager traders from behind the walls of their house, and are economically fairly independent within their family (Cohen, 1967; Hill, 1969; Holtedahl, 1973). They rely on their children's help in trading their products. Until recently, these women were opposed to modern education for their children. This is clear from the fact that illiteracy is highest in the Hausa quarter in Ngaoundéré. But as we shall see, these women are now becoming increasingly aware of the potential risks of not sending their children to school.

Moslim Fulani women and women from less islamized groups, like the Mboum and the Bororo, have a different perception of the eventual opportunities and constraints following from modern education.

Fadi, a Hausa woman

Fadi is Hausa and the first of the four wives of a Hausa marabout, Al Hajji Bouba, who lives in the Hausa quarter. Al Hajji is the religious counsellor at the court, *fada*, of the *Lamiido*. Fadi is fifty years old. Of the three other wives, two are Fulani and one is Mboum. Fadi, like most Hausa women, is a very clever trader and has considerable economic independence. She sells *weina* (rice cookies) and invests the profit in various other income-generating activities. Her husband's income is solely from gifts given by the parents of his pupils or in payment for his other religious services: Koran school exams, marriage contracts, name-giving ceremonies, etc. He sees his own position and power as entirely based on his religious activities and pious behaviour, and his material obligations towards his wives are fulfilled by God through the gifts he receives. So Al Hajji is only "indirectly" related to Ngaoundéré's economic market.

Fadi's economic success is closely related to her position as first wife and as key person in the Hausa neighbourhood. Her respectability and influence are partly based on the fact that she remained married to the same husband, Al Hajji, ever since their marriage when she was fourteen years old, and partly on the fact that she has been a very clever network-builder.

Over the years, some of her husband's pupils became involved in her commerce during their years of Koran studies. They are considered to be "her children". She never gave birth, but she continuously adopted the children of her sisters. These children sold her products outside the walls. She became a "confidente" for her husband's pupils, including a few young Hausa men with a modern education, and helped them make contact with the girls they wanted to marry. They helped her by buying new goods during their travels in the outside world, which Fadi could never enter. She in turn lent them money to start their own business. The profit she earned on the products they brought her, clothes, porcelain and the like, she mostly invested in construction. Her "sons" helped her organize this. In her dealings with these "sons", Fadi learned that people with education have easier access to the urban authorities than those without. The educated sons helped her with the paper work

Fadi conceals most of her economic activities from her husband and her co-wives. She doesn't want her husband to ask her for money - he is often short of money for his daily expenses -and she doesn't want him to reduce the allowance he pays her. Fadi's co-wives know that she is rich, but have never been able to equal her success. "We could not spoil her market. We could not sell the *weina* which is the most lucrative product. Nothing else gives a profit close to the profit she makes," they explain. I must add that since her co-wives are Fulani and Mboum respectively, this means they don't possess the knowledge and passion for trading which Fadi acquired in her childhood.

In spite of her success, Fadi is increasingly apprehensive about her priorities. She sent her last two adopted children, Amina and Moussa, to school and she had one of her intellectual "sons" handle the registration and other paperwork. After three years, she took Amina out of school because the girl had to do the selling and acquire the necessary knowledge to be a Hausa housewife. Fadi couldn't see the use of school knowledge compared to network-building experience and the commercial skills it brings. Moussa is still at school. "He might be clever and find a job and a salary in the future", she says, "but he might also not be clever enough". She is uncertain and tries to spread her risks: she asked her two grown-up educated "sons" to check whether her little son would manage at school, but she also hired a Pere boy "from the bush" to do the necessary supplementary trading. He at least will acquire the knowledge of trading necessary to maintain her contact with the traditional economic market.

At the moment, Fadi is worried because her daughter Amina isn't receiving sufficiently interesting marriage proposals. Fadi often takes Amina, who is prone to stomach aches, to a traditional medicine man in a neighbouring village. She pays him to cure Amina's stomach and make her breasts beautiful so that she will be as attractive as possible. She pays for Amina's expensive make-up, perfume and dresses, so as to attract potential marriage partners when she sells Fadi's products in town. On her tours, Amina met several civil servants who showed an interest in her. As soon as Fadi heard the news, she had them pay her a visit. However, as soon as the men understood her marriage intentions, they disappeared. It is also part of Fadi's role as organizer of Amina's

radio, etc.) for a dowry which might increase Amina's chances on the marriage market. This requires so much money that for the time being, she had to stop her construction activities. "Marriage expenditures for one and school expenditures for the other", she says,"where will I get the money!"

