Transforming Female Identities
Women’s Organizational Forms in West Africa
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Edited by
Eva Evers Rosander

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Preface

This is a collection of papers both from a conference held in early 1993 on women and organization in West Africa and by a few researchers who were invited to the conference but were unable to attend. The conference was called Transforming Female Identities: Women's Organizational Forms in West Africa. It was held in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon, in collaboration with Anthropos, a Norwegian-Cameroonian research program, started and led by Professor Lisbet Holtedahl, University of Tromsø, together with the University of Ngaoundéré.

The theme is stated in the title of the book; it deals with women's associations as platforms or spaces for the transformation of female identities. The majority of the contributions are short case studies of different kinds of associations. A few papers, however, show a concern about women's organizing in a wider sense. There are important spatial, social, political, economic and religious aspects of women's lives which may be seen as female ways of coping with the daily constraints with which women live. These are organized by the female actors themselves either individually or in groups. That is why this book actually embraces many facets of female activities in West Africa, both public and private, open and hidden, some of which do not necessarily take place within the framework of formal or informal associations. Still, we keep a special focus on the presentation of self and of one's activities in organizational terms right throughout the various contributions to the volume. Since some of the authors are Anglophone while others are Francophone, each contribution is supplemented by an abstract in either English or French. The Preface and the conclusions of the Introduction have been translated from English into French to facilitate for the Francophone readers.

Even if some time has passed since the exciting visit to Ngaoundéré where the majority of the contributors to this volume enjoyed the generosity of our Cameroonean colleagues, we who participated in the confer-
ence still remember it vividly. Hopefully, this book will contribute to an increase in the knowledge about and interest in women’s lives and organizations in West Africa. We thank the representatives of Ngaoundéré University and the staff of the Anthropos Research Program for their marvellous assistance during the conference. Special thanks to Professor Holtedahl for her enthusiastic collaboration in the realization of the conference and her readiness to share with the other participants her knowledge and experiences of fifteen years’ anthropological studies in Ngaoundéré. Thanks also to Ms. Solveig Hauser for her help in preparing the manuscript for publication.
Préface

Les articles réunis dans le présent ouvrage ont pour origine un colloque ayant pour thème les relations entre femmes et organisations en l’Afrique de l’Ouest. On y trouvera aussi la contribution de quelques chercheurs invités qui n’ont pu participer à cette manifestation. Le colloque s’intitulait: «Transformation des identités féminines: formes d’organisations féminines en Afrique de l’Ouest». Il s’est tenu au printemps 1993 au Cameroun, à Ngaoundéré, en collaboration avec le programme de recherche Norvégien-Camerounais Anthropos; ce projet, initié et conduit par Lisbet Holtedahl, professeur à l’Université de Tromsø, est développé en liaison avec l’Université de Ngaoundéré.

Le titre de l’ouvrage en explicite le thème: il explore les associations de femmes comme tremplins ou comme espaces de transformation des identités féminines. La plupart des contributions sont de courtes études de cas portant sur divers types d’associations. Cependant quelques articles abordent les processus d’organisations féminines dans une perspective plus large. Dans la dimension spatiale, sociale, politique, économique et religieuse de la vie des femmes, certaines caractéristiques importantes peuvent en effet être identifiées comme autant de moyens utilisés pour dépasser les contraintes quotidiennes qui pèsent sur elles. Ce sont les femmes elles-mêmes qui, individuellement ou collectivement, mettent en œuvre ces actions. C’est pour cela que le présent ouvrage embrasse de multiples facettes des activités féminines développées en Afrique de l’Ouest, en public ou en privé, ouvertement ou secrètement, parfois sans rester dans le cadre formel ou informel de la vie associative. Toutefois, les différentes contributions présentées ici privilégient la dimension organisationnelle de l’action individuelle ou collective. Certains auteurs ayant rédigé leurs articles en anglais et d’autres en français, chaque contribution a été complétée par un résumé dans l’une ou l’autre
langue. L'avant-propos et les conclusions de la préface ont été traduits de l'anglais en français à l'intention des lecteurs français.

Même si quelque temps s'est écoulé depuis notre passionnante visite à Ngaoundéré, au cours de laquelle la majorité des auteurs ont pu apprécier la générosité de leurs collègues camerounais, nous gardons un vif souvenir de ce colloque. L'ouvrage que nous présentons contribuera, nous l'espérons, à développer la connaissance et l'intérêt pour la vie des femmes et leurs modes d'organisation en Afrique de l'Ouest. Nous tenons à remercier les représentants de l'Université de Ngaoundéré, ainsi que le personnel du Programme de Recherche Anthropos, pour l'aide merveilleuse qu'ils nous ont apportée durant le colloque. Enfin, nous adressons un remerciement tout particulier au Professeur Holtedahl pour sa collaboration enthousiaste à l'organisation du colloque et pour son empreinte à partager avec les participants son savoir et son expérience de quinze années d'études en anthropologie à Ngaoundéré. Je tiens à remercier Mme Solveig Hauser pour son aide à l'éboration de ce livre.
Introduction

Eva Evers Rosander

Compared to other parts of the world, Africa has a very rich associational life. Especially in West Africa, there is a proliferation of popular, traditional and informal women’s associations, rural as well as urban (cf. O’Deyé 1985, March and Taqu qu 1982). This is a striking difference to North Africa for example, where rural women do not meet in groups outside their families and kin or with other than female neighbours. What are the West African associations for? Do they offer women space for activities which could not take place within the realm of the household? If so, which are these activities and what are they good for? What about the formal or official organizations, connected to the state through regional and local institutions and agents?

The theme of this book is the transformation of female identities, the geographical area is West Africa and the space we have chosen for our studies is women’s organizational forms, mostly their associations. Both the actors, whose identities we are going to investigate to the best of our abilities, and we, who wrote and interpreted these actors’ sayings and doings, are all female, with the exception of Mahmoudou Djingui. In our contributions we reveal a combined curiosity to know more about this women’s associational phenomenon in West Africa and to understand the associations’ significance as platforms or spaces for a possible transformation of female identities. Implicit in this lies the well-documented fact, confirmed by our informants, that women to varying degrees suffer from male domination and sociocultural norms and values which deprive them of political power in the community on a regional and national level. Do the women’s associations work to change this sit-
uation for the better, or do they confirm and support the existing power and gender structures?

Which are women's current ways of life, their autonomous models, their ideals and their ambitions of "succeeding" professionally and socially? Judging from the literature, most women have their main arenas, their spaces, in connection with their matrikin and in their households. It is within the realm of marriage and motherhood that the women confirm themselves by getting accepted by others as "real" women. Domestic and social concerns dominate their lives (cf. Amadi-ume (1987) 1995, Awe et al. 1991, Bledsoe and Gillis 1994, Clark 1994, Sudarkasa 1996). How is this "domestic" life combined with the "associational", which takes place outside the household? Or maybe this division between the extradomestic and the domestic is misleading when dealing with women? Hopefully the following chapters will also throw some light on the relationship between "domestic" and "public" female life in West Africa.

Before a short resume of the different contributions, a clarification of some elementary concepts used throughout the book may be needed.

By "association" is meant a group of people with a organizational structure. The members constitute a certain constellation of people who share some characteristics and who perceive of themselves as members of this particular group. The associations may be informal or formal, private or public. Thus, "associations" are groups of people organized around certain activities and with some form of internal hierarchy in terms of a "leader", president or chairman/woman, a treasurer, one or more secretaries and the members. "Association" so defined is often undifferentially used in parallel with "organization". However, in this book "organization" is often, though not always, used as something wider and more general, namely "structures of recognized and accepted roles" (Uphoff 1986:8), which may not necessarily be institutionalized, although this is often the case. "Organization" is seen as a generic term, pointing out capacity to accomplish goals through collective action within a structure (cf. Bryant 85:21–23).¹

The associations dealt with are both formal and informal. Some of them overlap this categorization. By "informal" I refer to the kind of association that has no links whatsoever with the state or state-related

¹. Cf. the unpublished paper written by the Africa Gender Group at the Centre for Development Studies in Copenhagen (Bülow, Evers Rosander and Nau- thrup 1994).
regional institutions. Even if there are an elected president and a treasurer, one or several secretaries and/or other office bearers, there are no membership lists or any form of registration. To cease being a member does not require any formalities; one just stops going to the meetings.2

Sometimes we refer to those associations where we find the women as actors as women’s platforms or spaces. “Space” is here gendered and has social, economic, political and ritual dimensions. In the context that we use it, “space” should be understood less as a geographical term, but more as “a social process of symbolic encoding and decoding that produces a series of homologies between the spatial, symbolic and social orders” (Blunt and Rose 1994:3). It is within this gendered space that the transformation of female identities may—or does not—take place.

The study of West African organizational forms cannot avoid focusing on multiple social identities, including ethnic, religious, gender, age, caste, class, education and kinship. However, “identity” here will not be considered just as a process of naming: naming of self, naming of others, naming by others, as proposed by Louis Brenner (cf. Brenner 1993:59). For even if men and women define themselves and others in accordance with the criteria of sameness and otherness, this far from covers the complicated reality with its identity shifts which occur at certain moments among certain constellations of people within and outside the associational framework. Maybe under the influence of what Judith Newton and Judith Stacey (1995:288) called “the postmodern fix”, we think it is obvious that gender identity is seen as multiple and various, and, as they say,

as co-constructed with race, class and sexual and national identity. Identity politics as the politics of the “same” has given way, as a dominant mode of conceptualizing feminist community, to a policy involving multiple alliances, alliances across identities. ... These are transformations, often referred to as postmodern, in which we situate our own “border crossings” in this project (ibid. 1995:289).

This is valid for us too, in this book on women’ associations and identity transformation. Women’s multiple and shifting identities and the impossibility of generalizing about female conditions and circumstances causing different shifts in roles and identities is explicitly pointed out by Hus-

2. This text on formal and informal associations and the definition of “organization” is an abbreviated version of what appears in my article called “Women in Groups in Africa: Female Associational Patterns in Senegal and Morocco” (1997:103).
saina Abdullah, Gunilla Andrae and Ndèye Coumba in their respective chapters of this book.

Women's informal associations in West Africa also express and consolidate women's cultural and social identities as members of the community in a more consistent way. In Senegalese society, for example, everybody strives to become integrated into the group. Nobody wants or can stay alone, without belonging to one or more groups. To be alone is to be "outside", isolated, and that is something which only mad people do. One's life has to be "transparent" (Wolof: leer) and well known to one's social surroundings. Everything has to be done in common, as if to underline one's honesty: meals, work, entertainment. The associations offer the proper framework and a legitimate form for togetherness. Aide-entre-aide (self-help) is important for all kinds of social activities and ceremonies. This means collaboration with others on a reciprocal basis. To realize oneself fully as an individual, one needs a group, a collective. Morality and respectability seem to be key words in connection with women's behaviour (cf. Evers Rosander 1997a).

Trying to find out how these identities are constructed is of interest for the understanding of the more complex social and discursive processes. Just one example: the use of "mother" as a denomination of the woman president of an association by its members reflects the sociocultural importance of motherhood in West African society. The question about the distinction—if there is one—between the biological and the social construction of female identity is revitalized in some of the chapters of the book and we could actually ask ourselves if any dichotomy exists. As Prudence Woodford-Berger asked in her presentation at the conference in Ngaoundéré: Where does the biological end and where does the social start?3

Related to the issue of women's identity and identity shifts within the associations is the question of the relationship between the individual and the collective; between a collective female identity and a female solidarity on the one hand and the individual strategies on the other. Even if women participate together in organized forms of activities of different

3. The last phrases are actually rewritten from a tape from the conference in March 1993 in Ngaoundéré, where Lisbet Holtedahl commented on Prudence Woodford-Berger's paper. Verbatim Lisbet said: "..."For instance, she (Prudence) brings up the very interesting distinction between the biological and the social construction of gender identity and how difficult it is to see where the biological notion, perception or influence ends and where the social construction begins. Is there in fact a dichotomy?"
kinds, ranging from money saving in rotating savings and credit associations to the cultivation of food crops and vegetables in common fields, their spirit of communality seems to be less developed than their individual ambitions. Whenever relations get strained, the women are prone to reveal feelings of suspicion and mistrust towards female colleagues and neighbours. So there is no reason to idealize the women's associations: their role and nature are contextualised by the nature of the society which produces them (cf. Haynes 1996:154). It even seems as though formal associations, in particular, are marginalising women and their common interests, with elite women acting in their own individual interest, as noted by Prudence Woodford-Berger in her chapter. Or are the "ordinary" women just overlooked in the construction of the modern West African state?  

Kinship is one important variable for the identification of self and others. Biological and social as well as spiritual motherhood is crucial for a woman's status and self-esteem. This is the case not only in matrilineal societies in West Africa. However, it seems as if women do not organize in large networks of solidarity based on kinship. In a sense, the society appears to be fragmented into small nuclear units of mothers and daughters, the marriages often being polygynous (in Muslim West Africa). Women are estimated in men's eyes and their own view as wives, mothers, sisters and daughters. But what about their professional identity? In the chapters that follow, we will get to know women as industrial workers, traders, farmers, fishmongers. They are struggling in their different roles and take on shifting identities. In many of the contributions, the antagonistic attitude of women towards men is expressed openly or in a more concealed way. Are the women's associations there to mitigate or to sharpen these conflictive tendencies?

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The thirteen chapters of this volume are divided into four sections. Three of them present accounts of women's collective forms of associating. The fourth one talks about some women's individual strategizing and search for convenient organizational forms under changing life conditions.

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4. This last phrase is also quoted from Lisbet Holtedahl's taped comments at the Ngaoundéré conference in March 1993.
The first section contains contributions on formal associations such as factory workers' unions in urban Nigeria and a national women's organization in rural Ghana as well as glimpses from the organizing of domestic life of the women active in the union.

The second section deals mostly with informal associations related to rural and semiurban women's organization of work. The chapters show how development oriented measures, directed from a regional and national level towards the described communities in Senegal and Mali, interfere with change and reshape the traditional associations and women's roles and identities.

The third section concentrates on women's religious (Christian and Muslim) associations and gives examples from town and countryside in Nigeria and Senegal. The Christian sisterhood The Fatima Sisters is certainly an established and formal institution or "order", while in the Muslim cases, the organizational structure of the associations vary between being formal (approved of by the supreme religious leader) and more or less informal.

The fourth section shows us the life strategies that some women choose as individuals, outside the collective framework of the women's associations. Some women did not actually choose, but the prevalent circumstances and changes in their environment confronted them with new ways of life. The cases are from Ghana, Cameroon and Europe.

Section I: Unions and Women's National Organizations

In Prudence Woodford-Berger's chapter on female linkage, collective identities and political ideology in Ghana, she already states in her introduction that the commonly held gender conceptions include "the pervasive notion of a gender division of power in which males are associated with authority and exclusive rights to political hegemony". The fact that women in West Africa suffer from the consequences of male domination over female lives runs like a continuous theme through the various chapters. In the Ghana case, in spite of women's importance and status as traders, mothers and even as queens, they still find themselves dismissed to domestic space, without power in the mixed public or political institutions. This situation is reflected also in the formal women's associations such as the 31st December Women's Movement. According to the main informant's story, this movement or association has turned out to be more concerned with getting support for government policies than with
the specific problems of women; and even less with the problems of poor, rural women. The serious question is how to achieve empowerment for these marginalised and neglected women. As long as some groups of women promote mutual elite interests while the others risk being manipulated, Woodford-Berger says it is understandable that women do not feel a unity of purpose in bringing about strategic change in a feminist sense, i.e. in solidarity with each other. Neither do the informal women's associations in the Ghana case offer any real solutions to women's social and economic dilemmas. The conclusion seems to be that it is not the associations—neither formal nor informal—but the women's matrilineal kinship ties with mother's sisters, daughters and sister’s daughters which offer the women small but reliable resources and safety in times of need.

Hussaina Abdullah's chapter on multiple identities and multiple organizing strategies of female wage workers in Kano's manufacturing sector in Nigeria provides a lesson to those of us who think that gender discrimination is a sufficient reason to mobilize women in a common struggle for social equality beyond the barriers of class and without the support of the men. Reality reveals something different. Abdullah points out that women wage workers' struggle against discrimination in the work place are mediated by internal differences amongst these workers. She underlines that women shift identity according to their current priorities and the specific problems that confront them at a given moment. To illustrate her point she draws a comparison between women working in two different factories in Kano: one factory being unionized and another one lacking a workers' union. The concern is for women factory workers being discriminated because of their gender. In both factories women complained about having worse working tasks and conditions than the men. Yet, while the women in the unionized factory have gladly fought with their male colleagues and engaged in strike actions concerning class issues, they have not taken any initiatives to stop the gender discrimination against themselves. Without the initiative and leadership of the men, they seem weak and powerless.

However, there are exceptions, as Gunilla Andræ's case study from Lagos, Nigeria, shows. Andræ presents us with a female factory worker who is an active "feminist" in the sense that she has tried her best to fight for better working conditions for the women. She has found herself combated by not only the male management of the factory but also by those women who occupied higher positions than her in the firm and
who did not feel any solidarity with the female workers on the floor. This particular woman seems to get her fighting spirit strengthened by her religious and social engagement: she is also active in a church community. Furthermore, since she runs some commercial activities like petty trading in addition to her factory work, she is not totally dependent on the benevolence of the factory management. Being the mother of several daughters old enough to take care of the domestic tasks, gives her the liberty to leave home. Again, she serves as an illustrative example of women's multifaceted roles and shifting identities according to their varying contexts.

Section 2: Women's Associations, Women's Work and Development

This section gives us an insight into what the participation in the women's informal associations can provide their members in terms of material and immaterial resources.

Income-generating activities in rural settings are often started up by national and international development agencies in the form of cooperatives and as revolving funds. They can be based on traditional organizational forms and are thus easily accepted by the indigenous population. Yet they sometimes end up failing their goals of increased revenues for the participants—why? The reason may be that the development agents' ideas about individuality, communality, collectivity and property differ from those of the beneficiaries (cf. Ndiyone 1992). Only micro studies like the ones presented below could give the kind of information about organizational ideas (of the people and the development agents) which actively contributes to an understanding of local premises and perceptions.