"You can't have your cake and eat it too" is a popular expression. Fadi has to make a choice. She is dependent on Amina's trading and the fact that she did not invest in her schooling seems to keep her from attracting a son-in-law from among the intellectual traders. An intellectual son-in-law might have become a still better partner in Fadi's entrepreneurial activities than her intellectual "sons".

Whereas Al Hajji Bouba is uninterested in modern education and depends on religious and traditional political activities for his income, Fadi is an innovator. She was one of the first Hausa women to "try out" the school system. Sensitive to the importance attributed to education in local sectors, she sees educated people as possessing assets also relevant for her own income-generating activities. She chose to keep the boy at school, which may give her future contact with key persons in the new economic fields, and to have the girl acquire the traditional Hausa woman's knowledge. She spread her own risks - and unintentionally created a situation which made her daughter less attractive to the young Hausa elite men with whom she cooperates: they seem to have new ideas about the ideal wife and want to marry a girl with more education than Amina. They have seen the fruits of school knowledge for their own careers and contacts with local authorities. Having seen Fadi's helplessness when she reflects on the schooling of her own son, they see it is important that the mothers of their own sons can assure their schooling.

Fadi's participation in the "market of knowledge" shows how she combines traditional and modern knowledge. Her strategies help her reinforce her important position in the Hausa society, but she is also confronted with new and unintended consequences: expenditures for schooling and an increasingly costly dowry.

Da Abe and Zeinabu, two young Fulani sisters

The problems Fadi faces regarding her daughter's marriage resemble those of Da Abe and Zeinabu.

Da Abe and Zeinabu are the eldest daughters of an influential Fulani marabout, Al Hajji Malam Manga, in Ngaoundéré. Al Hajji has two Fulani, one Hausa and one Kanuri wife and some twenty-five children. He owns some cattle, which gives him an irregular income, but religion is the basis of his social status and the family's upkeep. The girls' proper pious female behaviour is of the utmost importance to all the members of the family. Zeinabu's and Da Abe's mother, Dali, is Fulani and the first wife. Da Abe was the first of the girls in the household to go to school. When she was between fourteen and sixteen, her father tried three times to arrange a marriage for her, because as a religious leader Al Hajji Malam Manga deemed it very important that his daughters should be properly married. But Da Abe repeatedly managed to evade the marriages, helped by a group of Fulani intellectuals, some of whom have key positions in the educational sector. She is now studying in Europe and says she intends to marry a man she "loves". However, she may have trouble finding him. Most intellectual Moslims say they would never marry a *long crayon*. Da Abe also says that when she earns her own income, she will take care of her mother who suffers from the tensions among the co-wives and her economic dependency on Al Hajji.

Zeinabu, Dali's eldest daughter, never attended school and was married at the age of fifteen to a rich Fulani trader. She left her husband after several years of marriage and obtained a divorce after a long period at her father's house. She later remarried, again a man of her father's choice, and again she escaped and divorced. She has now been living with her mother and small sisters and brothers at her father's house for several years without entering a new marriage; there seem to be few proposals. She is now twenty-seven years old and is becoming increasingly eager to find a husband of her own choice. But she is in a very difficult situation. Since her family's position in society is based on religion, she does not have the opportunity open to Moslim women from less religious families to enter the "free women's"

unmarried women in Moslim urban West Africa (Cohen, 1961, and 1971; Holtedahl, 1973; Bovin and Holtedahl, 1975; Smith, 1954). It still represents an alternative to marriage for urban Moslim women of lower status. Zeinabu is virtually unable to meet any men who have not been introduced by her father, and she risks damaging her father's social position if she goes out without his consent.

Yet, with the help of an old woman in the quarter, she does succeed in occasionally meeting men. Some of them even made a marriage offer, but as they are polygamous, she was not interested. Because of her own negative experience in her earlier marriages and the strong pressure of her educated sister, her ideal is a "good" marriage with a monogamous Moslim husband. Together with her mother, she pays regular visits to a clever marabout who tells her to be patient and explains to her that men do not dare marry a daughter of such a well-respected man. But he has promised to help her and sells her *bindi*, medicine made from the ink for writing Koranic verses. Zeinabu sells peanuts through her small brothers and sisters and spends the money on her visits to the old woman and the marabout.

Zeinabu feels she is the victim not only of tradition but also of modernization. "In all the neighbouring houses young illiterate women live with their fathers, some of them have even given birth out of wedlock. The fathers do not manage to find husbands for them because the young men prefer girls who have gone to school", she says.

Zeinabu and her mother talked about the disadvantages of polygamy and told me how lucky they think I am to have a husband who "loves" me because, as they say, he does not want to marry other women. Ideas about "love" as a basis for marriage and the husband's duty to be generous and responsible in exchange for the wife's services are highly attractive to them. Apparently they believe that in such conditions, women do not suffer from their husbands' control. I found it very difficult to "translate" and communicate the various control mechanisms and other difficulties generated in marriages based on "love" in Western urban bourgeois settings.

We see that Al Hajji Malam Manga's family is also involved in negotiations about the meaning of education. They are confronted with Da Abe's refusal to marry. They have witnessed the emergence of the

were the first to risk sending boys to school. This means they have recently had to change their perception of modern education. They now see it less as a threat to their own position and identity, but more as an economic asset. The young intellectual men have developed new ideas about an appropriate wife. To a certain degree, they still accept their father's point of view in the choice of a wife (they are dependent upon him economically), but they insist that she be educated - not so much, that she becomes a *long crayon* but enough to assure that their sons will do their school work properly.

It has become increasingly difficult for parents to find husbands for their uneducated daughters, especially if they are divorced. For these women, the road to marriage as a system of subsistence has been narrowed. The new male identity management has led to a marginalization of the knowledge young uneducated Fulani girls possess. It is not as easy for the girls to convert female piousness, subordination towards a husband or excellence in cooking into a safe economic position as a wife. In the high prestige groups, more and more of these women remain at their fathers' home. They represent a threat to their families' honour. This is different for women of the lower classes, who can go live in a "free women's" house.

At the moment, the potential risks of new marriage strategies lead to a great deal of clandestine activity in the field of male and female interaction. Old Fulani women organize clandestine meetings between married men and women, or between married men and unmarried girls in situations which hardly correspond to the traditional rules of male and female honour. These old women are especially active among the more religious groups.

It is an effect of male identity management in relation to modern education that the interests of young men and their fathers converge. A father's honour still depends on his daughter's proper marriage, preferably before she is seventeen. Since young educated men don't want to marry a *long crayon*, very few Moslim girls go beyond primary school. This is also why there are so few Moslim girls in the secondary schools and so few well-educated Moslim women in Ngaoundéré. The few exceptions are not considered attractive as marriage partners by most of the well-educated Moslim men. These women are rarely

interested in polygamous marriages or in showing the kind of obedience still considered important by men to safeguard their masculinity.

Zeinabu and Da Abe's experience in the "market of knowledge" indicates a gradual devaluation of traditional knowledge. Zeinabu has not acquired the necessary new knowledge, and Da Abe is in the process of acquiring "too much" education. They do not have the right combination of traditional and new knowledge. Their new ideas about "the good life" should be viewed against this background. As they see it, if "love" was accepted as the ideal basis for a monogamous marriage, the relevance of the right combination of knowledge would be of less importance. In their daily negotiations with their family, this idea is expressed in their refusal to marry the men the father chooses (Da Abe) or accept marriage offers made by polygamous Moslim men (Zeinabu). The sisters are both excluded from the new "market of knowledge". Another implication of the sisters' negotiations is that Zeinabu and the mother, Dali, have certain expectations regarding future social and economic support from Da Abe: there is more emphasis on mother-daughter-sister cooperation.

Ai, a young Bororo woman

I noted various alternative patterns in Moslim women's strategies for "the good life". One pattern emerging among educated Moslim women is that they don't return to their father's home after divorce. They start their own business or small restaurant and become the head of their own household. Another alternative is a new pattern of identity management among women of lower, less islamized groups, like the Mboum and Bororo. These women are faced with special dilemmas because they have to choose between acceptance from the "established" Moslim society or access to new urban job sectors. The case of Ai, a young Bororo woman, will illustrate this.

Ai is twenty-three years old and lives with her husband, Haman, also a Bororo. She grew up in a Bororo nomad group which was only superficially islamized. After a short marriage when she was sixteen, she left her husband and took refuge at the Protestant mission in a village south of Ngaoundéré. She was fortunate enough to get a [illegible]

job and some training as an assistant nurse in an orphanage. She was pregnant when she arrived and gave birth to a girl. When she paid a visit to her husband, he subsequently took the child and granted Ai a divorce. After she had stayed for some time at the mission station, Ai was asked to convert to Christianity. She was quite willing to do so and asked her father for permission. As he refused and threatened to withdraw all future support, she didn't convert. She then had to leave her job, and the missionaries helped her settle in another village. After a while, she did what was most common for young formerly married girls from the bush: she settled in a "free women's" house. Here she could find lovers. Her female attractiveness was converted into a livelihood.