Anastasie Mekounde gives an account of the establishment and development of a women's group called Nsaw Mboum in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon, whose members mainly consist of women from the Mboum ethnic group. According to the author, these women have benefitted from the group activities both by offering them a new and welcome opportunity of enlarging their physical space beyond the walls of their houses and by showing them new and previously unknown ways of life. They have been taught some income-generating activities and at the same time they have gradually got used to socializing with women from other ethnic groups and other quarters of the town. Thus they have grown conscious of their own lack of education and their low status in the society and
have begun to compare themselves with others. This is first step towards a transformation of identity, as the author has analysed the situation. She regards it as an obvious step forward that these women, as a result of their participation in the association, seem to place themselves in a larger context than before and are able to relate to a world outside the domestic sphere. Of special use to them has been the starting up of a ton-tine (rotating savings association), so that Mboum women can get access to sums of cash large enough to be able to invest in some kind of petty trade. However, the conflicts that have occasionally torn the group apart during its relatively short existence, are witness to the fragility of the associational unity and the importance of a strong leadership. Again, it would be a mistake to think that the women exhibit a solidarity with each other beyond the matrkin. To be a member of a group is not the same as working with each other for common ends. The N'saw Mboum association offers the women a social, economic and moral space as individuals in a collective form.

The importance of reaching outside the house is also stressed by Ndèye Coumba in her chapter on rural women in a village in the Diourbel region, Senegal, whom she compares with female fishmongers on the shore close to Dakar. In her comparison of their respective independence and decision making opportunities, she notices that the women fishsellers who spend more time working outside the home act more independently and are able to earn more money than the rural women who remain “invisible” inside or close to their houses. Their husbands or fathers are not willing to let their wives or daughters leave the village to go to the urban market places. The men on the shore get used to finding the women there and accept them, as the men can see for themselves that the women are managing well. The constraints on the female fishmongers are not male control but illiteracy—to avoid being cheated they need to know how to keep books—lack of child care, lack of domestic service and, as a consequence of these factors, too little capital to expand and do large scale business.

In spite of the rural women’s limited mobility and restrained freedom of action, they sometimes succeed in adapting their traditional forms of association to the modern state regulated models for financial aid. One

example is the loans that can be offered to the village women organized in cooperatives under the name of Groupements d'intérêt économique. The women enthusiastically organized collectively to get access to these revolving funds, but the ecological conditions worked against them, especially the failing water resources. Moreover, they lacked the men's support to solve the difficulties connected with the realization of the projects. The cultivation of vegetables run by the cooperative gave low or no economic yield and the women's work load was too great. The female fish traders, on the other hand, who worked on an individual or family basis, were not members of any economic cooperative and could therefore get no loans, as to get a bank account one has to come up with a considerable sum of money. So the women's rotating savings and credit associations were the often only solution for women fishmongers in need of cash for buying fish. That was why these women's development efforts continued to be hindered by economic prescriptions not suited to women's reality, as well as by ignorance and resistant sociocultural norms and values.

Ndèye's two cases show that one cannot generalize about women's life conditions and gender relations; they vary considerably with geographical place, ecological and economic circumstances, women's work specializations etc. This is stressed several times by other authors in this volume. It also appears from these two cases that most women suffer from male domination and female subordination in one way or another. There is a conspicuous absence of men in female space, including in the cooperative agricultural projects, and an absence of women in male space, including the formal political and public scene. This segregation maintains the traditional gender relations. More concretely, in neither of the cases do we see that the women's associations provide good and sustainable solutions for women's need of cash and for an increase in political power.

In Jasmine Jessen's chapter we find somewhat similar processes taking place in a rural community in Mali, where the intervention of centralized urban health authorities cause changes in female ideas about themselves as midwives and as women giving birth. In Mali, the traditional role of the midwife used to be the one of the therapist, who by her presence did the woman giving birth a favour. To be a midwife was not a profession but a vocation. Her "training" was not medical-technical but human and social, based on knowledge transferred informally from certain women to others. Usually the midwife vocation was passed on from
mother to daughter. Nowadays, village midwives are being organized in formal associations run by the Health Ministry and trained in practice of new instrumental and impersonal scientifically based knowledge. Jessen wonders whether the midwives stop thinking of themselves as co-villagers and start experiencing themselves as a kind of specialists, who are in the community on a particular mission from time to time. If they see themselves as professionals, knowing things about biology and medicine of which others are completely ignorant, what about the changes in the social relationships between the midwife and the mothers-to-be?

Section 3: Religious Associations

The two contributions from Nigeria deal with the same Catholic association of nuns, called The Fatima Sisters. One author, Sister Esther Shebi, is a member herself of this “order” or association. Both she and her Swedish colleague, Ulrika Erlandsson, draw attention in their chapters to men's image of women as “only” mothers, wives and food producers. According to the authors, the men consider women to be without dignity and self-esteem. This image is then related to the authors' presentation of women's own ideas of themselves as strong and, in contrast to the men, industrious. They consider themselves to be women who care for their children and show great responsibility for the well-being of their families. In the women's eyes, men are the irresponsible, and therefore not to be trusted.

Another perspective is introduced by the authors; the one of the women as “sacred mothers”, uniting the idea of spiritual motherhood with the one of strong, independent womanhood. What is so shocking to the men—and also challenging to many women—is the nuns' abstinence from sexuality and childbirth. The Fatima Sisters live in celibacy, devoting their time and energy to other women who suffer and who need their help and encouragement. This is against both Christianity, Islam and traditional, indigenous religion. As in a sense these women, by their renunciation of secular motherhood, indirectly declare that they do not need men, they are sometimes exposed to male aggression such as violence and sexual abuse. Some nuns have become pregnant as victims of rape.

The white pure nun has become an attractive ideal for some Nigerian women who want to combine their religiosity with practical work for the improvement of women's lives and social conditions in the rural
Nigeria of today. Sister Esther Shebi asks us not to understand the Fatima Sisters as a feminist organization, as their motivation is deeply religious and their leader is not of this world. The nuns have chosen Jesus as their master. This is not surprising in such a tough male dominated world as theirs. Women who fear violent sexual acts, wife-beating and pregnancies with great mortal risks, may regard the Fatima Sisters as a welcome alternative.

The Senegalese Muslim associations called dairas are open for both men and women. Penda Mbow’s and Eva Evers Rosander’s chapters deal with women’s religious participation in the Sufi associations, Mbow from a more general and historical perspective and Evers Rosander through a case study of one particular religious association with only female members. The associations offer a respected platform for the women’s social and religious activities. Still, the position of women in the Sufi brotherhoods in Senegal is low in comparison with men’s. In Muridism, the Sufi order described by Evers Rosander, women are excluded from the most important rituals, like the singing of religious songs and the pronunciation of the vow of obedience to one’s religious leader or marabout.

Also in the other “orders” like the Tijaniyya and the Quadriyya women are not allowed to take part in all religious events on a par with men but remain relatively marginalised. For these women, the membership in the daira associations is important as it increases their status and prestige vis-à-vis both men and other women in Senegalese society (cf. Haynes 1996:154). Mbow draws special attention to the fact that rural women, who migrate to the big cities and, above all, to the capital, miss their village and family network. The female immigrants would feel lonely and exposed to strange people they could not trust in town, if the daira had not been there to offer them a religious and safe alternative. Women’s participation certainly contributes to the flourishing of the contemporary urban dairas in Senegal. Not least economically, the women make substantial contributions through paying the addiyas, the gifts of money to the marabout, which are collected regularly at the daira meetings. Again, one can say that women’s piety and generosity within the framework of the associations (the dairas) contribute to the conservation of the religious hierarchical system and hereby also to women’s subordinated position. Still, Mbow sees women’s participation in the dairas as a possible forum for the development of other political and religious activ-
ities which can eventually lead to a transformation of women’s identities as individuals and as members of the group.

Section 4: Organizing Female Lives

When we talk about women’s organizational forms we also include organizing in a wider sense, meaning among other things women’s strategizing for a better life. These strategies could be intentional to a greater and lesser extent; they could be expressed very clearly and discussed among the women themselves but they could also be applied almost unconsciously. Akosua Adomako Ampofo’s article shows how young girls find complementary ways to provide for themselves and to solve their economic problems by the use of both traditional solutions and partly new ways of acting. Young girls become mistresses of men for many reasons, as Adomako explains to us. There exists a wide range from something similar to prostitution, where sexual services are paid for in cash, food or clothes, to different forms of “marriages” or variables of betrothal, acknowledged without moral problems by the parents of the girls and the surrounding community. Earlier, in the old times, Adomako especially remarks, girls should be virgins before marriage. These ideas are still prevalent to some extent and are reflected in the marriage rituals, which permit young girls to live as married and yet be not legally and formally fully the wife of a certain man. Today, other arrangements of the kind we are used to call “sugar daddies”, i.e. “boyfriends” as co-financers of young girls, even of school girls, are frequent. The girls seem to be disillusioned what concerns men, judging from their statement that as men are no good anyhow, one could at least get some money out of them. Yet this attitude fits in with the general impression of the other contributions of this book, in which men’s irresponsibility, idleness and dominance are repeatedly stressed.

Male domination is a male “privilege” which is often expressed in a religious idiom, where it manifests its legitimacy and universal applicability. This is especially noticable in Lisbet Holteidahl’s chapter about modern and traditional knowledge. While the young women in Adomako’s paper are “commercializing” sexuality, the young girls in Holteidahl’s contribution are trying to find new fields of income generating activities and new female space which will permit them to reach outside the local female community. This miracle will be possible through western education, such as it is desired and perceived by some young girls in
the town of Ngaoundéré, northern Cameroon. Holtedahl draws a comparison between a young Muslim and a young Christian girl, who both have the same aspiration to acquire higher education. They want it for partly the same reasons, expressed in locally—read religiously—different although overlapping terms. Here it is not, as in the case with the religious associations, a question of finding a respectable space for women. On an individual basis, the girls want to break new ground and find themselves new female career patterns. In Holtedahl’s chapter, the Muslim girl fights against destiny in the form of a forced marriage. She wants school education and professional skills; something which can give her a good start in life and a chance to provide for herself. The Christian girl sees her husband getting all the benefits in terms of scholarships and educational facilities, while her own endeavours to be a good pupil results in her being ostracized and accused of using sorcery against her class mate rivals. Just like the Nigerian nuns the Fatima Sisters, the Christian girl in Holtedahl’s case chooses to renounce sexuality to be able to fulfil her goal: to study at a European university. The price for a woman seems to be to leave her role as wife and mother behind, in her striving for a professional career. We have already been struck by the importance of the concept of motherhood and the introduction of the idea of a “spiritual motherhood” as an alternative to a secular one. Now we face “non-motherhood”, in the Cameroonian case. This may not be so extreme as it first seems. Holtedahl stresses in her chapter that the struggle to become independent and free from the bindings of local community values, which the girls undergo in their fight for higher education, can be seen as a process of transformation of identities, affecting the girls’ self image. This is related to a change in the girls’ social networks—from a local to a transnational one. The network aspect is certainly important to bring in here. The need for a reliable and trustworthy network in the diaspora is great. In the Christian girl’s case, her religious devotion probably helps her to establish some contacts and strengthen her identity as an African in Europe. Religion is important as an identity marker for men and women in the diaspora. What about the Muslim girl Fanta in Holtedahl’s case—is it discriminatory for her to manifest her Muslim identity in Europe or not?

The contribution by Mamoudou Djingui gives us an ideal case with which to end this book, as it shows how the organization of new economic, social and religious spaces affect women’s life conditions. The change from a nomadic life of the Fulbe to a stationary, permanent life in
a house surrounded by solid walls, the men engaging in agriculture instead of cattle breeding as their main economic activity, has spatially transformed women’s life even more than men’s. This is so in the sense that women’s mobility is restricted and their daily life is more than earlier confined to the inside of the house. Among other signs of Islamic belief and a respectable Muslim female life style, a much stricter sexual segregation has become the men’s concern. They regard it as a new ideal to be able to provide for their women, so that the latter do not ever have to leave the compound. Ideally women should not be seen outside the house. Thus, they have to abstain from their earlier economic activities for ideological reasons or because of the lack of cattle. Before, the cattle took the women out to the market place and gave them an income from selling milk. However, only the rich sedentized Fulbe men, the aristocrats, can wholly provide for their women and keep them in total purdah. In these relatively well off households, women are, as it seems, adapting to the circumstances and the religious ideal, competing with their family and kin living close by and with their female neighbours to manifest their prosperity by parading sumptuous clothes and jewels at the ritual family ceremonies and parties.

Some variations of this changed pattern of lifestyle is described by the author. He mentions women who send their sons to do the selling and buying of goods for their mothers, and women, who cultivate gardens close to the house only for household consumption. In terms of organizing principles for women’s life, this study teaches us a series of lessons: the impact of both economic change and religious ideology which affect space in all dimensions of life and not least the urban architecture. The women internalize the religious ideology about female seclusion and feel culpable if, for economic reasons, they have to leave their house to work. Even if it cannot possibly be their fault that their husbands cannot provide for them, they feel as if they were to blame for not being “real” Muslim women, restricting themselves to their homes. The transformation of identity in cases like this is one from relative independence and high self-esteem to one of feeling guilt and suffering from the incapacity of proper role fulfilment.
CONCLUSIONS

In this book we have focused on women’s organizational forms outside domestic space, i.e. on women’s associations. That is why the conclusions that we can draw are based on women’s activities at a community level.

In community life we saw that there is a contrast between the low profile that women have in official and political decision making and the dynamism that the women display on the communal level in their associations. These associations have multiple functions: they are social, economic, religious and recreational and serve as spaces for mobilizing women to fulfil their household and community duties. However, the women’s informal and traditional associations did not threaten men’s prerogatives; the associations did not question any established norms of society. On the contrary, they served rather to moderate the consequences of an eventual change of norms, roles and attitudes. This could partly be explained by the hierarchical structure of the associations, reflecting the societies which produced them.

Judging from the particular cases presented here neither the formal nor the informal associations seem to offer space and milieu for changes in women’s access to more power and decision making. We can witness sad examples of this situation in the chapters from the unions in Nigeria and the formal women’s organization in Ghana. Even if the religious associations offer a moral space for women to travel and trade as respectable women, it still does not confer on them an increased influence over the public domain or any political authority. In the development aid related associations mentioned in the book, in which women’s income generating activities are promoted, one can see how traditional male and socio-cultural obstacles stop women from any real advances or success in economic or political terms. Lack of education, formation, self-confidence and emotional and intellectual support deprive these dynamic women from enjoying substantial and sustainable rewards of their work and efforts.

Nevertheless, the existence of a women’s associational space is important, as it provides possibilities for the women to organize their spare time, to mitigate the effects of the economic crisis and the emotional strains in their households and to capitalize on the female networks of self-help outside the family and household sphere, without which the women would lead a much more precarious life. Women’s associational
activities also help them to better take on their established role in the community: to fix the daily and the ceremonial practicalities, manifesting their dynamism in an acknowledged and respected space. Thus, the West African women’s associations serve certain concrete purposes and they are collective platforms for the achievement of individual goals. They offer women moral space for their economic and social activities. They are also female “sanctuaries” in a figurative sense, i.e. spaces of relaxation, sympathy and entertainment.

Having noted this, it remains to conclude that a real, sustainable transformation of women’s status, roles and identities has to start early in boys’ and girls’ childhood, inside the household units themselves, with consciousness-raising and later with organizational efforts and both male and female support, which reach over the family and kinship boundaries. This is easy to say, but what about reality? We know we are dealing with slow processes, much resistance from the surrounding society and tough and elastic gender structures. The women’s informal and formal associations are not spaces for change but mirrors of the prevailing power structure of the society.

Not only the authors of this book testify that it is difficult to change the basic ideology on which gender ideas rest. It is localized to those hidden domains or interior psychological bindings which are pretexts for manifesting individual desires: choice of marriage partner, divorce, attitudes towards polygyny. Only small changes have been seen so far.  

If changes towards greater female autonomy and more power and decision making potentials are difficult to achieve collectively for the women within the realm of the associations, how do women succeed individually, in the cases shown by Adomako, Holtedahl and Djingui? While both Adomako’s and Djingui’s examples show women’s manipulating of their domestic and traditional non-professional roles into some kind of commodification, Holtedahl’s case with the Muslim and the Christian girls manifests an emergent ex-domestic, non-traditional alternative. In Holtedahl’s account, these young women seem to have a new

6. This is very well described in the following words by Jeanne Nanitelamio: “Les facteurs psychosociologiques sont à mettre au centre de ces luttes, car les obstacles que les femmes dressent dans leur têtes sont parfois aussi importants sinon plus que ceux qui sont dressés en dehors d’elles. Dans ce cas, l’intériorisation des préjugés négatifs les concernant constitue un handicap, qui est souvent difficile à surmonter, pour lequel il faut une action longue, utilisant toutes les ressources possibles pour convaincre.” (Nanitelamio 1996:20)
found strength in the self-willing of a changing identity. They articulate a transnational and translational subjectivity that has developed through the mediation and dissolution of boundaries. Both autobiographical accounts span the transition from cultural criticism to the reinvention of ethnic and gender identity across a series of locales, just as in the case of Aihwa Ong’s chapter on Chinese female immigrants to the US in the book *Women Writing Culture* (cf. Ong 1995:366). No doubt, there is a certain transformation and negotiation of identity going on in the two women’s existence as immigrants, in which not only ethnicity and gender are important, but also religion, race and class.

The most important conclusion of our study has already been touched upon in the individual contributions, but here attention is paid once more to the fact that the transformation of female identities is not limited to associational space, nor is it bound to being only a question of gender. What make changes so complicated when dealing with the gender structure is of course its tight links with the economic, political and social distribution of power. Class, ethnicity, race and gender are all linked into each other in patterns of super- and subordination. In this ranking of status and prestige, gender takes on symbolic dimensions and disfranchises other vital structures of dominance in the society.

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Introduction: Conclusion en français

Dans cet ouvrage, nous avons mis l’accent sur les formes d’organisations féminines développées hors du cadre domestique, en particulier les associations de femmes. C’est pourquoi les conclusions que l’on peut en tirer reposent sur leur action à un niveau communautaire.