Ai met Haman a few years ago at the mission hospital. She had had an accident, was very seriously burned and needed many operations. Haman had been forced since childhood to live in an urban area because he had a chronic disease and had to be regularly hospitalized. After they got married, Haman assumed the responsibility for Ai's daughter by her first husband. Haman and Ai rented a house in Bali, one of Ngaoundéré's old Moslim quarters. Haman, who is poor, sells traditional medicine. His clients are mainly "free women" who buy various "love" potions, but also people from the vicinity who buy traditional medicine if they don't get the help they want at the hospital or who simply define "white" medicine as useless or sinful.

Haman feels he is not viewed as a serious Moslim by his neighbours, and therefore wants Ai to behave as a proper secluded Fulani wife. Ai appeals to their common Bororo background to get him to accept a less strict code. She would surely like her husband to become a successful and respected man in the neighbourhood and earn enough money to build his own house. But she is reluctant to pay the price: accepting a life behind the walls. Bororo women are traditionally very mobile, as they earn an important part of the family's cash income by travelling to markets to sell milk and butter (Dupire, 1962). She had also lived among Christians where women are allowed to participate in public work, and acquired "new" knowledge. During a short period, Haman allowed her to sell bananas and tomato tins bought at the railway station market, but as she spent the money on tobacco instead of saving

Their contacts with the mission and the hospital taught Ai and Haman the importance of literacy and knowledge of French. That is why they want to send Ai's daughter to school. She currently attends the local Koranic school and the primary school. They both see her schooling not only as an investment in her future but also in their own.

After several years of marriage, Ai still hasn't given birth. Haman is consequently now planning to marry a cousin. Ai has said that she will leave him if he marries a second wife. She has two alternatives, as she sees it: either stay Moslim and enter a new period as a "free woman" or accept the offer from the Mission. If she converts, she will get a new job as a salaried health worker and lose her Bororo network. In neither case will she be able to keep her daughter, who is formally in Haman's custody.

Ai's and Haman's disagreement as to proper urban female behaviour seems to have been generated by their different identification with the inhabitants of the Moslim quarter. Ai is newly settled in Ngaoundéré. She prefers to keep the personal "freedom" she had as a Bororo woman, as a mission station worker and as a "free woman". Haman's lengthy dependence on the local Moslim community for the "sale" of his special medical knowledge has led him to an identity management which implies purdah for Ai (VerEecke 1989).

Ai's participation in the "market of knowledge" exhibits a pattern different from the ones described above. She has acquired a combination of traditional and new knowledge. Her new knowledge is informal, however, and can only be used in a Christian setting. Due to her ethnic background and the fact that her family is in a proces of islamization, her whole family network is at risk if she returns to the mission. She is not integrated in a well-established urban network, so that her only chances in town lie in her capacity to express traditional female competence and knowledge. She has to acquire traditional urban Moslim female knowledge and behaviour if she wants to stay married.

Christian women's strategies

For Christian women, the intertwinement of modern education, religious patterns and new relations of power is markedly different. This presents other moral and economic dilemmas.

The national school system was largely initiated by the missions, and their proselytes were the first to be educated. Traditionally, the ethnic groups the Christians come from, were subsistence farmers. Their schooling has enabled Christians to fill most of the administrative positions in the modern bureaucracy. Yet for many Christians, being educated also creates problems in the urban setting. Farming in the villages or at the outskirts of Ngaoundéré is no longer considered an acceptable way of earning an income. In addition, access to land is becoming increasingly difficult. Men as well as women try and find salaried positions as labourers or bureaucrats. But in town there are very few jobs open to people with only a primary school education.

Many Christian families (Gbaya, Duru) who, for the last twenty years, have been sending their girls to school are in trouble now. The girls were not married in the traditional way at the age of thirteen or fourteen. They became pregnant by school boys, teachers or other civil servants who didn't adhere to the customary rules on marriage and family, and for various reasons did not marry the girls. They viewed such marriages as an obstacle to their career. The obligation to work in their father-in-law's field was not compatible with their own education-based ambitions. The fathers and mothers who, according to traditional rules and laws, could have expected a contribution to their livelihood from their son-in-law, are now economically responsible for their adult daughters and grandchildren. Pregnant daughters are expelled from school.

These recent experiences may explain a growing trend among Christian parents to marry off their daughters at puberty even if they have not finished primary school.

Suzanne, an unmarried Gbaya woman

Suzanne is a 28-year-old Gbaya woman. Her parents are from the Meiganga region. Originally peasants, they settled in the Balayji quarter several decades ago. Her father worked as a labourer at the Catholic Mission, and her mother cultivated her own field a mile from Ngaoundéré, mainly for subsistence. All the children went to school. Only two of Suzanne's brothers have temporarily held salaried jobs. Nowadays, they are all unemployed, divorced or not yet married. Some of Suzanne's sisters are married to farmers in Meiganga, and one is married to a civil servant in Chad.

At sixteen, Suzanne was married by her father to a Moslim Mboum by whom she had a son, and for whom she converted to Islam. She subsequently divorced him. "I like the Mboum because they are like the Gbaya, but I couldn't accept being secluded", she said.

After the divorce, Suzanne settled at her parents house in the Balayji quarter, where she now has her own room. She had a secretarial job in the Municipality office, but lost it when the post was eliminated due to the recent crisis. While working at the Municipality, she was elected leader of the RDPC Party women's group in the Balayji quarter. All the women in this group are "free".

For years, she has received most of her income from her lovers, mostly Moslim traders from Ngaoundéré or civil servants she meets at party meetings. She is continously offered marriage by the Moslim traders who have no modern education, but she says, "I do not want to be wife number two or three". She is attracted to the Moslim men because they are generous to women they fancy, but her identity as a literated Gbaya woman is incompatible with the secluded life they offer. The civil servants don't offer her marriage. "Men from my own ethnic group, be it civil servants or workers, are not reliable as husbands", she says, "they do not stick to one woman either!"

The fact that she has not given birth since she was eighteen makes it likely that she has become infertile. It is probably also because she has lived as a "free woman" that she is not offered marriage by civil servants. Clearly, both Christianity and literacy limit the opportunities for "free women" to convert femininity into marriage.

Suzanne not only supports her son, who goes to school, but also her parents and several of her unemployed brothers. In her situation, she considers her son's education as a critical asset for his future and her own. She alternately goes to mass at the Catholic church and writes on her Koranic tablet. "People don't seem to understand, but they are all praying to the same God!", she says. She wants to earn her own living and she wants to be the only wife of a senior civil servant, Christian or Moslim. She spends a large part of her economic resources on specialists (marabouts and others) who sell recipes to get the husband she wants, find jobs for her brothers, help one brother out of prison, and cure her sick father. Money from lovers, help from "magic", religious activities and her own beauty have become the assets she tries to convert into a living. Every now and then she says she has to choose to pay either for her son's education or her sick brother's medicine, i.e. between her son's future and her brother's life.

Suzanne's position in "the market of knowledge" does not allow her to have "the good life" as she defines it. As was the case for Zeinabu, Suzanne has developed a certain conception of an ideal love-based marriage with certain economic obligations. Her identity as a literate modern woman, however, is incompatible with men's expectations of a good wife in Moslim and Christian neighbourhoods alike. For an uneducated rich Moslim trader, polygamy is still an important expression of masculinity. For an educated Christian civil servant, polygamy has become an expression of "backwardness", and so to marry a former "free women" as his one and only wife is not an interesting option. To them, a *deuxième bureau* position for Suzanne is the least costly identity management. It is very difficult for Suzanne to realize her dreams and escape poverty. Her modern education only functions as a symbol which seems to give her access to certain arenas (Municipality and Party) as a potential informal partner. The activities of "free women" for the Party represent an important informal economic sector.

Of course, Christian women also have alternative strategies for reaching "the good life". Nearly all my case studies of Christian women have in common the emphasis on the importance of schooling for children. Often, the expenses for keeping children at school are a strain

way of life as sinful. They remain more closely attached to the Church. For these women, the Church women's groups are often of great importance. Members of these groups share a certain responsibility for each other's families. This partly compensates for the lack of family assistance in Ngaoundéré - but only partly, because the network does not offer the economic support the family would provide in the rural setting. The religious and ethnic networks enable the women to discuss difficulties in life and marriage, help each other when someone is sick or gives birth. They give each other spiritual support and consolation in the event of a death or divorce. Thus, they are creating a new urban women's culture of intimacy. "But we are all so overworked that we do not succeed in raising money together; we do not trust each other enough". All the efforts to organise "tontines" within these groups have failed because members let the group down by not sticking to the rules.