Dans la vie communautaire, on a pu identifier un contraste entre, d’une part, le profil bas des femmes dans les processus de décisions officielles et politiques, et d’autre part le dynamisme qu’elles manifestent au plan communautaire dans leurs associations. Ces associations, qui ont des fonctions multiples (sociales, économiques, religieuses ou récréatives), constituent pour les femmes des espaces mobilisateurs en vue de l’accomplissement de leurs devoirs domestiques et communautaires. Toutefois, les associations informelles et traditionnelles de femmes ne menacent en rien les prérogatives et privilèges masculins: elles ne mettent en question aucune des normes sociales établies. Bien au contraire, elles servent plutôt à tempérer les effets d’éventuels changements pouvant toucher les normes, les rôles ou les attitudes. Ceci peut s’expliquer en partie par la structure hiérarchique des associations: ce sont les reflets des sociétés qui les ont produites.

Si l’on en juge par les cas particuliers présentés ici, les associations, qu’elles soient de caractère formel ou informel, ne semblent pas constituer un terrain de changement permettant de développer la participation des femmes au pouvoir ou à la prise de décision. On en trouve une triste illustration dans les chapitres consacrés aux syndicats au Nigéria, et aux organisations formelles de femmes au Ghana. Même si les associations religieuses offrent aux femmes un espace moral leur permettant de voyager et de faire commerce en toute respectabilité, elles ne les aident aucunement à acquérir une plus grande influence dans la vie publique, ou bien une quelconque autorité politique. Il en va de même des associations concernées par l’aide au développement, citées dans cet ouvrage: alors que les activités féminines génératrices de revenus y sont encouragées, on voit de quelle façon les obstacles traditionnels tenant au pouvoir masculin et aux données socio-culturelles interdisent à la femme toute avancée réelle, toute réussite sur le plan économique ou politique. Faute d’éducation, de formation, de soutien émotionnel et intellectuel, de confiance en elles, ces femmes dynamiques se trouvent privées de toute gratification substantielle et durable pour leur travail et leurs efforts.
Cependant, l'existence d'un espace associatif féminin est important pour elles, car il leur permet d'organiser agréablement leur temps libre, d'atténuer les effets de la crise économique et des tensions émotionnelles qu'elles vivent au foyer, et enfin de capitaliser le produit des réseaux d'entraide féminins, hors de la sphère familiale et domestique: sans eux, ces femmes mèneraient une vie beaucoup plus précaire. L'action associative aide aussi les femmes à mieux assumer le rôle qui leur est assigné dans la communauté: organiser les pratiques quotidiennes et cérémoniales, en montrant leur dynamisme dans un espace reconnu et respecté. Les associations de femmes en Afrique de l'Ouest sont donc au service de buts concrets: ce sont des tremplins collectifs pour la réalisation d'objectifs individuels. Elles offrent aux femmes un cadre moral pour leurs activités économiques et sociales. Elles constituent aussi des «sanctuaires» féminins, au sens figuré, c'est à dire des espaces de relaxation, de sympathie, de ravissement.

Après ce constat, on peut conclure qu'une réelle et durable évolution du statut, du rôle et de l'identité de la femme doit commencer tôt dans l'enfance des garçons et des filles, au sein-même de l'unité familiale, avec une visée de prise de conscience, et plus tard des efforts d'organisation soutenus par des figures masculines et féminines, au-delà de la sphère familiale et parentale. La chose est facile à dire, mais qu'en est-il de la réalité? Nous savons que nous avons à faire à un processus lent, avec de nombreuses résistances dans l'environnement social, et dans l'ancrage et l'élasticité des rapports institués entre les sexes. Les auteurs de ce livre ne sont pas seuls à attester à quel point il est difficile de faire évoluer l'idéologie de base, qui est le support des conceptions des rapports entre les sexes. Elle a ses fondements dans des zones cachées ou bien des contraintes psychologiques qui sont prétextes à la manifestation de désirs individuels tels que le choix du conjoint, le divorce ou l'attitude vis-à-vis de la polygamie. Et seules de faibles évolutions ont pu être observées à ce jour.7

S'il est aussi difficile pour les femmes d'obtenir collectivement, dans un cadre associatif, des changements conduisant vers plus d'autonomie,

7. Ceci est très bien décrit dans les termes suivants par Jeanne Nanitelamio: «Les facteurs psychosociologiques sont à mettre au centre de ces luttes, car les obstacles que ces femmes dressent dans leurs têtes sont parfois aussi importants, sinon plus, que ceux qui sont dressés en dehors d'elles. Dans ce cas, l'intériorisation des préjugés négatifs les concernant constitue un handicap, qui est souvent difficile à surmonter, pour lequel il faut une action longue, utilisant toutes les ressources possibles pour convaincre.» (Nanitelamio 1996: 20)
plus de participation au pouvoir et aux processus de décision, comment certaines femmes y parviennent-elles individuellement, dans les cas relatés par Adomako, Holte Dahl et Djingui? Les exemples cités par Adomako et Djingui montrent des femmes qui aménagent leurs rôles non-professionnels, domestiques et traditionnels, en vue d’un mieux-être.

En revanche, le cas évoqué par Holte Dahl, qui concerne des jeunes filles musulmanes et chrétiennes, met en évidence l’émergence d’une nouvelle alternative, qui n’a plus de référence ni domestique, ni traditionnelle. Dans le récit de Holte Dahl, ces jeunes femmes semblent avoir trouvé une force nouvelle dans leur volonté opiniâtre de construire une autre identité. Elles développent une subjectivité transnationale et traduisible rendue possible par la médiation et la désagrégation des frontières. Les deux récits autobiographiques couvrent la transition de la critique culturelle à la réinvention d’une identité ethnique et sexuelle à travers une série de locales, exactement comme dans le cas relaté par Aiwha Ong dans son chapitre consacré aux immigrantes chinoises aux États-Unis, dans l’ouvrage «Les femmes écrivent la culture» (v. Ong 1995: 366). Il y a sans aucun doute une part de transformation et de négociation identitaire à l’œuvre dans l’existence de ces deux immigrantes, et pour lesquelles importent non seulement des critères d’appartenance ethnique et de genre, mais aussi de religion, de race et de classe.

La conclusion la plus importante de notre étude a déjà été mise en évidence à travers les contributions individuelles à cet ouvrage, mais elle mérite d’être soulignée ici une fois encore: la transformation des identités féminines n’est pas et ne saurait être limitée à l’espace associatif, ni réduite à une question de genre. Ce qui rend le changement si problématique, lorsqu’il s’agit de la structure des rapports entre les hommes et les femmes, ce sont à l’évidence ses liens étroits avec la répartition du pouvoir sur les plans économique, politique et social. Classe, appartenance ethnique, race et genre sont imbriqués dans des modèles de domination et de subordination. Dans cette hiérarchisation du statut et du prestige, le genre acquiert des dimensions symboliques et recouvre les autres structures essentielles de domination dans la société.
Section 1

Unions and Women's National Organizations
Associating Women

Female Linkage, Collective Identities and Political Ideology in Ghana

Prudence Woodford-Berger

INTRODUCTION

This text will discuss some of the issues and problematics connected with women’s involvement or non-involvement with single-sex associations, organizations or movements in Ghana. It is argued that motivating forces in women’s associative behaviour are related to conceptual models and to practices concerning female linkage, i.e. relations or connectedness of a nature that require or enable members in a group to act as a unit. Motivating forces must also be understood in the context of women’s pursuit of life goals within specific social, political and cultural settings. These settings are also infused with conceptions of gender.

In Ghana, commonly held gender conceptions by most men and women in both patrilineal and matrilineal groups include the pervasive notion of a gender division of power, in which males are associated with authority and exclusive rights to political hegemony. Women should defer and subordinate themselves to male superordinance and authority. The fact of women’s economic importance, the idealization and cultural

1. I am extremely grateful to Kristina Bohman, to the participants in the Gender Theory research seminar series at the Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University, as well as to Eva Evers Rosander and the participants in the Conference “Transformation of Female Identities: Women and Organizational Forms in West Africa” for their comments on the ideas presented in this paper and for discussing with me earlier drafts of this presentation.
elaboration of motherhood and the existence of female royals with a degree of authority as well as of a number of highly-placed educated and/or wealthy urban women do unfortunately not detract from the fact or diminish the socio-political and economic effects of these principal gender conceptions of power.

The paper is based on life history, observational, survey and other primary field research data collected in a rural, Akan\(^2\) community in Dormaa District, western Brong-Ahafo region, on research data collected on the national economic and political situation, as well as on a review of some of the literature which treats analytical and theoretical aspects of gender and social organization that are relevant to the discussion. Ethnographic and other primary field research data were collected, mainly over a period spanning 18 years, divided into three sojourns in the field: 1976–77 and two shorter visits in 1991 and 1993. Significant changes have occurred in how women perceive their life situations. Among other things, it is noted that the widespread constrained economic and social circumstances actually work against most women being able to pursue associating as a general political strategy. As a result, the divide between some urban women with resources and alliances through associations and most rural women without these is, in many respects, clearly much greater in 1993 than in 1976.

2. Akan is the name for a collective ethnic identity comprised of a number of sub-groups. Chief among these are the Fante, the Ashanti, the Akuapem, the Brong, the Wassaw and the Nzima. The Akan have a more or less common language and share a social structure and cultural ideas based on matriliney as a fundamental organizing principle. Descent through women is a central determinant of social, property (especially land and houses) and other economic rights, as well as of juridical status. In rural Akan areas and in many urban ones, residence subsequent to marriage is duolocal. Conjugal jointness of economic resources is the exception rather than the rule and generally even in other ways, conjugal ties are subordinate and weak relative to kinship ones for both women and men.

The epitome of power in Akan is symbolized and embodied in the position of king or chief and in the royal stool (=throne) which is also considered a reification of divine sanction of a ruler’s supreme authority. Akan monarchs have female counterparts—“Queen Mothers”—who may preside over their own courts and who are responsible for matters concerning women.

The Akan presently comprise more than half of Ghana’s total population and are localized roughly in the southern half of the country. Akan groups are present in Northern Togo as well as in Eastern Ivory Coast. The latter include the Baulé, the Agni and the Brong, whom are also represented among the Western Ghanaian Akan, e.g. in Dormaa traditional state, where the research on which this paper is based was carried out.
THE SETTING

The community involved in the research is located in the semi-deciduous, tropical rain forest and transitional forest areas near Dormaa-Ahenkro in northern Dormaa District, western Brong-Ahafo Region. It is actually the large center of a number of related villages and is comprised of about 3,500 inhabitants whose livelihood systems revolve primarily around labour-intensive (bush fallow, mixed cropping) horticulture, foraging and small-scale marketing of crop produce, processed foods and retail goods. The population is almost entirely matrilineal Dormaa and Brong Akan. Although the Dormaas of course share most of their social and cultural characteristics with other Akan sub-groups, they also emphasize the fact that their common history—marked among other things, by a strong element of resistance to the overlordship of other groups, notably the Ashantis—nonetheless gives them a certain degree of cultural distinctiveness in which they take great pride. The community does not yet have access to electric power and lacks a functioning piped or handpumped water supply.

For more than 50 years—until 1983—Dormaa was a major cocoa export farming area as well as a producer of foodstuffs and forest products, also often sold for cash. It has been the cultivation of forest products including cocoa that, more than any other single production sector, has provided cash incomes for people and that has directly connected the area to the national and international economies. In recent years, cocoa production and income has declined drastically, the production of crops such as maize, cassava and pulses has increased greatly, as has male labour migration. Land rights—vested in matrilineages—and access to gendered labour for farming and other economic undertakings, historically have consistently been the most important factors of production in the community. However, the importance of money capital has grown markedly in the late 1980s and early 1990s, at the same time as nearly all individual and family incomes have declined and costs have increased greatly for health services, schooling and through taxation.

Females make up roughly 58 per cent of the population. Women more than men do the bulk of farming work and indeed, together with children, presently constitute the major part of the workforce in the community generally. This is due not only to their majority in number, but also to cultural conceptions held by women and men of women as family food providers and as tillers of the soil.
The range of occupations among men tends to be wider than among women, as, in addition to or instead of farming, they may hunt, do some fishing, palm-wine tapping, lorry driving, fitting, storekeeping, carpentry, revenue collecting, clerical work, masonry, soldiering, weaving and other crafts, as well as be holders of traditional and religious titled offices for which they receive some remuneration. Increasingly, since about the mid-1980s and the implementation of the country’s Economic Recovery and Structural Adjustment Programmes, men—especially younger men—are also entering the small-scale trading sector and do marketplace or street selling as a main occupation. There are indications that they are displacing female petty traders in some commodities such as clothing, retail packaged goods, cosmetics and creams.

Political organization in Dormaa exemplifies the Akan traditional state system in which institutionalized representative participation in decision-making through a system of councils from state to local village and lineage levels is a main feature. At each level, all major sections of the population are represented by the selection or election of heads. Women are regarded as an important constituency in this system and many male office-holders both historically and currently have had female counterparts at the various levels (Wilks 1975; Arhin 1983, 1990; Drah 1987:37). These women are usually designated responsibility for a specific sphere, that of “women’s affairs”. They oversee women’s adherence to cultural standards of female-ness and sometimes mediate in gender conflicts—such as marital disputes—at local community levels.

In the national context and broadly speaking, the women and men of Dormaa are fairly representative of the approximately 68 per cent of Ghana’s population that is rural and that is directly responsible for most primary production (food crops, export crops such as cocoa, minerals) in the country. Such production and the reproduction of amenable conditions for its maintenance and expansion generates a greater part of national revenues than any other sector and subsidizes the bulk of development in Ghana. Current national tendencies, that aim at inter alia restructuring public expenditure and investment and in that context also revenue generation, show signs of further weakening the bargaining position of most rural producers.
WOMEN AND LINKAGE IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY SETTING

Africa is considered by some to be the continent with the greatest number and the most active women's associations (Staudt 1986). In Ghana, research attention to women's associations and organizations (as in West Africa generally) has been informed by largely the same theoretical and analytical frameworks as mixed or gender-neutral organizations in general. That is, it has taken place within a "social change" or "cultural continuity" discourse (Banton 1961, 1973; Little 1965, 1974) and has focused primarily on more formalized varieties of organization, such as professional (e.g. registered market commodity sellers) or religious associations in urban areas (e.g. Nypan 1960; Sudarkasa 1973; Robertson 1974; Lewis 1976; Steady 1976; Campbell 1985). More recently, there has been some attention to women's organizational manifestations that result from expressed national-level intentions of enhancing women's situation (Dolphyne 1988) and/or from the operation and politics of the one-party nation state (Tsikata 1989). Women's collective actions or movements as protest or confrontational devices have been depicted in research that has treated more or less phenomenological occurrences of women's organizing, as in militant uprisings, or forms of temporal political mobilization (e.g. Van Allen 1972, 1976; Ardener 1975; Mikell 1986; Amadiume 1987).

Research on formalized women's organizations within a general change-and-continuity discourse has yielded valuable information on the ways in which such collectivities are used by women *inter alia* to acquire greater economic control over the products of their own labour, or to affirm established female rights. However, much less is known about non-formalized female collectivities and for both categories little insight has been gained concerning motivational factors and the nature of the linkages and sentiments between the women concerned. It has been shown that the basis for and focus of female solidarity may vary from one context to another (e.g. Caplan and Bujra 1978; Moore 1988), but the conceptual fundaments of associating and how organizational manifestations of loyalty and mutual support with respect to a certain set of goals actually are generated remain unclear. Thus, we know much less than we might about the potential or actual role of such collectivities as gender-political mechanisms, i.e. beyond their function as economic coping and corrective measures. Such factors concern the life aspirations of Ghanaian girls and women, and consequently their need as individuals,
and as a category to periodically or constantly have to negotiate with or challenge manifestations of the constraints of gender ascription, e.g. the impact of male authority and political dominance which can jeopardize their survival and self-aggrandizement. The life histories of community women illustrate the nature and significance of meaningful single-sex linkage and define a rationale for investing in such linkages from a specific perspective.

Adwoa Twimwaa is 53 years old and one of the women I have known, studied and studied with since 1976. She was born in the community and has spent most of her life there apart from a few sojourns to other parts of the region and the country. The longest of these occurred upon the death of her mother when she was still a young girl. After several years in the care of her mother’s elder sisters, who arranged for the nubility rites (bara or bragoro) which in Akan society mark entrance into female adulthood and provided her with general guidance and material assistance, she was sent to stay with her father’s brother in Southern Ghana. She returned to the community a few years later after the death of her father. Other sojourns of much shorter duration took place during her marriages—altogether 4—all of which were with men from outside the community. Twimwaa resided with her three daughters and a mother’s sister until she herself succeeded some years ago to the headship (fie wura) of a lineage house. She is presently divorced and has been divorced off and on for long periods during her adult life. Her comments on her former husbands and the state of marriage imply that her own marital alliances ended due to the husbands’ unwillingness or inability to contribute adequately to her support. Other contributing reasons seem to concern what she sees as the impracticality or difficulty of maintaining an independent economic base and loyalty to her lineage while at the same time being required to gear her own socio-economic decisions and actions to the often conflicting priorities of a husband to which she had to defer.

Since her teenage years, Twimwaa has maintained herself and later her three daughters by farming and by the sporadic sale of surplus foodstuffs, spices and herbal medicines. She farms on land to which she has rights through her mother’s lineage. She also has rights to two areas of cocoa holdings. However, one of these was ravaged by drought and forest fires in 1983 and she has not been able economically or in terms of adequate labour power, to rehabilitate the area. The other cocoa area lies so far away that she is unable to care for or harvest the trees. In gen-
eral, she has little help with her farming or trading work except for a 7-year old granddaughter and cannot afford to hire extra labour.

Twimwaa’s experience of collective action or of joining associations or organizations represents what is available for the majority of women in the community: ties of cooperation, mutual assistance and trust are established and actively maintained primarily within one’s own matrilineage. Secondarily, voluntary association may also occur, essentially to augment personal economic resources mobilized through lineage or marital relationships. However, in terms of actual experience of voluntary association, Twimwaa’s may be somewhat greater than many community women’s. As it turns out, it seems that her ability to enter voluntary, mutual assistance associations has not only been stimulated by her oftimes divorced status, but that this status has facilitated membership, since she did not have to seek the permission of a husband. The main context for collective assistance and action has been that of her female matrikin, with whom she also shares other corporate interests and assets. Other associative contexts that have at one time or another been significant for her have been sporadic participation in informal susu or savings funds, a Pepper Growers’ and a Ginger Producers’ Cooperative, a Women’s Alliance at the Roman Catholic Church, of which she is a member, and a local branch of the national women’s organization, the 31st December Women’s Movement (DMW). The latter attracted some women in the community because of their hopes that their economic and political interests would be represented at both local and national levels.