Elite women

We have now seen why there are very few women from Ngaoundéré with a secondary school or university education. Most women with higher education come from southern Cameroon. There, outside the sphere of Islam, the Catholic Mission and modern education spread much earlier (Laburthe-Tolra, 1988). However, the same dilemmas the local women face in their identity management emerge among southern elite women in Ngaoundéré as well.

Jeanne, a divorced Bamileke woman

Jeanne, 30, is one of the very few women in a high position in Ngaoundéré bureaucracy. She is a Catholic. Her father, a Bamiléké, lives in Yaoundé where he holds an influential position in a Ministry and is active in the Catholic church. Jeanne's mother is a Fulani from a rich family in Maroua in the north. Jeanne went to primary school in Yaoundé, but like many of the daughters of elite families in the capital, she was sent to the north for her secondary school education. The north

Yaoundé. After secondary school, Jeanne studied at the university in Yaoundé, where she married a student "of her own choice". After finishing her studies, which she continued further than her husband, she worked in the educational sector, first in Garoua, later in Maroua. Her husband had less important positions and not always in the same town.

They had six children. In the mid-eighties, Jeanne got a well-paid job in Ngaoundéré's educational sector. Her husband, who did not get a job immediately, decided to complete his education and went to Yaoundé for further studies. After a period of living apart, they got divorced. Her ex-husband later married a nurse.

Jeanne now lives with all the children in a big villa in the wealthiest suburb of Ngaoundéré. She has invited nephews and nieces from her mother's and father's families to live with her while they go to secondary school in Ngaoundéré. They help her take care of the children, and she tries to motivate them to further their studies.

In addition to her demanding job, Jeanne is on the board of the Party women's group with other civil servants or wives of functionaries from the south. She often goes to Yaoundé for conferences and meetings. On one such occasion, she fainted and remained unconscious for a long time. She explains this as the effect of sorcery by a jealous board member in the Party women's group because she had been nominated as the future chairman (cf. Warnier and Rowlands, 1988).

Jeanne's success as an influential civil servant is partly based on her family background on both sides, but also on her studies, which she pursued further than most women. Her knowledge of the local languages in the North as well as the South, together with the regime's preference for appointing more women in the north, further facilitated her access to powerful positions in the bureaucracy and the Party.

Whereas she seems to manage the bureaucrat role better than most women, she is in a difficult situation on the board of the Party women's group. The fact that she knows Moslim society better than other civil servants from the south is an advantage she knows how to exploit in her role as a female authority figure. However, she has difficulty collaborating with other politically active women. Her colleagues say she behaves like a "man". They say she is more interested in going to Yaoundé than in defending women's interests. Jeanne surely identifies

with the establishment. In order to keep her position, she will have to negotiate with the other women on the board.

Jeanne's identity as a married woman has also been problematic. Her husband was not enthousiastic about being married to such a powerful woman. Jeanne herself sees her divorce as the result of the threat equality in marriage represents to urban elite men. She knows her chances to enter a new marriage are nonexistent. "Who would marry a powerful woman with six children from a former marriage?"

For Jeanne, success in the official sector of "the market of knowledge" has been accompanied by problems in her relations with her husband and her position in women's networks. But it has strengthened her position in the family network.

Sara, a single Beti woman

In a way, the woman in our last case is in the opposite situation. A key person in a very strong network of women, she is gradually losing influence in the official sector, in spite of her good education.

Sara was born in Ngaoundéré. She is thirty-five and comes from a poor family. Her parents are Beti from the South. Her father worked at the Catholic mission station in Ngaoundéré for twenty-five years. When he fell seriously ill, the nuns took care of Sara during the long periods when her mother left for the south with her younger children. Sara's parents have now retired and live in the south.

For longer periods, Sara's "family" was the nuns at the Catholic mission, who helped her get a good education. She has had a high position in the educational sector for many years. She remained single but has given birth to four children. All of them have the same father, a civil servant from the south. Since he is already married, Sara would never consider marrying him.

Sara is active in the Catholic church, on the board of the Party women's group and in the local Beti group. This group organizes *tontines*, which enables her to trade in yoghurt in addition to her job. One of her daughters sells yoghurt in the market before and after school. In spite of her fairly high salary, this additional income is

daughters and their children, as well as her nephews from the south. She also sends money to her parents.