At present, Twimwaa expresses disappointment at not having been able to achieve any of her ambitions through the more formal associative contexts. In the case of the cooperatives, bookkeeping irregularities and conflicts with regional organizations contributed to the paralysis and then dissolution of the local branches. The local chapter of the 31st December Women’s Movement became inactive when its membership, which some years ago numbered 75 members dwindled steadily and was finally unable to keep up the fixed monthly membership payments to the national association. The church Women’s Alliance is still active, but Twimwaa has not been able to keep up her dues, which means she can no longer take part in meetings and outings.

Currently, in 1993, farming and petty selling of foodstuffs (mostly maize) and medicinal herbs constitute Twimwaa’s only sources of money income, income which trickles in irregularly and in small amounts. Twimwaa’s daughters are now adults who themselves are now mothers
of 2 children apiece. In earlier years, when her daughters were babies, Twimwaa’s economy also contained occasional contributions from the respective fathers of her children, as well as from her kin. Twimwaa’s middle daughter and two young sons, as well as the daughter of Twimwaa’s youngest daughter are staying with and in large part being supported by her.

As Twimwaa’s life history illustrates, there are three main sets of issues that the Dormaa community women identify as central to their interests and around which they may mobilize or act collectively. These concern: (1) livelihood, (2) the construction and reproduction and confirmation of female identity and (3) perceived life course or life career opportunity requiring both long term and short term strategic planning.

LIVELIHOOD AND AKAN FEMALE IDENTITY

Akan women are strongly identified with a responsibility for earning a living through hard work for the benefit of themselves and their dependents. In addition, they—like men—are also subject to Akan cultural conceptions of self-aggrandizement and wealth accumulation (ahonya) that promotes independence and authority in advanced age and which are reflected in most individuals’ personal livelihood and life aspirations. The necessity or desire of improving access to productive assets, particularly labour and money or other capital—perhaps particularly in times of actual or foreseen difficulty—prompts giving priority to lineage contexts which are conceived of as more reliable for women. The most significant linkages or networks for Adwoa Twimwaa with regard to farming resources have been a more or less fixed set of primary matrilineal consanguines, abusuafoo. The same necessity can also propel an interest in joining voluntary organizations, such as producers’ cooperatives or mutual assistance associations such as a church Women’s Alliance. In Dormaa, livelihood considerations for women are strongly linked to conceptual models of female identity both as actualities and as potentials for personal growth. Therefore, collective contexts, where these can be combined, are likely to be those which attract women. The extent to which organizations can meet these needs and expectations of women will determine whether they remain members and can in turn participate in the development of the organizations concerned. However, it is also true that demands on the women in terms of the resources they bring to organizations can be so heavy as to put the organizations and the assets
they may offer effectively out of the reach of the women who most are in need of them.

Broadly speaking, these conceptual models are based on clear distinctions between female-ness, béré and male-ness, nyin or nini. In addition to child-bearing, female-ness is strongly associated with fecundity, with hard work, resourcefulness, non-aggressive behaviour and deference to men and with provision of food and care.

The most meaningful ties of mutual commitment and loyalty among women are connected with these models and reflect precepts of matrilineal kinship which are epitomized in linkages present in the minimal kinship unit: the matricentral cell. This is a female-focused unit composed of a mother and her children. The bonds among them—both between the mother and her children, particularly between mother and daughter and among siblings, particularly between siblings of the same sex—are considered by people to be primary and the most essential of all relational linkages in terms of survival, social identity, cultural continuity and connections to the divine. It is also these bonds which are the ultimate symbols for emotional attachment, commitment, reciprocity and interdependence and they are the models to which nearly all other relationships are compared.

Motherhood does not designate a mere biological role, but is also a highly idealized, culturally central condition and status for women. It is through motherhood and the blood, mogya, of women that the main basis for social, economic and political organization in the community, the matrilineage, abusua and the matrilineal principle, is transmitted and perpetuated and it is motherhood above all other attributes and processes, which renders women fully female, béré. “Motherliness” involves provision of food, material and emotional care and with voluntary generosity with respect to such provisioning. A “good woman”, obaa pa, is a woman who is able to win people’s respect or at least approval by virtue of how she lives up to her provisioning responsibilities and is able to maintain primary relational linkages. Such provisioning is considered by all to be what women have in common in addition to the physiological and, among the Akan, culturally elaborated phenomena associated with menstruation and (the potential for) biological motherhood.

For women, linkages with biological and categorical (e.g. mothers’ sisters) mothers and with sisters are multifaceted, multifunctional, mutually obligating, represent qualities of ultimate reliability and loyalty and therefore major ideological fundaments for association or organizing
(pooling or sharing of social and economic resources) among women. Linkages with sisters moreover represent what women see as the greatest potential for symmetry and equality between women, despite the manifestations of relative seniority based on age and of individual fortunes and life circumstances that are greatly influenced by patrifiliation and contact with fathers' kin and by marriage. It is this that underlies the contradictions which characterize the pursuit of some of these aspirations, something which mitigates against collective associating.

At the same time, local women operate within regional and national economic and political contexts of which they are very well aware. These contexts also include conceptions of sex and gender ascription, as well as of relations between women and men, among women and among men. Where these coincide with local women's strategic aspirations, and they are at the same time able to gain access to these contexts, associating for women can be rewarding and can also result in changes in the contexts themselves. However, for a number of reasons, financial and otherwise, women in the community have not been able to secure such access.

Social identity is determined by matrilineage (abusua) ties and blood, mogya, is both the substance and a spiritual medium through which a major part of social (matrilineal) identity and relative social status is transmitted. However, neither women's food provisioning and nurturing identity, nor the culturally elaborated fact of female blood as epitomized in bara or bragoro nubility ceremonies upon first menstruation, appear to be extended into a functional commonality that is converted into an ideological fundament for organizing politically in line with the thinking of some Western feminist standpoint theorists (see, for example, Smith 1987).

It is highly significant, I think, that only a very few women in the community declared outright or otherwise implied that their situation vis-à-vis men or male political and decision-making structures was something they share with all other women. On the contrary, there was a strong tendency to present their life situations as the results of highly individual sets of circumstances and processes.

FEMALE LIFE CAREERS

Akan concepts of personhood as examined by inter alia Rattray (1927), Fortes (1950), van der Geest (1975), Bleek (1976), Sarpong (1977),
Ackah (1988) and Amoah (1990) indicate that female personhood involves a process of self-definition, which allows the construction by female individuals of a (at least to some extent) unique social identity in terms of a life career that concerns the achievement of certain independent material and moral ends. This in turn entails the achievement of the attributes described above.

When I first came to know her, Adwoa Twimwaa's life and the life career aspirations and prospects she expressed included scenarios for the future which fit poorly with present-day realities. At that time, most women could expect to achieve positions of modest autonomy, authority and political participation by the time they became of advanced age, for example as lineage elders or as heads of houses. Nowadays, Twimwaa and her peers are living under distressed economic circumstances which prohibit investment in any ventures other than absolutely necessary ones. Among other constraints, this has meant not being able to pay dues to collective contexts which potentially could assist them.

As is the case with most women in the community, the most significant female linkages and collective female contexts for Twimwaa socially and economically are those defined by matrilineal kinship, i.e. mother's sisters, sisters, daughters and sisters’ daughters. She feels that an organization such as the 31st DWM has no genuine understanding of community women's problems and questions, whether it really is interested in assisting their struggle for self-aggrandizement. She says that rather than truly adopting an egalitarian stance, the organization finds it easier to help "Those who already have something", such as the local chapters in Dormaa-Ahenkro and other large towns in the region.

The 31st DWM was established in 1982 by the Chairman of the Provisional National Defence Council which made up the (military) government at that time. It is still closely associated with the government and its resources (the First Lady is now head of the organization) and has managed to push competing women's associations out of the political arena and off the agenda. Presently, it has a monopoly of position, as it is the only nation-wide organization which claims to represent the interests of Ghanaian women. This has resulted in effect in a blanketing out of the majority of women's voices and experiences in public debates. Although important legislative changes affecting women's rights in marriage and with respect to inheritance have been made largely due to the lobbying efforts of the 31st DWM, the movement has clearly been more concerned to garner support for government policies than in injecting
into public and political discourse issues which concern the specific problems of women. That would mean challenging and coming into conflict with the government and those of its policies which constitute major problems for women.

As noted, Ghana has a history in the state systems, which comprise the modern nation-state, of women's political representation. This tradition, however, when addressing women, does so exclusively in terms of ascribed sex-linked attributes and roles, by e.g. restricting attention to matters of gender to "women" and their "affairs". Thus confined, women's messages are not articulated and considered within the general political male and military discourses which determine the developmental direction of the country and its people as a whole. Male, mainstream decision-making continues to be protected through the creation of separate women's spokespersons and women's branches of government (Cheater 1986; Amadiume 1987; Dolphyne 1988; Tsikata 1989). Twimwaa and other women in the community say they became members of 31st DWM because of their need for more and better and independent economic resources, moral and political support from those in power in their struggle against poverty and inequities, recognition, new knowledge, practical assistance in problems involving their daily work and more hopeful life opportunity prospects. Some of them feel that they risked their good reputations and physical safety to become members. Their need for a truly representative political voice to augment their community back-up associative forms and to support them in promoting change in the social and economic conditions of their lives has not been met. They are representative of most rural women in Ghana, who continue to be marginalized and neglected.

Relevant here is insight into structural commonalities or other potentially cohesive factors and women's associative behaviour in specific social or cultural settings, e.g. similarities in female economic responsibilities in Ghana. A major question here is whether sex-related or gender ascribed similarities or differences are or can be converted into a more or less conscious and motivating unity of purpose in bringing about strategic change in a feminist sense, i.e. an awareness of gender inequalities and a conscious intention to change them.

Is distress motivation enough to promote solidarity and association? In other words, will impoverished Ghanaian women consider themselves as sharing enough common ground to come together to confront political realities that victimize them? If they do, what support can they expect
from other women, considering the fact that there are many indications that associating for women, as a general political strategy per se in African contexts, does not always work in the sense of achieving empowerment ends (Cheater 1986; Staudt 1987; Tsikata 1989). Herein lies perhaps also a key to our understanding of non-association, i.e. why women do not or cannot come together and through association or organizations concert their efforts to achieve perceived common goals. It is necessary to recognize the reality of potential manipulation through female linkages, to the extent that some groups of women may in fact represent a coalition of mutual elite interests, thereby creating, maintaining or reproducing new power structures and positions of privilege among women (La Fontaine 1978; Keesing 1981; Cheater 1986; Tsikata 1989).

Bibliography


Résumé:

Associer les femmes: Liens féminins, identités collectives et idéologie politique chez les Akan de Dorma, Ghana

Prudence Woodford-Berger

Cette étude explore la réalité des relations sociales et politiques des femmes prises individuellement et collectivement dans une communauté locale matrilinéaire, et dans le contexte national ghanéen. Dans la communauté locale se forgent les notions primaires d'identité sociale, de loyauté, de conditionnement émotionnel et de justice, notions considérées par les femmes et les hommes comme nécessaires et contribuant à gagner de quoi vivre, à acquérir le respect et à renforcer des positions personnelles aussi bien que collectives. Dans une large mesure ces relations sont déterminées par des réseaux matrilinéaires ou par des liens d'affiliation entre femmes résultant du mariage. Des entretiens avec des membres de la communauté et une observation de leurs formes associatives montrent que ces liens se caractérisent souvent par des notions de réciprocité. Malgré l'idéologie matrilinéaire, les modèles d'autorité sont dominés par les hommes excluant dans une large mesure les intérêts des femmes, résultat entre autres, de la superposition historique d'une organisation militaire sur la structure politique.

Pour les femmes, les contextes traditionnels et locaux de la définition de soi fournissent des voies vers la considération sociale, un niveau d'assurance économique et une certaine influence politique locale. En même temps ces contextes peuvent développer une certaine capacité à mettre en question ou à défier les conditions ou les notions qui limitent les aspirations de vie individuelle ou la création de nouvelles bases pour une action politique collective. Ceci parce qu'elles dépendent habituellement de définitions des rôles sexuels, qui imposent une division du travail rigoureuse selon le sexe.

Dans le contexte national, les processus politiques impliquent des options autocratiques portant sur les objectifs et les moyens de développement économique et politique, et déterminent le rôle de plusieurs catégories de population dans cet effort. A bien des égards, l'état moderne est pareil à l'état traditionnel, y compris l'organisation gouvernementale, militaire aussi bien que civile. Une question clef sera explorée dans cette contribution et nous tâcherons d'y trouver quelques réponses: dans
quelle mesure les organisations politiques nationales, comme Le Mouvement des femmes du 31 décembre, peuvent-elles comprendre, défendre et représenter les intérêts et les besoins de la majorité des femmes ghanéennes du secteur rural?

Ce Mouvement est devenu surtout une partie annexe du gouvernement au pouvoir et dépend de son infrastructure politique et de ses ressources financières. Il a été effectivement associé à des efforts de changement, par exemple pour modifier les lois sur le mariage et l'héritage dans le sens de l'égalité des sexes, mais il ne s'est pas attelé à la recherche de solutions radicales en ce qui concerne les conditions d'oppression et d'appauvrissement de la majorité des femmes ghanéennes. Ces conditions s'enracinent dans les rôles et les identités inhérents aux homme et aux femmes, et un changement nécessiterait d'entrer en conflit avec des attitudes de domination masculine à l'échelon de la nation, et du gouvernement lui-même. Le Mouvement mobilise plutôt un soutien aux stratégies gouvernementales. La structure monolithique du Mouvement est à l'image de celle du gouvernement et l'empêche par exemple de diversifier son organisation au niveau local pour que des branches décentralisées puissent répondre aux attentes locales des femmes, tout en tenant compte de leurs connaissances, et leur permettre une participation authentique et un renforcement de leur pouvoir. En effet, les femmes, en particulier dans le secteur rural, reçoivent peu de soutien politique dans leurs efforts pour surmonter les mécanismes de l'attribution qui leur est réservée et les restrictions qui en découlent. Par conséquent, l'appartenance au Mouvement est pour les femmes une stratégie politique globalement inopérante.
Multiple Identities and Multiple Organizing Strategies of Female Wage Workers in Kano's Manufacturing Sector

Hussaina Abdullah

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to assess how different and changing situations in the work place influence and shape female wage workers' identities and concerns in the Kano Manufacturing Sector.\(^1\) The intention is to identify and assess the kinds of identities which women factory workers take on in the context of their struggles in Kano. We shall pay particular attention to class and gender identities to show that the most commonly adopted identities in women wage workers' struggle against discrimination in the work place are mediated by internal differences amongst these workers. This point is particularly essential in order to show that women involved in work place livelihood struggles do not remain within particular, static frameworks but shift their identity in terms of what their current priorities are and the specific problems that confront them.

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1. Kano is located in Nigeria's geographical north and is the second industrial and commercial centre in the country, surpassed only by Lagos. The importance of Kano as a major centre of economic activities dates back to the nineteenth century, when it served as an important entrepôt in the trans-Saharan trade.
This study will therefore focus on the shifting identities which women take on depending on their particular concern at a given moment.

The data presented in this chapter comes from a wider research project on female wage labour in the manufacturing sector of Kano, Nigeria 1945–1990 (Abdullah 1991). Field work for this study was conducted in September–December 1988 and January–June 1990. The paper is divided into three sections. In the first part we discuss the issues of gender and class discrimination in the factory system in two different industrial relations contexts. The study covers twelve industries, six unionized and six non-unionized. The rationale for this is to give a balanced picture of the way in which different industrial relation settings affect women workers in Kano. In section two, in the light of the evidence generated by our study, we shall attempt to address some of the theoretical issues arising from our analysis. In the third part of the study, we shall try to see if the trade unions’ lack of concern with non-class contradictions has forced women to devise other forms of organization to tackle these contradictions. In particular, the role of the Nigeria Labour Congress Women’s Wing (NLCWW) as an alternative organizing platform will be discussed. In concluding the study, we shall point to the ways in which the experiences of the women factory workers of Kano can be translated into a concerted political arrangement for their empowerment at the work place and in society.

2. The 12 factories employed a total of 994 women, of which 928 were shop-floor workers, 19 were shop-floor supervisory staff, 5 were in the managerial category and 42 were employed in the administrative cadre. The discussion focuses on the 947 shop-floor employers. The sample was dominated by women in the 36 years and above age category. They accounted for 55 per cent of the sample. 65 per cent of the sample had no formal education.

3. The difference between the two categories of firms in our study case can be found in their differing work situations. Companies in the unionized sector almost always abide by the regulations of the Federal Government and National Joint Industrial Council (NJIC), which those in the non-unionized sector do not. Their conditions of service differ from those in the unionized sector. Each company operates its own conditions of service, which usually fall below the NJIC approved agreement. Workers in the non-unionized firms are usually denied benefits granted to those in the unionized firms, such as the official minimum wage, overtime, sick leave, redundancy and holiday payment.
1. GENDER AND CLASS DISCRIMINATION IN THE KANO MANUFACTURING SECTOR

In this section, we will discuss the form gender discrimination took in the factory system. What we intend to do is to look at the discriminatory policies implemented by both management and the unions against women workers in the unionized firms. In the non-unionized firms, we will concentrate on management policies that were detrimental to the interests of female workers. The analysis will be taken further with a discussion of women’s perception of the influence of trade unions on the working conditions in general and gender issues in particular.

Gender Discrimination in the Kano Manufacturing Sector

Gender discrimination refers to the specific discrimination experienced by persons of the same gender, in this case, women factory workers. As Whitehead notes:

Our experience as women is of always being perceived and treated as members of a gender category about which there are all kinds of stereotyped beliefs and which is inferior to the alternative gender category, that of men (Whitehead 1979:12).

Gender discrimination in employment manifests itself in various ways, but the most important is statistical discrimination. Elaborating on the issue of discrimination against women, Pittin notes that:

One of the most commonly recognised is that which has been described as statistical discrimination. This includes both wage discrimination (equally productive men and women being paid different wages) and employment discrimination (a smaller number of women being employed in an occupation or industry than would occur without discrimination), or inferior jobs and promotional opportunities being available to women (Pittin 1984:73).

This study will concentrate on the latter form of discrimination, i.e. the better job and promotional opportunities given to men rather than women. The other type of discrimination, wage discrimination, does not apply in Nigeria, as both men and women receive equal pay for equal work. 4

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4. This policy came into being after the restructuring of the Trade Union movement in 1978.
Gender Discrimination in Unionized Factories

In the unionized factories, gender discrimination on the shop-floor manifested itself in the form of making women perform domestic chores such as sweeping, washing of plates, cleaning of toilets and fetching of water. In addition, female workers complained about deductions made from their wages when they take their children to the hospitals and visit the ante-natal clinics. They also complained about the frequent and arbitrary reduction in their working days and refusal of casual leave. (Casual leave is a seven-day leave all workers in Nigeria are entitled to in addition to their annual leave.) Furthermore, where medical care was available to workers, women wage workers were not entitled to treatment for obstetrics and gynecological or any illness arising from pregnancy or child birth, and neither did their spouses benefit from such facilities. The female factory workers of Kano complained of discrimination in the disbursement of motor cycle loans and promotions. They also suffered restrictions on the frequency of pregnancy they were allowed while their male counterparts enjoyed preferential treatment.

Gender Discrimination in the Non-Unionized Factories

In the non-unionized companies, the women interviewed all complained about the non-payment of maternity leave allowance, non-payment for time spent at the ante-natal clinic or for taking their children to the hospital. It is worth noting that some of their complaints, particularly those dealing with the loss of income arising from attendance at the ante-natal clinics or for taking children to hospitals, were shared by female workers in three of the unionized firms. Yet, interestingly, the women in the non-unionized factories felt that the discrimination which they suffered was the result of the refusal of the management of their companies to recognize unions. When asked if they thought they enjoyed any particular advantages as factory workers, they all said “No”. But when asked if they suffered any disadvantages and if these were attributable to their gender they all said “Yes”. One of the women commenting on the issue of a gender discrimination on the shop-floor said:

All these things (sweeping of shop-floor, cutting of wages, discriminatory working hours etc.) are being done to us because we are women. They (management) know women do not like Wahala (making trouble), and won’t go on strike to demand equal treatment with their male colleagues. They know if they do these things to male workers, the factory would become uncontrol-
lable. And as such, women have to bear the brunt of management's cost-saving strategies through discriminatory policies (Interview 6. 6. 90).

Gender, Class and the Union

What we intend to do here, is to elucidate the women's perception of their unions, and its attitudes on gender issues. The struggles of women as members of the working class will be discussed later on. But, anticipating that discussion, it can be suggested at this stage that class awareness is an emerging feature of life in Kano for both male and female industrial workers. A unity of approach in their attitudes to employers and to the federal government characterises to an increasing extent relations between the sexes in the context of employment. And, as the argument unfolds, it will become apparent that women, in spite of their under-privileged positions in the labour unions, have given male workers full support in strikes, go-slow and other forms of industrial actions, like in the 1975, 1981 and 1988 national strikes.

In the six unionized companies in this study, the women workers were all members of the various unions to which their factories were affiliated, in compliance with Decree Number 23 of 1978 which recommends that all industries should be affiliated to unions in their different trade groups. Although all the women had one complaint or another about their local factory unions, they all accepted that the situation in their various establishments was much better than in the pre-union days, when they were much more vulnerable to a management which arbitrarily dismissed them without fear of consequences. The women therefore had clearly developed a class solidarity with their male counterparts on the importance of effective trade unionism in the promotion of their broad interests as workers. Their acceptance of the broad principles of trade union policies did not prevent them from being critical of their own union, both in terms of its effectiveness as a union and in terms of its practices towards its women members (see for example, Charles 1986; Chhachhi & Pittin 1991, Pittin 1984). One of the women workers commenting on the gender biased nature of the union in her factory said:

Although I believe in the existence of a union in the factory system, I do not think it represents our interest. Go and ask my colleagues (referring to other women) if they (i.e. male shop stewards) have ever demanded things that do not benefit them. They have never asked management to include our husbands in the health care scheme or to extend health care facilities to us when we are pregnant (Interview, 5. 4. 1990).
In the non-unionized factories, a unity was observable amongst the workers, irrespective of their gender difference. All were struggling to become unionized in the belief that it would help to improve their living and working conditions. The female workers said they wanted their factories unionized so that they too could enjoy the national minimum wage, transport, housing and leave allowances, end-of-year bonus, maternity leave with pay, health care, meal subsidy and redundancy benefits among others. For workers in these factories, the union was seen as an end in itself. They viewed the union as the ultimate messiah that would fight for their rights and protect them from the high-handedness of their managements. In response to the question “What do you think about a union?” The women said:

(i) They wanted a union;
(ii) They thought it was good as it would fight for the rights of its members;
(iii) It would protect them from management (Abdullah 1991:175).

The positive role the women attribute to unions in the non-unionized sector can be captured in the words of one women who said:

We want a union in our factory, as its existence will improve our lives. With a union, we shall be entitled to all the benefits enjoyed by factories in the unionized sector. In addition, management won’t trample on our rights any more as our union will fight for us (Interview 5. 5. 90).

When we referred them to the problems facing women in unionized companies and their complaints about their union officials, the women in the non-unionized factories said that they would solve those problems as and when they arose, but that the immediate and dominant problem they were facing was the lack of a union. They said that women in unionized industries noticed gender forms of discrimination because they were enjoying the fruits of having unions that had negotiated issues such as a minimum wage and other benefits on their behalf.

2. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE DISCUSSION

From our discussion so far on the issues of gender and class in Kano’s manufacturing sector, two conflicting tendencies appeared to prevail in the attitude of the female wage workers. In unionized factories, where the basic class questions were being tackled by trade unions, the gender question was at the heart of the daily struggles of women workers. On
the other hand, in the non-unionized companies, workers of both sexes were struggling in solidarity for the recognition by the management of their right to unionize, their conviction being that unionization will lead to the end of their economic deprivation and exploitation. In effect, depending on the concrete situation one is faced with, it was either the issue of gender or the issue of class that was of primary concern to the workers (Abdullah 1991:176).

From the evidence available on the situation of women workers in Kano, it can be argued that the idea of prioritizing one form of contradiction, the questions of gender over class oppression in society over the other, (Elson and Pearson 1981:89) is fraught with serious problems. This is mainly because it is no longer possible to use the category ‘women’ without specifying distinctions of race, caste ethnicity, stage in the life cycle, etc. (Chhachhi and Pittin 1991:4). In relation to our study, it showed that even though the women workers of Kano belonged to the same stratum in the labour process, there was no unity of interests. There were many secondary divisions amongst the female wage workers which objectively often made such a unity of action very difficult to achieve. Our study, for example, revealed five types of divisions amongst the women factory workers of Kano. These were between administrative and shop-floor women, married and unmarried women, educated and less educated women, younger and older women, Muslim and non-Muslim women.

The difference between administrative workers (secretaries, receptionists and clerical staff) and shop-floor workers relates to the differing atmosphere under which they worked. Whereas the administrative women workers worked under a less tense atmosphere, where they were not forced to work in shifts or wear uniforms, and their movements were not rigorously checked and monitored, and they enjoyed longer break periods, better job security and promotional prospects, their shop-floor colleagues worked under the opposite conditions (Pittin 1984:78). Because of these differences, there was a constant struggle between the administrative and shop-floor workers. In all the unionized factories, female administrative workers did not attend union meetings unless an issue that concerns them directly was to be discussed. For example, when the working days of shop-floor workers were reduced in W. J. Bush, Depi, Bally and Standard Plastics, it was the female administrative workers that refused to cooperate with their colleagues when they wanted to go on strike. In W. J. Bush (Nigeria) Limited, when the com-
pany management decided to restore the five working days for shop-
floor workers, but refused to restore the ten per cent cut in wages of the
administrative workers, only then did the female administrative workers
call on the union to demand the reinstatement of the ten per cent that
was being deducted from their salaries. So deep was the antagonism
between the two groups of women workers at W. J. Bush (Nigeria) Lim-
ited that during the interviewing session for this study, the female shop-
floor workers demanded that their administrative counterparts should
leave the interview session as the interview was only for shop-floor
hands. The women shop-floor employees alleged that their administra-
tive colleagues were at the interviewing session because they thought
that the ten per cent wage cut would be discussed.

Another category of differentiation was found between married and
non-married women. Non-married women here refers to all single,
divorced, and widowed women. At Mentholatum (Nigeria) Limited,
healthcare services were not extended to the spouses of female workers;
the women were asked why they had not jointly pressurized manage-
ment to include spouses of female workers in the provision of healthcare
to staff. All the non-married women rejected the suggestion, arguing
that, since it was the problem of married women, they should be the
ones to come together and find a solution. The same division was
noticed at Bally Plastics and Standard Plastic Industries on the issue of
visits to ante-natal clinics and for accompanying sick children to the hos-
pital.

The third type of difference among the women workers of Kano was
between older and younger women workers at Depi (Nigeria) Limited. It
was alleged by the older women workers (women aged 35 years and
above) that some of their younger colleagues were having affairs with
some of their male co-workers (union officials) and management staff.
The older women believed that the sexual dealings between their
younger colleagues and some management staff and union officials bred
disunity as it was alleged that the younger women were more interested
in pursuing their individual rather than collective interests as they acted
as spies for the company management and the male-dominated union.

The fourth type of differentiation manifested itself between the edu-
cated and less educated women workers. The term ‘educated’ refers to
all women with some secondary schooling and ‘less educated’ refers to
women without any secondary school education. The educated women
usually saw themselves as superior to their less educated colleagues.
Because they viewed their factory employment as a transitory phase, they were often reluctant to participate in factory struggles. For example, it was the educated women at Depi (Nigeria) Limited, W.J. Bush and Sons (Nigeria) Limited and Mentholatum (Nigeria) Limited who refused to participate in the 1988 fuel subsidy strike called by their unions.

Finally, the last category of division among women workers was along religious lines in factories employing women of varied religious beliefs. We learnt that some Muslim women of northern origin felt that their non-Muslim colleagues were infidels and thus believed they had no business participating in any solidarity action with the so-called unbelievers. At other times, religious antagonism between women workers was sometimes fostered by management staff through their actions and utterances. For example, at Depi (Nigeria) Limited, the management’s policy of providing a salary advance to Muslim workers during Sallah (Ramadan and Eid El-Kabir) festivities and none to Christians during Easter and Christmas, was a source of tension between the workers. When the personnel manager was asked why the company pursued such a policy, he said that it would be unfair to the company to provide a salary advance during Christmas, as all workers are entitled to a yearly bonus given at Christmas and that since Kano is a Muslim dominated state it is just assumed that Muslims should have some extra privileges. In the non-unionized firms, when the workers tried to organize around class issues, the management used religious and ethnic differences to divide them. It is usually women workers who fall prey to this divisive tactic.

From the discussion outlined so far, we have shown that the idea of prioritising one form of contradiction over another, apart from not being valid for all situations in the work place, tends to gloss over secondary contradictions that occur amongst women workers. Such contradictions may create obstacles for their self organization into a coherent force in the factory system, but might also serve as a basis for their self-organization for the attainment of group objectives. Let us now proceed to discuss the issue of multiple organizing strategies and see how women have organized around non-class issues to fight against their subordination and discrimination in the labour process.
3. MULTIPLE ORGANIZING STRATEGIES OF FEMALE WAGE WORKERS OF KANO

In the preceding section, we outlined the problems faced by the female industrial labourers of Kano both as workers and as members of a subordinate gender in the work place. In this section, what we intend to do is to discuss women’s alternative organizing strategies to confront their subordination within the factory system, especially as the trade unions have not been able to solve non-class contradictions.

In all our studied firms, whether unionized or not, the women had not made much progress in the area of organizing independently to defend their collective self interest. The only alternative form of organization that was available to women in the unionized sector was the Nigeria Labour Congress Women’s Wing (NLCWW).

The NLC leadership decided in 1983 to establish a women’s wing in all the states of the federation to take care of women’s needs and problems in the work place. The aim of the NLCWW was to serve as a focus of attention on matters affecting women workers which the NLC had itself been unable to tackle. According to Rebecca Olisa, the then chairperson of the Lagos chapter: “Women are now very much aware of their rights and wrongs as far as trade unionism is concerned” (Shettima 1989:88).

With all its laudable objectives, after its establishment in 1983, it was only functioning in eight states including Kano by 1987. By 1990, when the research was undertaken, it was only in Lagos State that the NLCWW was functioning. The NLCWW could not function well nor take off effectively in Kano and other states of the federation because its creation was at the initiative of the NLC, which is male dominated. In addition, some of the male trade unionists were suspicious of the NLCWW. For example, after the proscription of the NLC in 1989 by the federal military government, some of the executives of the industrial unions went to see the then administrator of the trade unions to put pressure on him not to create a women’s department in the NLC as part of his reorganization policy (Abdullah 1991:196). Even if the NLC was serious about having a women’s wing, the fact that there was no women’s department at the national secretariat and in every industrial union to coordinate the activities of the state branches of the NLCWW, show that the decision to establish it was just a ploy designed primarily to satisfy the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Organi-
zation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) which have been championing the cause of women workers within the trade union movement.

In addition to the problems the NLCWW is facing from the NLC, the organization itself has not done much even in Lagos, where it is functioning. It has only addressed the issue of child care. Even then, there is only one nursery located at the secretariat of the NLC. Other issues, such as sexual harassment and violence against women in the workplace, health care facilities during pregnancy and for spouses of female workers, have not been addressed at all.

Apart from organizing along class lines through their unions, the women workers in our survey companies did not organize or form alliances along lines like gender, ethnic, religious, age or marital status to fight against their subordination and discrimination in the factory system. In other words, the multiple identities which the women factory workers of Kano portrayed did not translate into multiple organizing strategies as we had envisaged. This did not mean that the women workers did not have alternative associations in the workplace or in their neighbourhoods. The contact among female factory workers surrounds issues such as bereavement, marriages and naming ceremonies among others.

Amongst the migrant population, participation in ethnic associations is quite high, as this gives them a sense of identity and belonging in a “strange” place. Usually, the meetings of such associations are held monthly with contributions ranging between 50 kobo and one Naira. It is usually at such meetings that new arrivals to the community are introduced and their problems such as jobs and accommodation discussed. The monthly contributions are used to help people in times of difficulties: bereavement and fire outbreak and also on social occasions such as weddings and outdoor ceremonies.

Apart from organizing along class lines, the women industrial workers of Kano did not form associations to fight issues that were peculiar to them. And where ever they had alternative forms of organization, it was to solve non-work related problems.

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5. Naira and Kobo are units of Nigerian currency. 100 Kobo=one Naira. N22=$1.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

From the discussion so far, it is obvious that the multiple identities which the women portrayed on the shop-floor did not translate into multiple organizing strategies. This is because of the differing working conditions, the difference in marital status, age structure, religious and ethnic affiliation and educational background created obstacles for the self-organization of the women workers into a coherent force in the factory system to achieve their group objectives. It is evident from our analysis, that the resistance and struggle in which the female wage earners in the Kano industrial sector have engaged, concerned class issues undertaken by their unions. Why have the women workers of Kano not engaged in strike actions or other forms of struggle to fight issues involving gender and other forms of discrimination and subordination? Is it that they lack such consciousness, or are they a docile section of the labour force?

In our estimation, participation in the modern labour process may be a sufficient condition for the formation of class consciousness, but not of other forms of consciousness, given that patriarchal ideologies permeate all facets of society, including industrial relations. It is easier, in the context of a factory system and in the context of the overall class-based gender blind orientation of trade unions, for women workers to gain class consciousness than for them to gain gender consciousness. In many respects, class consciousness among women is only the first step towards gender consciousness. It is easy for women workers to join their male colleagues in showing the realization that they are exploited and oppressed. In order for this class consciousness to have a gender dimension built into it, the women must also be able to understand that the additional disadvantages which they suffer have to do with their gender, an experience which sets them aside from their male colleagues. Further, women must be able to identify the sources of the disadvantages they suffer on account of their sex.

The interviews we conducted amongst women workers in Kano showed that there was some awareness amongst them of gender discrimination in the factory system. We can therefore argue that the women of Kano know that they are exploited as workers and as women and can identify the source of their exploitation. What is totally lacking, however, is the willingness or the ability of the women to organize and mobilize in their own particular interests with a view to tackling gender discrimination. This is lacking for various reasons:
(a) The individualized approach of the women to the problem of gender subordination in the work place.
(b) Fear of losing their jobs which prevents them from expressing their dissatisfaction.
(c) The fact that they must care for their children and undertake other household chores makes them less willing to participate in union activities.
(d) The lack of commitment by the NLC to the NLCWW and women’s issues in general.

Is the female wage labour force in Kano therefore docile? From the evidence available to us, it is clear that following their insertion into the modern labour process, the women workers have been quite active in trade union activities, always participating in strike actions, go-slows, and other such struggles.

How can the experiences of female wage earners of Kano be translated into a concerted effort for their empowerment at the work place and in the society? This is the challenge which the women workers of Kano will have to address in the 1990s and beyond.

Bibliography
Résumé:

Identités multiples et stratégies d’organisation multiples des ouvrières salariées dans le secteur industriel à Kano, Nigeria

Hussaina Jummai Abdullah

La problématique de la multiplicité des identités dans les études sur le travail a été développée pour lier les questions d’identité, de conscience et de stratégie aux luttes entreprises par les ouvrières dans le système industriel et aussi pour montrer comment les situations diverses dans lesquelles les ouvrières se retrouvent à des moments différents, influencent leurs actions aussi bien que la planification des réponses qu’elles élaborent durant ces périodes. Cette orientation postmoderniste incite les chercheurs à éviter des prises de positions ab initio à propos des contradictions qui préoccupent probablement les ouvrières à tout moment, surtout quand ces contradictions ne sont pas statiques mais varient selon les situations, selon les préoccupations liées ou non à une classe sociale, à la religion, aux problèmes ethniques, au nationalisme etc., selon le contexte. En outre, dans ce mode de pensée, la tendance à supposer que le sexe constitue une base suffisante pour l’action solidaire des femmes, tend à masquer les différences internes parmi les ouvrières. Ces différences peuvent faire obstacle à une auto-organisation visant à constituer une force cohérente dans le système industriel, mais également à servir de base pour une auto-organisation afin d’atteindre les objectifs du groupe.