Sara's network consists of numerous poor people, mostly divorced or single mothers, but she has very little contact with the elite in Yaoundé. In her job she clearly concentrates on poor people.

Sara recently lost her job and was re-appointed at a lower level. A young, newly educated man got her former job. She was said to be too active in politics to handle such a demanding job. She herself thinks male civil servants feel humiliated if they have women superiors. She also thinks that by holding that women do not need to marry, she antagonized the educational and church authorities.

Sara says she found the man "she loved", but her ideas about marriage, based on Catholic ideas and her higher education, made her refuse a polygamous marriage. "When all my children have become independent, I will marry an old man who will take care of me", she says, "I haven't got time to care for a husband now!"

Like Jeanne, Sara has a good education, but her rank is lower. Her networks do not offer her any convertible assets to strengthen her position in the official sector. This makes her place in the modern "market of knowledge" a vulnerable one.

Conclusion

In these case studies, I viewed women as negotiators of identity and position. I tried to analyse how a new factor, Western education, has become relevant to these women and to the people they relate to in various fields. I hope to have made it clear that this education constitutes a new market in urban life, a new "market of knowledge" with its own rules of access and prices.

Every woman in Ngaoundéré has a special repertoire of knowledge influenced by her ethnic and religious affiliations. Her opportunities for building a"good life", vary according to this repertoire, as do her strategies and negotiations. From the case studies, it is clear how women's ideas about "the good life" - or what is worthwhile to strive for - vary. What is considered to be an asset by one woman, can be a disadvantage to another. At the theoretical level, my

and intentions for the understanding of aggregate and often unintended effects of behaviour. What has been accumulated varies, and so do the various accumulative strategies.

The overall processes of women's negotiations thus generate a wide range of female careers. There are three main types, as has been illustrated by the cases presented above.

The first career is the one women with no Western education enter. They are excluded from the new "market of knowledge" where literacy is a necessary asset. They are indirectly affected by this new market, since they have become less attractive as wives to men who do have access to it. Their traditional knowledge has devaluated. At the same time, they are confronted with traditional expectations when they try to build relationships or networks and convert them into a livelihood. They either marry into a polygynous household (Amina), live as a free woman (Ai) or stay at their father's house (Zeinabu). These alternatives are not necessarily gratifying, considering these women's ideas about "the good life". Ai wants economic independence and monogamy. Zeinabu wants a monogamous marriage based on love which also assures her economic future. These women's life careers are therefore marked by periods of married life and periods as "free women" or father's daughters.

The second career is characteristic of women who try to acquire and use modern as well as traditional knowledge in their striving for a "good life". Their options may vary, but the market rules and their responsibilities impede the use of their new knowledge as an economic asset. They may have a primary school education, which can become a symbol of relative rank and ambition (Fadi, and several examples of Christian women). To them the new "market of knowledge" is peripheral. They can only "exploit" it indirectly, by making an effort to help their own children gain access to the new market in the future and often at a rather high price. Their relatives may die because they prefer to spend money on the children's tuition at school, or the children may remain unemployed despite all the sacrifices because of the ongoing devaluation of school diplomas.

The third career pertains to independent unmarried women. This variant can be viewed as a recent version of an old one: the "free

Some women who belong to this category have modern education, some only attended primary school, others have higher education. Their ideas about the "good life" vary. Some want marriage, others do not.

To unemployed, divorced women with only a primary school education, a status as "free woman" is the only way to assure subsistence (Suzanne). In the modern setting, however, new constraints have emerged, and the local officials they want to marry will never marry a "free woman". So their position as independent "free women" becomes permanent.

Some well-educated women from the south have had their positions as independent women confirmed. Jeanne, for example, has an important position in the official sector. She would prefer to be married, but her power in the official sector seems to threaten her marriage chances. Ever since she was divorced, she has been in the same position as Suzanne. She has to remain independent.

Another variant is the highly educated woman who does not want to marry. A husband is a social cost (Sara). If you have your own income, a husband is a charge: he has to be taken care of.

These three main types of female careers illustrate the general patterns in Ngaoundéré's urban society in the eighties. First of all, women's traditional knowledge has gradually been marginalized. It is getting more and more difficult to use it as a symbolic resource for marriage and as an asset for economic wealth. In practical terms, women's responsibility for their own children and other family members has increased. Many of the women are network builders in their striving for a decent life in a difficult modern urban context.