Le but de cette contribution est d’évaluer de quelle façon les situations différentes et changeantes du milieu de travail influencent et façonnent les identités et les préoccupations des ouvrières dans le secteur industriel de Kano. Kano est le deuxième centre industriel du Nigeria après Lagos, ainsi que le centre de la politique populistc et de l’Islam radical. Notre intention est d’identifier et de recenser les différentes identités que les ouvrières industrielles adoptent dans le contexte des luttes à Kano. Nous allons tout particulièrement porter notre attention sur les identités liées à la classe, au sexe, à l’ethnie et à la religion, étant donné que celles-ci sont particulièrement significatives au Nigeria.

L’identité ou les identités que les ouvrières projettent ou mettent en avant à un moment donné, reflètent la préoccupation dominante qu’elles affrontent à un moment précis, mais cette préoccupation ne doit pas être
considérée comme le seul modèle auquel elles s'identifient, ni même à travers lequel elles souhaitent être identifiées.

Cette contribution examinera les caractéristiques des ouvrières, montrant leur statut matrimonial, leur passé éducatif, leur origine, leur affiliation ethnique et religieuse et l'influence de ces facteurs sur les luttes engagées par ces femmes et les problèmes posés dans leurs luttes. L'étude porte sur 12 usines, dont six syndicalisées et six non syndicalisées, pour nous permettre d'examiner la dynamique des identités multiples dans deux contextes relationnels différents en milieu industriel. Nous chercherons également à voir si la problématique de la multiplicité des identités a été transformée en stratégies organisationnelles multiples, et leur effet, s'il y en a un, sur la section des femmes du congrès travailliste nigérien.

En conclusion et à la lumière des informations empiriques produites par notre étude, nous allons relever quelques unes des réponses théoriques qui découlent du féminisme postmoderne et indiquer les modalités permettant aux expériences des ouvrières de Kano d'être traduites en une solution politique concertée renforçant leur situation sur le lieu de travail et dans la société.
A Woman Worker in a Lagos Factory
Her Power Base in Family, Community, Labour Market, and Union

Gunilla Andræ

Within the comparatively well organized textile sector in Nigeria a murky hole of poor industrial relations and poor conditions of work has been found to exist in a group of garment companies in Lagos.¹ A notable feature of these companies is the unusual dominance of female workers in their labour force, in contrast to an overwhelming male dominance in the main part of the textile sector in Nigeria. It puts in focus the need to consider the gender factor in trying to understand the basis of workers' organization strategies and bargaining power at work. Tying in to a discourse that seeks conditions of workers' bargaining power in the complex interaction of factors in the production, reproduction and organization spheres of their lives,² our concern is to probe the insertion of gender in such a framework.³

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1. The study has been carried out with invaluable support from the textile union, NUTGTWN, Lagos sub-secretariat. Mrs. Ijeni Oputu and Mr. Adwale Otaru assisted me during fieldwork and data processing. Dr. Hussaina J Abdullah provided highly appreciated practical and intellectual support particularly in facilitating the fieldwork. Funding comes from Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries, SAREC, now Sida.
2. Warde (1988) is an example of a labour study that follows such a framework.
3. See next page.
The present paper gives a preview of material collected in Lagos in February and March 1993 as part of a larger study with these aims. Here we probe the situation of one female worker in one factory.

THE CASE OF ISOLO TEXTILES LTD

Attention was drawn to the garments and tailoring sector in Lagos when in 1987 the shocking conditions of work in one factory making shoe-laces and sewing thread, Isolo Textiles LTD, (ITL), were revealed in the press. A victimised worker who had left his employment was prepared to expose the conditions that workers in the factory had endured for over a decade: non-regularised employment was the rule. This also meant there was no application of the terms of national collective agreements for the industry, including no allowances and other benefits. There was no formal system of promotion. The workers, over ninety per cent of whom were female, were treated very badly. The term slavery was used to describe their conditions.

Established in the 1970s, this factory located in Isolo, Lagos, and employing between three and four hundred workers had resisted all attempts at unionisation throughout the 1980s. Three sets of executive


4. Concerning the ongoing project, which aims at comparing textile workers in three African countries, see research proposal, Andræ (1990). A chapter on gender and work in the garment industry will also be included in the larger study of textile workers and the unions in Nigeria carried out with Björn Beckman, see Andræ and Beckman, forthcoming. Two papers, Andræ and Beckman (1991) and in particular (1992), apply the general framework indicated above, without specific reference to gender.

5. The names of the case factory and the case worker in this study are faked to protect the worker.

6. This refers to the sectors organized by the National Union of Textile, Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria, NUTGTWN.
committee members were said to have been sacked, before a more permanent committee was installed in 1991. The latest attempt prior to that was in 1981, when workers were intimidated into keeping quiet and submitting for another decade. Finally the zonal officers of the union managed to move in and succeed in presenting the management with a list of union branch officials as a fait accompli. Relations were still antagonistic in early 1993. The management was openly hostile and said it would “go on television to say that this union is a disturber and ‘acting too big’”.

In trying to handle the situation the branch union officials felt their own lack of experience. Many recent incidents of conflict with the management were mentioned on both sides: a large number of stools for sitting down by the machines had been removed from the shop-floor by the management and reconquered with the help of the union; the locked entrance had been unlocked by union officials to save workers from forced absence on being late for work; a conflict over who was to address the workers and allocate incentives. Queries were constantly being issued to the branch officials when they tried to insist on the legislated and collectively agreed rights of the workers. In late 1992 there were dismissals over absenteeism and misconduct, where the union, however, managed to considerably reduce the numbers terminated.

After the establishment of a union branch, conditions were slowly being regularised; casual workers had been given letters of appointment, collective agreements were being implemented with regard to allowances and a salary scale for promotion according to a systematic job classification was under discussion. Industrial relations were however still very hostile.

GLORIA: A WORKER AT ITL

To illustrate the realities behind these special conditions in a factory dominated by female workers, we shall present the situation of Gloria (see note 5), one of the women workers at ITL, whom we interviewed at greater length. We ask who she is in terms of her responsibilities, aspirations and qualifications and also the opportunities offered to her, in the

7. Interview with officials of the Lagos Sub-Secretariat of the National Union of Textile, Garments and Tailoring Workers in Nigeria.
8. Interview with the branch executive committee, February 1993.
production, reproduction and organization spheres of her life and we look at her strategies as a worker in each of these contexts. We thus mean to give a concrete illustration to the modes by which her conditions in the factory become gendered. Factors to do with reproduction and family responsibilities come to the fore. The implications of gender relations played out in the labour market, at work and in the union, are also demonstrated.

Gloria was employed in 1984 as a cook in the canteen. She has later shifted to become a packer, a typically female designated position that is considered unskilled. Otherwise ITL is unusual among garment factories in allocating many kinds of machine work to women. This explains the predominance of over 90 per cent of women on the labour force here, with men employed only for maintenance work, where engineering skills are required. Usually women would be limited to checking and mending jobs, ironing and to packing as in Gloria’s case. Where sewing machines are used, they are usually run by men and women alike.

The working conditions and the developments at ITL that we mentioned above applied to Gloria’s situation: her employment was only regularised by a letter of employment in 1992. The delay in the application of the conditions agreed for the industry at large had left her and her workmates with low pay and few benefits. Working hours had only recently been changed from ten hours per day to a three-shift day of seven and a half hours in early 1993.

Gloria is 39 years old. She comes from Edo state, the heartland of the Benin Kingdom, where her father was a minor chief and a farmer with several wives. Her mother was a long distance trader of fish and other food. Gloria very much wanted to go to school after her primary education, but one of her father’s wives dissuaded him from sending any of the girls for education. Only her brothers had that chance. She did try to sit for an exam to enter post-primary education in Ilorin, but her husband was transferred to Lagos before she could finish. She had started to train as a tailor, but found she was not very good at it. So she took a job as a cook with a European company. When they closed down she continued as a cook in various places for about nine years, till she was recruited to ITL by a worker that she knew. Gloria does a little trading on the side. She sells clothes to supplement her income. She buys goods from traders, mainly clothes, but also other things like recently a wall clock. Her main supplier is a friend in her church and her customers are her co-workers and others, who pay by instalments. She takes some interest for herself
and passes on the customers’ instalment payments to her supplier. Her husband also has a fridge and sells soft drinks. She would like to have one of her own. Finally, she buys things for her children to sell on their way to school in order to earn what little they can.

She has no active plans to leave the factory work she has had for close on a decade. “If I see another factory job that is better I may resign and go there. But I do not have enough money to go and trade just like that on my own. You have to have enough money. You must still keep some surplus, to do more trading. It is insecure; it may collapse. One must think very well first of what will be the end. Expenses are great for the growing children and I need a regular income, particularly as my husband earns so little. The salary is regular if not safe, but it is not enough. The prices are very high now and the poor have to go to the same market as the rich, so it is impossible to save. But since I am well known as a no-nonsense woman I may be sacked at any time. I have to be ready for that. Till then I can do my little trading on the side”.

Gloria is active in her church in a way that makes quite some claim on her time. She goes to church every Tuesday and Thursday, straight from work and without going home first. She may also bring her children. She uses a language full of learned religious references and said a long prayer over me as I entered her house, revealing some aptitude and experience as a preacher. The church appears to be her major social context outside work, as well as her major contact for trading inputs. Activities are concentrated to service in the church. There is no strong organization for external work. She does not belong to any other organization, and has never done so. “But I have always been active.”

Her family responsibilities are substantial, more in financial than time respects. She is married and her husband works in a shoe factory. They have five children aged from three to eighteen years old. They stay fairly close to the factory (a bus ride of some fifteen minutes), in a rental building. Gloria and the children share one room in a corridor, the husband has another room by himself on another floor in the same building. She has good support service at home. Of her five children, the elder ones take full care of the younger, so she can just relax in the evenings, read books and go to church, attend to her trade. She normally does no housework at all, but is the one who carries the ultimate responsibility.

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10. Meaning a woman who will not submit to any treatment.
The traditional division of roles between the spouses also prevails: "My husband does nothing in the house. He often goes to visit his friends, or stays home to watch television. Nobody challenges it. I was trained to accept this. It would seem that I do not respect him if I do not". When it comes to financial responsibilities it is also Gloria who carries the main burden, while the husband has to be begged to contribute: "My husband was a trader before, buying and reselling goods from SCOA." Then everything collapsed. So he did not want to work at all and had no income. But I forced him to work. I said, 'Look at the children. The load is too heavy on me. I cannot carry it alone.' So I forced him, begging, kneeling down, begging. He agreed to work, first in another textile factory in Ikeja, now in a small shoe factory in Apapa. But he earns less than I do.

As regards Gloria's experience of women's union work, she tells me that in the 1980s the workers in ITL tried to channel their grievances through the supervisors, who might or might not bother to pass them on to the management. "They were always women, but they are among management," Gloria says. "Not on the side of the workers. If they think they will get into trouble, they will withdraw. They are middlemen. But at the time when there was no union, they filled some of the middlemen function of the union. No renewed attempt to form a union was successful until 1991. Everybody was running for safety, in order not to be sacked."

The executive committee of the abortive union branch of 1981 was an all-female group. For the committee formed in 1991, the men were the ones to be approached by the zonal level union to put up the leadership. When this group of males were in danger of being sacked for their interest in forming a union, it was Gloria who independently approached a neighbouring textile factory branch in order to get the address of the union secretariat and went to solicit higher level support. Later on, she was included in the executive committee, together with four other women to form the majority of their group of nine members.

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11. One of the large multinational trading companies.
12. Ikeja and Apapa are different parts of Greater Lagos.
13. Zonal level union sources confirm this resistance by intimidated workers against being persuaded to organize a branch in the late 1980s. Their final success depended on contacts with workers known to the zonal officers from other factories. (Interview NUTGTWN Lagos Sub-Secretariat February 1993.)
Yet it is not only an easy game working for the union. Gloria says: “The workers hate us, the management hate us. When workers demand something and they present it to the management, but do not get what they demand, the workers will say we have taken bribes. When the union presses the management, it is annoyed and gives the chairman and secretary warning letters. The management does not want the union. It still likes to rule. But it is a baby union. The next executive committee will learn more.”

Concerning the readiness of other women to come forth, Gloria said: “Because of the earlier events when the union executive committee was sacked without any compensation, many were afraid to represent the union in 1991. Now everybody wants to be there. With the new election (April 1993), the first group will go, but another will come in. There is nothing to stop them. We have good support from the zonal office”.

Whether the women workers will generally vote for other women is another matter. Another ordinary female union member at ITL finds it natural that it should be the men who lead the ninety-three per cent women. “It would be good to have a woman chairman. There is nothing a man can do that a woman cannot do. But as of now we need men in order to put us right. They have experience from the last few years. Women cannot come in straight like that without having the experience. We will come later”.

In the meantime, the women feel powerless as a consequence of the subordinated functions they have on the executive. In the words of Gloria: “Like in other companies they choose men as chairman and secretary and women only as treasurer, so that they will not know what they are hiding inside. They do not even recognize us from behind. I am the financial secretary. Many times they have meetings without my knowledge. They do not call even the treasurer. They do not want her. But sometimes, even what we spend they do not want me to know about, or write it down. They say, ‘You do not have to know all!’ This is boring through my heart. Many times I do not know what is going on.”

That these are sensitive issues is indicated by what happened to Gloria after a group discussion which I held with women members of executive committees of several factories in Lagos. Another worker also representing ITL, went to report to the branch leaders, her attitude precisely critical on the matters just discussed. The others then accused her for wanting to take over the union and struck her name from the list of candidates for the executive committee in the pending elections.
ON THE GENDERING OF WORKERS' ORGANISATIONS

The strong representation of women in the work force is most certainly one factor that explains the late formation of unions and the continued poor industrial relations in the garment industry compared to the textile industry as a whole in Nigeria. The employment of women, with their real and expected lesser organized strength, can be understood as one of several strategies of the characteristically small and locally well-entrenched entrepreneurs with the purpose of avoiding adherence to legislated and collectively agreed workers’ rights.14

The story of Gloria at ITL contains information on the way circumstances at the reproduction, labour market and organization levels interrelate to shape a worker's conditions in the work place. In particular it demonstrates how structural conditions and values relating to gender combine to produce the specific conditions experienced by a worker as a woman. We shall here concentrate on summarising her case from the point of view of how conditions at the level of organization are gendered in the interaction with the reproduction and labour market levels of her life. We shall also look at the implications of her contacts with the male dominated union.

At the level of family reproduction, Gloria has an unquestioned and even forced economic responsibility to contribute a substantial share to the upkeep of her children. Her orientation to work outside the home is unchallenged by her family and society at large. This we believe enhances her motivation to act in order to improve her situation at work. She has a husband with whom to share financial family responsibilities. This means that her position in relation to her wage work is not one of absolute dependence. She can challenge her employers without

14. Here we draw from our larger study mentioned in note 4. For the gender aspects of work in the Lagos garment industry, my data contain a survey of four factories, including 130 male and female workers, union officials and managements. Some features of the four factories (where factory B is ILT) are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year. branch</th>
<th>Empl. No.</th>
<th>F%</th>
<th>Owner/mgt</th>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Union formed year</th>
</tr>
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risking her family's entire well-being. She earns more than her husband
does, which also gives her relative autonomy towards him and thereby
some freedom to act. There are of course limits to this freedom, by way
of the prevailing social rules for submission to his interests. This she
admits, but adds that her submission is something justified mainly by
what her relatives might think if she were to break this pattern. Again,
he does not question her participation in economic activity outside the
home.

The availability of support services in her home means that she also
has time for organization work. Although she carries the ultimate practi-
cal reproduction responsibilities, at the age of 39 she can rely on the help
of her older children to take care of the younger ones. This leaves her
time to pursue her church interests and do her extra trading work to
supplement her income in the factory. It also gives her flexibility and
time for the long shifts and over-time on the job demanded by her
employer. Most relevantly from our present point of view, it gives her
time for the meetings and training sessions required in union work.

Gloria has not been able to acquire the formal skills she wanted, due
to the priority given to her brothers' education and later to her hus-
band's needs. Nor has she been trained on the job. This lack of training
limits the extent of the labour market that is available to her and thus
the bargaining power that goes with the possibilities of leaving her job
for other work. This limitation is enhanced by the narrow job designa-
tion in the field of wage work in general for women in Lagos. As for
other types of work, it is well known that relatively abundant opportuni-
ties for economic activity have been established by women in entrepre-
neurial work, especially in the informal sector in Lagos. Gloria's outspo-
ken preference for her relatively more secure wage work, however, has
the same limiting effect on her bargaining power. Her children's security
is worth a lot in the present phase of her life. The limitations entailed by
this are somewhat counter-balanced by the scope for supplementary
income she has developed in trade, which gives her some credible alter-
native. Again, she will not risk quite everything when protesting over her
current conditions.

Her high valuation of the wage work she has got, has resulted in a
notable stability on the job, throughout her child-bearing age. Apart
from her relative freedom in relation to reproductive duties, this length
of employment and accumulated experience on the job, will have
enhanced her value to the employer, particularly as she has now proba-
bly stopped bearing children and thus stopped demanding costly maternity leave. It is not entirely certain whether this compensates for the costs of gratuities on her retirement and the higher wages according to a regulated incremental wage system brought in by the union, when regulating her promotion, security of employment and her economic conditions on termination. It has, however, become more costly to sacked her. She keeps testing the limits by her demonstrated militance, from the basis of self-confidence that her length in employment will have enhanced.\(^{15}\)

There are gender differentiating forces also within the organization sphere. The aspiration and confidence required for action in the public sphere are factors that have their own highly culture-specific determinants. In Gloria’s case we can assume that her church work will have provided her with some of the confidence and militance she has displayed when moving in defence of all workers’ interests on the formation of the union and later offering her participation in union work.

A worker from another factory spoke of the need for “a woman’s shame to be broken off” before she could act effectively as an organizer of her work-mates in relation to male employers. Gloria and other workers in my survey preferred to mention the lack of routine and training for organization and negotiation in the union and workplace context.

As a woman, Gloria has had to face not only the employer but also her workmates and the union officials at various levels. Once on the union committee, she felt powerless in the face of male domination. She found this unacceptable and difficult to submit to. When she complained, she was removed from office.

The NUTGTWN union clearly bears some responsibility for the weak position of women in its organization. At levels above the factory branches it was, up to the time of my survey, an all male structure.

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15. This is contradicted by the dearth of women workers over the age of 40 found in the factories that I have surveyed in Lagos. Is it possible that once the reproductive responsibilities are reduced, the reduced need to play for security will free the women to move into free enterprise, a tendency that is likely to be enforced by the possibility at this age to have accumulated some capital? Regularised employment and adherence to collectively agreed conditions will give rights to severance pay like gratuities. These will also be worth defending by organized action to achieve as large as possible an input to the establishment of such independent activities. The relative prevalence of these different aspirations in the Nigerian context is a complex of questions for further study.
Although zonal officers usually encouraged the inclusion of women on the branch executives, they still endorsed a situation where a majority of female ‘exco’ members, as we found in ITL, was a stark exception. In other surveyed branch committees, one or two women, usually for the financial functions, was the rule. The technique of the zonal union to initiate branch organizations around male workers, whom they knew from union work in other factories, will have enhanced this male bias. The lesser mobility of women workers in itself makes them ineligible for playing such roles as points of contact.

The central Nigeria Labour Congress has, however, made attempts to strengthen the situation of women by establishing a special Women’s Wing for mobilisation and training. In the textile union in Lagos a similar body was just being established in early 1993. The founding female trade unionist\(^\text{16}\) was motivated by disappointment at the low level of union activity of women in her own factory and lamented the fact that women do not appreciate the importance of organized action to achieve the gains that might be possible through union work. She made the interesting assumption that it was not household duties, but rather alternative economic activities that claimed the time and interest that women workers might have given to union work. Thereby she confirmed the relevance of studying the interrelation between different spheres of life in understanding the basis for workers’ organized action and strength, as we have attempted in this paper. She also implied the important circumstance of women’s own preferences and strategies being decisive factors in explaining their organizational behaviour.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our reflections on the experience of one woman are made against the background of our broader study of union orientation and bargaining power of the mainly male workforce in the textile industry in Nigeria at large and among male and female workers in sections of the Lagos industry in particular. We have aimed at illustrating the specific structures, values and social rules that condition female workers’ organization and bargaining power in particular. The role of gender relations in these regards is thus indicated more by implication than by explicit doc-

\(^{16}\) Esther Nwuchwu, interview March 1993.
umentation. The latter will have to await the full account of the Nigerian material that we have here touched on by a preview of this one case.

The purpose of the present paper is to begin to demonstrate how the factors that we include in our analysis of workers' organization and bargaining strength, i.e. the conditions experienced in the production, reproduction and organization spheres of their lives, may each be analysed with regard to the differences observed between women and men. We want to imply that the weaker organization and lesser workers' strength and thereby poorer conditions of work and employment found in female dominated factories in Lagos, as compared to the Nigerian textile sector as a whole, can be analysed as the outcome of structures, values and rules that reflect the prevailing gender order in each of these spheres of life. Together they combine in a sectorally specific gender system\(^{17}\) of industrial work, which is nationally and often also locally specific.

The fact that structural and socio-cultural conditions vary between societies in each of the spheres of life that we want to consider, makes a comparative approach to the study of gendering processes in work place organization an interesting and challenging task. Societies on the West African coast, of which Lagos is a part, are viewed in the literature as peculiar when it comes to women's autonomy in marital relations, their economic responsibility for family reproduction and their orientation and access to work outside the reproduction sphere (see Dennis 1984, 1991; Afonja 1990).

Comparison with female workers in predominantly Muslim parts of West Africa will put the conditions of these Lagos workers in sharp contrast. We know the former have less responsibility to provide economically for their children, but also less autonomy in their choice of economic careers outside the household, and are more restricted in their access to wage labour markets (Pittin 1984; Abdullah 1991). They are also found in the separate and usually even lower positions in the workplace (Abdullah 1991; Olayde 1991).

In other parts of Africa, e.g. East Africa (Ahilire 1992, Bryceson 1980) where activities in the informal trade sector are narrower due to historically different economic structures, women in industrial work will differ with regard to the lesser strength that comes from having very few

\(^{17}\) Concerning the concepts of gender order and gender systems, see Hirdman, 1988.
alternative economic opportunities and experiences. The long tradition of organized action of female textile workers in South Africa will again be reflected in a level of effectiveness in organization and a bargaining power very different from what the organizationally less experienced Lagos women in this industry can achieve (Berger 1992). At the national level, the codification of social values, traditions and rules in each of the considered spheres of life, into laws and institutional structures (such as courts, police and ministries of labour) will help maintain and reproduce these orders in specific ways in different countries.

The application, in a comparative study, of an analytical frame where conditions and practices in the production, reproduction and organization spheres are looked at from a perspective of identifying the inherent gender order, of each in turn and from the point of view of their interlocking impact on organization and bargaining strength, holds promise for demonstrating the range of processes and mechanisms by which the conditions at work are made so different for men and women in general. It is a task that largely remains as far as labour in African industry is concerned. This will be taken up as an outflow of the study of Lagos industry that is reported here. 18

Bibliography


18. The Lagos study reported here is planned as one component of a comparative study to include cases from South Africa and, hopefully, Uganda. It is outlined in Andræ, 1990.


Résumé:

Une ouvrière d’une usine de Lagos: La base de son pouvoir au sein de la famille, de la communauté, du marché du travail et du syndicat

Gunilla Andræ

Cette communication s’appuie initialement sur la médiocrité des conditions de travail dans une usine de textile de Lagos, qui présente des caractéristiques communes aux petites usines de textile: les femmes y constituent la part la plus importante de la force de travail, et l’on y a assez tardivement adopté un mode de régulation d’inspiration syndicale pour gérer les relations entre capital et travail. En reliant dans un discours qui vise à identifier les bases des stratégies d’organisation et du pouvoir de négociation des ouvriers, sur leur lieu de travail et dans l’interaction complexe entre les facteurs de leurs différentes sphères de vies (production, reproduction et organisation), notre objectif est de mettre en évidence l’importance du rôle des sexes dans ce cadre analytique.

La communication donne une première vue du matériel recueilli à Lagos en février–mars 1993, et qui s’inscrit dans une étude plus vaste du pouvoir ouvrier en matière d’organisation et de négociation dans l’industrie textile Nigérienne en général. L’étude plus complète comporte un matériel recueilli par l’observation structurée de situation de travail ouvrier, des entretiens avec les instances de management ainsi qu’une série d’entretiens approfondis avec des ouvrières. Ici, nous présenterons la situation d’une ouvrière que nous avons longuement interviewée. Nous nous demanderons qui elle est, en termes de responsabilités, d’aspiration et de qualification, et nous mettrons en évidence les possibilités qui s’offrent à elle dans les domaines de la production, de la reproduction et de l’organisation. Nous verrons aussi quelle est sa stratégie d’ouvrière dans chacun de ces contextes. Nous entendons ainsi donner une illustration concrète de la façon dont ses conditions de travail en usine deviennent déterminées par le sexe. Les facteurs concernant la reproduction et les responsabilités familiales apparaissent en premier. Les implications des relations entre les sexes sur le marché du travail, au travail et dans le cadre du syndicat sont aussi mises en évidence.
L’objectif de la communication est de commencer à montrer que chacun des facteurs pris en compte dans notre analyse de l’organisation et du pouvoir de négociation des travailleurs peut être analysé séparément à la lumière de différences hommes-femmes et de leur relations. Nous voulons montrer que l’organisation et le pouvoir ouvrier sont plus fragiles, et partant les conditions de travail et d’emploi plus mauvaises dans les usines de Lagos où la main d’œuvre est en majorité féminine que dans la totalité du secteur textile nigérian, et que ces différences peuvent être analysées comme la manifestation de structures, de valeurs et de règles qui reflètent l’ordre régnant entre les sexes dans chacun de ces domaines. Leur combinaison produit un système spécifique de relations entre les sexes dans le domaine du travail industriel.

L’application de ce cadre analytique à une étude comparative permet d’envisager la mise en évidence des multiples processus et mécanismes qui déterminent les différences entre les conditions de travail des hommes et de femmes en général. De telles comparaisons sont en projet, grâce à l’étude de cas dans d’autres régions d’Afrique, pour lesquelles le cas présenté ici constitue en quelque sorte un modèle.
Section 2

Women’s Associations, Women’s Work and Development
La naissance du groupe *Nsaw-Mboum* des femmes de Ngaoundéré

*Anastasie Idole Mekounde*

Plusieurs types d’associations volontaires féminines existent en Afrique noire. Nous tenterons ici de découvrir les nouvelles adaptions du vécu culturel à la vie que développent les femmes Mboum de Ngaoundéré, par la mise en place et la participation à l’une d’entre elles; le *Nsaw-Mboum* (racine Mboum), les Mboum constituant une des ethnies les plus anciennes de l’Adamaoua, une des provinces du Cameroun. Pour y arriver, nous décrirons brièvement l’origine même de sa création; nous aborderons ensuite son organisation, à savoir sa composition, la périodicité de ses réunions, les objectifs fixés et les activités réalisées; et à la fin, nous essaierons, en examinant l’existence de la femme Mboum avant et après son entrée au *Nsaw-Mboum*, de discerner les nouveaux comportements qu’elle adopte après son adhésion à cette association.

**GENÈSE DU GROUPE NSAW-MBOUM**

En Novembre 1988, Mme Titi Astadjoda crée dans la ville de Ngaoundéré, chef-lieu de la province camerounaise de l’Adamaoua, l’Association féminine *Nsaw-Mboum*. Cette femme de quarante-six ans avait constaté, lors de ses voyages à Ekondo-Titi, petite ville du sud-ouest du Cameroun, où son mari avait été affecté, le dynamisme des groupes de femmes de cette région. Nous observerons ici comment «les faits de circulation et les problèmes de migration temporaires ou non, ont une importance très grande pour comprendre la façon dont les hommes com-
munitquent entre eux dans le milieu urbain. Mais ce qui compte surtout c'est l'étude de la circulation des idées et des échanges sur le plan du langage. Etant donné ces faits matériels, et les échanges entre cultures, les villes sont des centres où les échanges entre cultures différentes sont particulièrement intenses» (de Lauwe 1963:53–54).

Revenue à Ngaoundéré, elle réalisait l'énorme retard accumulé par la communauté Mboum sur le plan scolaire: les parents refusaient d'envoyer leurs filles à l'école, parce qu'ils croyaient que l'instruction les rendait indociles et les poussait à la prostitution. Seulement, elle avait remarqué que certaines filles Mboum de Ngaoundéré, même non scolarisées, se livraient quand même au vagabondage sexuel qu'elles considéraient comme un moyen de promotion sociale. C'est à la suite de tous ces constats qu'elle fonda une première association.

Ce groupe, nommé d'abord «Aides-Ménagères» ne survécut pas au-delà d'un an, à cause des malversations financières selon certaines, ou des luttes d'influence selon d'autres; en 1990–1991, il renaquit sous forme de Nsaw-Mboum. Mme Titi réunit d'abord plusieurs de ses voisines Mboum, avant de contacter des femmes d'autres ethnies, et de confier le tout à des leaders différents pour éviter l'atmosphère désastreuse de la première association. Mais là aussi, les dissensions provoquées selon les unes, par une mauvaise gestion des fonds recueillis auprès des femmes selon les autres, par les tiraillements entre adhérentes causés par le multipartisme furent les fosooyeurs de l'organisation.

Mais en janvier 1992, Mme Titi au retour d'un bref déplacement pour des raisons familiales hors de la ville, trouva que quinze femmes parmi celles qui avaient toujours été avec elle s'étaient rassemblées chez elle de leur propre initiative de manière informelle. En effet malgré les nombreuses difficultés rencontrées, les femmes tenaient à continuer à faire vivre cette association et c'est elle qui existe aujourd'hui.

ORGANISATION ET FONCTIONNEMENT DU GROUPE Nsaw-MBOUM

Nous avons étudié plus haut l'origine de ce groupe et il s'avère nécessaire d'examiner à présent son organisation et son fonctionnement. Cette association a été composée, de 1988 à nos jours, de femmes, aussi bien mariées que veuves, divorcées ou célibataires. La tranche d'âge est de 20 à 70 ans, et bien que la majorité soit formée de femmes Mboum, on y trouve en extrême minorité certes, quelques représentantes d'autres ethnies telles que des Fulbe, des Haoussas, des Bayas et même des Boulous.
et des femmes originaires du Mbam. Très nombreuses au début de l’année 1989, presque une cinquantaine, elles ne sont aujourd’hui qu’une quinzaine, qui se réunissent toutes les deux semaines comme cela s’est toujours fait. Tout le monde se connaît dans le groupe, parce que Mme Titi avait, avec M. Saliou son beau-frère, réussi à convaincre les maris du quartier Njaebol et Bélaka où elle avait habité, de laisser venir leurs épouses aux réunions du groupe, en leur expliquant que celles-ci avaient un caractère social. En effet, selon la religion musulmane à laquelle tous appartiennent, «la sortie de la femme doit être autorisée par l’époux ou le tuteur légal» (Ascha 1978:134). C’est ainsi qu’il n’y eut d’abord que ses voisines pour y participer, puis d’autres y entrèrent par cooptation: amies et parentes des participantes habitant parfois assez loin. Sur le plan hiérarchique, les deux premiers groupes comptaient une présidente, une trésorière et un commissaire aux comptes. Mais l’association qui tourne actuellement fonctionne de façon totalement informelle et ne compte qu’une trésorière, qui est Mme Titi elle-même.

Les buts poursuivis par l’association étaient et restent le renforcement de l’entraide entre les femmes et le développement d’une certaine autonomie économique qui permettrait de subvenir aux besoins personnels et familiaux. Pour atteindre ces objectifs, les groupes ont mis sur pied plusieurs projets. Ainsi, dans la première association, la présidente Mme Belinga Lydie, maîtresse d’école primaire sollicitée par Mme Titi pour sa grande expérience de la dynamique des groupes dans les milieux ecclésiastiques protestants, se chargeait de la préparation au mariage des jeunes filles, en leur apprenant comment tenir une maison moderne. Le programme pédagogique devait être complété par d’autres activités comme la création d’un champ communautaire et l’organisation de cours de broderie, de tricot et de couture, qui ne furent malheureusement pas réalisés faute de cohésion dans le groupe. Des recettes de cuisine étaient également échangées entre femmes. C’est dans cet esprit que Mme Titi avait montré aux adhérentes de son groupe comment confectionner le poisson frais à la sauce tomate assaisonnée d’épices du sud du pays, comme le njansang, graine jaune au goût spécial.

Le deuxième groupe qui succéda au premier n’a guère changé d’activités. Mais c’est ce groupe qui a ajouté aujourd’hui, en plus de tout cela, l’apprentissage de la confection d’objets artisanaux typiquement Mboum, qui a effectivement démarré. Les femmes on donné 25 francs CFA (100 francs CFA correspondent à un franc français) chacune et ont acheté de la laine de plusieurs couleurs et de la paille appropriée pour
apprendre chez une spécialiste qu’elles ont invitée et payée, la fabrication de vans multicolores. De plus, les célibataires de l’association ont commencé à aider les vieilles femmes du quartier, plus ou moins encadrées par des parents lointains, en leur fournissant du bois de chauffage, des morceaux de savon et en leur faisant de l’eau. Les femmes mariées ne participent pas encore à cette œuvre parce qu’il leur faut l’accord préalable de leurs maris.

LES FEMMES MBOUM ET L’ASSOCIATION FÉMININE NSAW-MBOUM DE NGAOUNDÉRÉ

Nous avons proposé au début de ce travail, en observant leur vie avant et après leur adhésion au Nsaw-Mboum, d’essayer de saisir comment cette organisation a provoqué une autre manière de voir le vécu culturel chez les femmes Mboum. Elles l’expriment par ce qui les différencie des femmes voisines d’autres ethnies. Ainsi, elles citent plusieurs exemples allant de l’esthétique, comme la coiffure et les scarifications, aux activités économiques et artisanales, comme la pratique de l’agriculture et la fabrication de vans multicolores aux couleurs spécifiques, sans oublier tout l’ensemble comportemental essentiellement basé sur la soumission aux parents d’abord, aux maris ensuite.

A ce point, il s’avère nécessaire d’examiner les éléments du vécu culturel d’un adulte: le sexe, les activités économiques, le statut matrimonial, le lieu de résidence qui peut être urbain ou rural, l’ethnie, et enfin la culture globale à laquelle il adhère par les différentes relations tissées avec son environnement. La méthodologie que nous avons utilisée est l’observation participante; ainsi, en plus des interviews recueillies auprès des adhérentes, nous avons assisté à plusieurs réunions.

LES FEMMES MBOUM AVANT LEUR ADHÉSION AU NSAW-MBOUM

Interrogées sur leur mode de vie avant leur adhésion au Nsaw-Mboum, les femmes avouent que leurs sorties étaient fort limitées. Ceci a été confirmé par Aladji Aboubacar, Hadith à Médine, qui, lors d’un entretien a précisé qu’on: «conseille aux femmes de sortir quand les rues sont peu fréquentées: tôt le matin ou dans la soirée et de se faire accompagner (pour la sécurité). Elles ne doivent sortir qu’en cas de stricte nécessité dans le cadre familial: visite aux malades, assistance aux deuils, baptêmes, ou naissances et aux mariages». Elles ne se connaissaient même pas,
bien que parfois voisines de quartier, et n'étaient guère au courant des problèmes des unes et des autres.