Secondly, women's negotiations and their life careers demonstrate how new circumstances, influenced by the changing "market of knowledge", have transformed the traditional bases for gender roles and eroded the institution of marriage. The result is an increasing number of female-headed households. For some of these "lonely mothers", ideas of the good life still include marriage as an ideal option. The tendency to talk about "love" might be interpreted as a perceived solution to the increasing devaluation of the combinations of knowledge they possess and to men's changing moral options and marriage strategies. An ironic side effect of their notion that they are losing their "powers" is that

women have created an important job market for a wide range of male specialists: marabouts, "priests", magicians and sorcerers.

The overall processes in Ngaoundéré have created new forms of social stratification. A multi-faceted society is developing, where new combinations of achievements, relationships and knowledge are becoming increasingly important in assuring an income and valued positions. What has emerged is by no means a Western type of society, where power mainly depends on economic control. In today's Ngaoundéré, men and women's survival strategies create and reinforce combinations of new and traditional power and prestige. The state institutions represent a new arena for relationships and economic resources for men. This arena is the context within which women strive for "the good life". The fact that women do not participate in the official arena does not imply, however, that their resources, strategies or networks function independently of it. Nor do their various life styles or subsistence forms. On the contrary, the description of female careers illustrates how individual women relate to the official sectors of the Cameroonian state and vice versa. And it shows the intertwinement of the traditional and modern sectors. As long as women's partners and husbands, potential or real, participate in the official arena, women's networks will be dependent on the processes taking place in the state arenas.

Thus, a pervasive gender stratification is reinforced. Men's marginalized knowledge is gradually replaced by new modern knowledge, and women's marginalized traditional knowledge is replaced by more complex networks of communication and exchange rather than by formal education. Women in Ngaoundéré are becoming more and more marginal to the growing infrastructure of the young Cameroonian state. It is interesting to note that the Catholic and Protestant churches seem to be more important bases for new women's networks than the National Party. For Moslim women, a more informal semi-clandestine network of women is of growing importance. Thus Christian women's religious groups and Moslim women's networks have become the most important arenas for the development of women's modern knowledge.

10

Dot, commerce et contrebande: stratégies d'accumulation chez les femmes "islamisées" de Mokolo[1]

José van Santen

La vie des femmes mafa à Mokolo, petite ville des monts Mandara du nord du Cameroun, a profondément changé depuis leur conversion à l'islam. Dans cette région, l'expansion de l'islam est liée à l'hégémonie politique du peuple foulbé. "Islamiser" y signifie adopter des traits culturels foulbé. Un de ces traits est le système complexe d'échange de cadeaux de mariage. Chez les Mafa, la dot est l'affaire des hommes. Mais chez les Foulbé, l'acquisition des cadeaux de mariage est presque entièrement le devoir des femmes. Ainsi, la femme mafa, en adoptant l'islam, est confrontée à un problème complètement nouveau. Elle se trouve dans l'obligation d'accumuler du capital d'une façon ou d'une autre afin de participer aux échanges lors des mariages. Elle ne doit pas seulement contribuer aux mariages de ses propres enfants mais aussi à ceux des enfants de ses soeurs, de ses frères et de ses amies, qui l'aideront à leur tour. Ce n'est qu'en prenant part à ces échanges qu'elle peut être acceptée par la communauté musulmane. Chez les Foulbé, une femme peut en principe répondre à ces obligations grâce au bétail qu'elle possède. Mais les femmes mafa islamisées ne possèdent pas de bêtes. Elles doivent donc trouver d'autres façons d'accumuler de l'argent et de participer aux réseaux d'échanges du monde musulman.

Le but de ce chapitre est d'analyser comment les femmes mafa islamisées essayent de résoudre ce problème. Nous verrons qu'elles ont su créer des réseaux d'accumulation informels qui sont plus ou moins en dehors de l'Etat, avec notamment les nouvelles possibilités de contrebande - la ville de Mokolo se situe près de la frontière du

[1]Plusieurs collègues m'ont apporté leur aide pour ce chapitre. D'abord je voudrais sincèrement remercier M. Roch L. Mongbo pour ses commentaires stimulants et sa traduction de ce texte en français. En outre j'ai profité des remarques critiques des membres du "Ph.D.-seminar" de l'Université d'Utrecht et de M. Piet Konings et Peter