Selon plusieurs d'entre elles, les après-midis étaient souvent consacrés à des tâches ménagères ou à ne rien faire, et les recettes de cuisine étaient celles qu'elles connaissaient déjà avant d'être mariées. Soulignons que le dialogue avec leurs maris, empreints de respect et d'affection, ne faisait guère allusion à une autre forme d'information, hormis les sujets traditionnels censés lier les époux, comme par exemple la santé des enfants. De plus, celles qui désiraient acquérir un modeste capital pour créer ou développer une activité économique, ou pour améliorer leur niveau de vie et celui de leurs enfants, étaient obligées de le chercher uniquement dans leur famille, tout comme celles qui avaient besoin d'aide pour des événements nécessitant des dépenses somptuaires comme les deuils, les mariages et les accouchements.

Bref, ces femmes se retrouvaient donc souvent isolées, faisant face à des épreuves morales, ou à des problèmes économiques, sans aucun cadre formel (ou informel) pour échanger leurs expériences du vécu quotidien et leurs idées.

LES FEMMES MBOUM APRÈS LEUR ADHÉSION AU NSAW-MBOUM

A présent, lorsque les participantes au Nsaw-Mboum font le bilan de ce qu'elles ont acquis en allant aux réunions du groupe, elles établissent plusieurs constats. D'abord, elles apprécient énormément le fait de diversifier leurs fréquentations, multipliant par là les possibilités de sortir de la maison, soit pour assister aux réunions du groupe, soit pour aider les autres adhérentes lors des événements tels que les fêtes à l'occasion de rites de passage. Elles entrent ainsi en contact avec nombre d'autres femmes que celles de leurs familles respectives, ce qui ne leur était guère possible avant. En nouant ces nouvelles relations, elles élargissent considérablement leur horizon surtout par les différents projets communautaires (cultures des champs) et pédagogiques (broderie, couture, cours de cuisine) élaborés ensemble.

Elles font l'expérience d'un autre type de communication avec leurs époux qui les interrogent sur leurs activités dans le groupe. Elles rénovent ainsi leur expérience du vécu conjugal en dépassant le cadre traditionnel de la concession et en modifiant positivement, même si c'est encore dans une mesure apparemment minime, leurs relations avec leurs maris.
Elles soulignent ensuite l’aide financière que leur apporte la tontine\(^1\) en leur permettant d’étoffer ou de mettre en place un petit commerce qu’elles montent pour avoir de l’argent. C’est ainsi par exemple que certaines d’entre elles, qui ne vendaient que du bois donné par leurs maris chauffeurs de camion, ont pu, grâce à l’argent fourni par la tontine, développer leurs affaires en achetant de la farine, du sucre et du sel qu’elles revendent discrètement dans leurs concessions. Le *Nsaw-Mboum* leur a amené en plus d’autres clients à qui elles peuvent procurer les marchandises à crédit, car elles sont sûres d’être payées sur la base de la confiance réciproque qui règne dans le groupe.

Grâce aux bénéfices, elles sont plus à même d’assurer leurs responsabilités familiales, car ce sont elles qui «en fin de compte, doivent affronter leurs enfants affamés et démunis» (Hollusteiner et Badrour 1980:102). Donc, «outre la contribution au financement des besoins domestiques (accessoires ménagers ou vêtements pour enfants), la tontine permet de financer l’activité informelle» (Lelart 1990:45). Cette dernière leur donne aussi la possibilité, même si elles ont des revenus instables, de s’insérer dans la société moderne dont «l’argent devient une mesure précise et essentielle, utilisée de mille et une façons. Toute l’organisation actuelle du travail dans les sociétés technologiques s’effondrerait sans la mesure monétaire» (Rocher 1968:118).

Une autre réalisation du groupe, unanimement reconnue comme valable, surtout par les maris, est l’entraide sociale que les femmes ont réussi à développer entre elles. Les cotisations allègent la charge financière des deuils, des mariages et des accouchements, et la présence physique, tout en faisant plaisir aux participantes, aide l’assistée sur le plan des tâches ménagères toujours multiples à ces occasions, sans parler de la chaleur affective qui réconforte.

C’est finalement dans ce groupe que plusieurs de ces femmes ont trouvé une plate-forme d’échanges d’expériences et d’idées; et de leurs discussions se sont dégagées plusieurs convictions, dont la plus importante a été la nécessité d’instruire les filles, à telle enseigne que certaines ont décidé elles-mêmes d’assumer financièrement la scolarité primaire de

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\(^1\) La tontine est associée à des pratiques de solidarité. Il s’agit d’un groupe d’épargne dont les règles de fonctionnement varient selon les groupes. Les membres cotisent selon une périodicité définie à l’avance, et après un certain temps (fixé également à l’avance) cet argent est remis à un des membres («toucher» sa part, dit-on) qui en fera ce qu’il veut. Chacun à son tour pourra «toucher» sa part. Dans le cas du groupe *Nsaw Mboum*, la cotisation est hebdomadaire.
leurs filles. En effet, plusieurs pères privilégient la scolarité des garçons alors que les filles, qu’ils destinent obligatoirement au mariage, ne suivent que les cours de l’école coranique qu’ils jugent suffisants pour elles. Les adhérentes se rendent ainsi compte que «le droit de l’enfant à l’instruction a priorité sur le droit de la famille sur l’enfant: c’est là un important changement d’attitudes qui illustre une profonde transformation des mentalités à l’endroit de la science» (ibid. 1968:123).


CONCLUSION

Après avoir étudié la vie des femmes Mboum de Ngaoundéré, avant leur adhésion au Nsaw-Boum et après leur affiliation à cette organisation, nous constatons qu’elles ont développé de nouvelles adaptations de leur vécu culturel. En effet, elles ont pu assouplir la pratique de l’Islam en atténuant considérablement la quasi-claustrophobie vécue jusque là selon les règles de l’Islam, ce qui les a ouvertes à leur environnement humain immédiat, symbolisé par les autres femmes. Les formes d’apprentissage et de connaissance acquises lors des réunions leur ont permis d’introduire un dialogue inédit dans leurs couples.

Il faut aussi signaler, en plus de ces avantages, l’aide financière que leur offre la tontine de Nsaw-Mboun et qui leur donne les moyens, grâce aux modestes activités économiques qu’elles mettent sur pied, de s’introduire dans le système monétaire moderne par le biais du secteur informel. Nous ne manquerons pas de souligner l’importance des réseaux de solidarité qu’elles arrivent à créer pour leurs membres. Elles réussissent ainsi à atteindre une ouverture totale au monde actuel, non seulement grâce à cet esprit d’entraide, mais aussi grâce à la conscience ethnique qu’elles acquièrent en mesurant l’écart de scolarisation qui les sépare des autres groupements sociaux camerounais. En comparant leur style de vie à celui des femmes des autres ethnies, elles réalisent leur retard dans l’insertion dans la société dite moderne et, par l’effort qu’elles déploient pour le rattraper, elles s’ouvrent à d’autres univers culturels.
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Abstract:

The Creation of the Women’s Group *Nsaw-Mboum* in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon

*Anastasie Idole Mekounde*

The Mboum is one of the oldest ethnic groups in the province of Adamawa. For some Mboum women in the town of Ngaoundéré, the creation of a women’s voluntary association called *Nsaw-Mboum* (of Mboum origin) has signified new and useful adaptations to contemporary urban life, which earlier was dominated by female seclusion and little contact with other women outside the domestic sphere. Started in 1988, the association’s first phase of existence did not last for more than a year, due to financial problems and internal conflicts. In 1990–91 it revived, but it was not until 1992 that the activities of the *Nsaw-Mboum* group of fifteen women found their form and content, largely due to the organizational talents of a certain Mme Titi, a woman of great importance to the association. Today the association actually consists of two women’s groups: one was meant to have courses in sewing and embroidering, which were never realized, while the women did interchange food recipes and learnt new dishes from the south of Cameroon from Mme. Titi. The other group has added the production of handicraft objects to their activities, which has become very popular among the women.

The group *Nsaw-Mboum* offers its members a decent and respectable reason to leave their homes for group meetings and to attend other women’s ritual passage parties such as marriages and funerals, to assist in food preparations etc. on these ritual occasions in a reciprocal way. The members also have their own “tontine”, a rotating savings association, which makes small economic investments or transactions by the individual group members possible. These kinds of activities are at the same time a training in group solidarity and social interaction, which the women need, because of their former isolation in their homes.
La situation des femmes au Sénégal en milieu rural et dans la pêche artisanale
Quelques éléments d'analyse

Ndèye Coumba Fall Diop

INTRODUCTION

La prise en compte de la dimension femme dans l'analyse des problèmes liés au sous-développement dans le Tiers-monde a pris aujourd'hui une importance réelle. Les femmes ont été et sont encore l'objet de plusieurs études et enquêtes. Dans un pays comme le Sénégal, leurs rôles ont été perçus différemment selon les époques. Les couches qui composent cette population ont été la cible privilégiée des politiques, des chercheurs et autres «développeurs».

Ce texte n’a pas la prétention de présenter de manière définitive les femmes au Sénégal, il est une contribution à la réflexion sur la connaissance/reconnaissance de cette population diversifiée que constituent les femmes. Il s’appuiera sur une expérience dans le secteur agricole et dans celui de la pêche artisanale. Les raisons de ce choix sont surtout guidées par un souci de présenter les femmes actives dans des secteurs socio-économiques assez différents et qui, malgré les similitudes observées dans leurs situations, pointe quelques différences dont il faut tenir compte dans l’analyse de la situation des femmes au Sénégal.
LES FEMMES EN MILIEU PAYSAN: FEMMES DE YASSI

Yassi est un village situé dans le centre du Sénégal, en zone wolof fortement influencée par la religion, la confrérie mouride et le culte du travail. Les femmes du Groupement de Promotion Féminine (GPF) que nous allons étudier, assez jeunes pour la plupart, sont toutes mariées et portent fièrement sur leur dos ou dans les bras leur dernier enfant. Ces paysannes sont accueillantes, dévouées à leur familles, et à leur guide religieux. Elles constituent la main-d’œuvre la plus constante pour l'économie familiale villageoise.

Dans cette région de Diourbel, l'agriculture est loin d'être prospère à cause des aléas climatiques, la sécheresse et une forte dégradation du milieu naturel. Ce village, pourtant caractérisé par une grande motivation des habitants dans la lutte pour la survie, connaît de graves problèmes d'approvisionnement en eau. La condition des femmes de Yassi est celle de la majorité des femmes rurales dans les zones marquées par la tradition religieuse:

-inexistence du droit à la propriété foncière: elles n’héritent pas de terres mais exploitent des parcelles mises à leur disposition par leurs maris
-elles sont dans leur totalité analphabètes
-leur pouvoir social est quasi nul. Si elles sont les premières éducatrices des enfants, il n’en demeure pas moins que les décisions importantes concernant les enfants sont prises par les hommes (Ex.: décision d’envoi d’un enfant à l’école Coranique ou Daara hors du village).
-toute l’économie de survie repose sur elles à cause de la forte migration temporaire des hommes vers les villes en saison sèche
-les corvées d’eau et de bois restent leur activité essentielle dans cette zone quasi désertique.

Malgré toutes ces contraintes, elles ont quelquefois su adapter leurs formes d'organisation traditionnelles aux modèles proposés par l’Etat, afin de bénéficier des aides financières et techniques.

Ainsi le groupement de Yassi, qui compte une centaine de membres, développe des activités de survie pour la consommation, la transformation et la commercialisation de produits surtout agricoles. Dans ce domaine, l'exploitation d'un champ collectif rigoureusement organisé, leur permet d’avoir des revenus monétaires par la vente de la récolte et par la conservation des produits en prévision de la soudure. La transformation d’une partie de leur récolte personnelle, par la fabrication d’huile
mation d'une partie de leur récolte personnelle, par la fabrication d'huile avec un système manuel de presse, est un moyen de pourvoir la caisse communautaire des femmes.

Cette caisse fonctionne comme une «banque» dans la mesure où les cotisations versées par chaque membre, ainsi que les revenus tirés des diverses activités communautaires, sont redistribuées sous forme de prêts avec intérêt aux membres et aux villageois.

La gestion et l'exploitation d'un moulin à mil (acquis par l'intermédiaire de l'État, comme récompense), qui attire les femmes de hameaux voisins, constitue une source de revenus appréciable puisque, hormis le facteur rentabilité, elle offre des opportunités de développer des capacités de gestion d'infrastructures collectives et crée une relation avec une banque.

De plus, les femmes s'occupent du petit bétail. Ce travail, certes traditionnel, est aujourd'hui mis à profit. Elles ont su profiter de leur savoir-faire dans ce domaine et se sont lancées dans l'embouche ovine, opération de commercialisation de moutons, qu'elles renouvelent chaque année à l'approche de la fête musulmane de l'Aïd.1 Il faut dire que ce groupement, déjà primé par les services de l'État pour son dynamisme, est titulaire d'un compte dans une institution financière qui leur octroie des prêts relativement substantiels, qu'elles ont jusqu'à présent remboursés dans les délais. Elles ont pu économiser assez pour constituer un apport financier à verser à la banque. Ce fait est assez significatif du niveau d'organisation et de détermination de ces femmes, car au Sénégal aussi, une garantie, ou un apport financier assez important, est la condition à remplir pour l'octroi d'un prêt par une banque.

Face à la nécessité de vivre et de survivre, les femmes de Yassi ont essayé de faire un bois de village et un jardin maraîcher afin d'assurer le quotidien alimentaire (un système d'arrosage à tour de rôle, avec un certain nombre de bassines et de plants à arroser par femme et par jour). Mais elles ont été obligées de arrêter cette activité qui, non seulement les surchargeaient de travail, mais ne leur donnait pas non plus assez de résultats à la hauteur de leurs efforts.

La dynamique des femmes semble, en apparence, uniquement basée sur ce groupement fort. En réalité, ce sont toutes les formes d'organisation traditionnelles des femmes de tous les âges qui entrent en jeu pour

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1. Aïd ou tabaski, la plus grande fête religieuse annuelle de l'Islam. A cette occasion, chaque famille sacrifie un mouton.
atteindre un but global: participer et initier des actions pour améliorer la vie quotidienne des villageois. Par exemple, avec le fruit de leur travail, une case de santé a été construite et la Croix Rouge a fourni l’équipement. La mosquée, ainsi que le marabout-guide spirituel bénéficient de parts de leurs revenus. Dans ce village, les hommes sont conscients de la part effective de contribution des femmes, du moins en ce qui concerne le travail. Malgré une apparente mise en avant du groupement des femmes (elles sont la seule entité sociale bien organisée au village) et un soutien clamé par les hommes, l’organisation et le système de décision restent entre les mains des hommes. Et les femmes sont conscientes de leur position, car, comme elles le disent souvent par des citations imagées: «lorsqu’un bébé rit aux éclats, il faut comprendre que c’est sa mère qui le porte et joue avec lui». Cela veut dire que si les femmes sont en mesure de s’adonner à des activités rémunératrices, c’est parce que les hommes, qui sont aussi leurs pères et époux, l’ont favorisé ou permis.

Cette claire conscience du rôle et du pouvoir des hommes sur elles et sur l’expansion de leurs organisations, devrait faire réfléchir. Ce constat de «faiblesses» dans leurs rôles traditionnellement définis, loin d’être pour elles une cause de démotivation ou de révolte, ne revêt aucune importance devant la nécessité de trouver des solutions, même provisoires, aux problèmes qui les interpellent tous les jours en tant que mères, épouses, maîtresses de foyer, et cultivatrices.

Cette situation d’organisation, «promotionnelle» certes, est vécue avec une certaine fierté, mais on trouve aussi le souci d’associer les hommes à la réalisation des activités. Hormis le rôle d’innovatrices dans la recherche de stratégies pour répondre aux différentes sollicitations, on peut dire que les femmes de Yassi nourrissent d’une certaine manière la migration saisonnière des hommes vers les centres urbains. En effet, leurs activités de contre-saison assurent de petits revenus qui servent à:

- nourrir le reste de la famille, en se procurant des produits manufacturés indispensables
- réaliser de petites épargnes communes pouvant être un fonds de crédit qu’elles peuvent prêter aux jeunes en partance
- épargner individuellement pour le départ d’un fils de la famille: étant analphabètes et sous le joug du fait religieux, les filles ne quittent le village que pour rejoindre un époux
- enfin, dans les cas où le mari est en ville, la survie de la famille est assurée par la femme après l’épuisement des produits de la récolte.
Néanmoins, ce rôle économique, même s’il est théoriquement reconnu par les hommes, ne contribue en rien à faire gagner aux femmes une place dans le système décisionnel familial et communautaire. Elles restent encore, sur des questions importantes engageant la communauté, en dehors des circuits de concertation limités aux notables.

LES OPÉRATRICES DE LA PÊCHE ARTISANALE

On les trouve sur les plages du Sénégal, par dizaines, assises sur des seaux toute la journée sous des abris de fortune, et pendant toute l’année. Elles sont revendeuses, mareyeuses ou transformatrices de produits de la mer. Leur activité est essentielle dans le circuit de la pêche artisanale au Sénégal mais reste pour une large part dans un domaine informel. Les femmes rurales ne sont pas les seules à inventer de nouvelles formes de «promotion» face aux difficultés liées à leur environnement socio-économique; dans d’autres secteurs, suivant leurs problèmes, les autres femmes ont, elles aussi, des stratégies.

Les opératrices de la pêche artisanale ont besoin d’argent liquide tous les jours pour acheter et/ou vendre de la matière première à transformer. Celles de la plage de Hann, quartier dans la périphérie de Dakar, que nous avons approchées, ont mis au point un système sophistiqué de génération et de collecte d’argent frais et de produits que seules les femmes savent gérer: un vaste réseau de solidarité lie ces femmes de la plage face aux mareyeurs équipés et aux pêcheurs (capitaines et propriétaires d’embarcation).

Ce réseau prend ses racines dans la communauté de ce quartier (famille, voisinage, amitié, classe d’âge) qui vit essentiellement de l’exploitation de la mer. C’est sur cette plage de Hann, le plus important point de débarquement, que les femmes, initiées pour la plupart par leurs mères, ou leurs maris pêcheurs, ont développé leurs activités. Mais leurs moyens sont limités par la conjugaison de plusieurs facteurs:

– elles ont un faible niveau éducationnel, 90% sont analphabètes;
– elles ont des devoirs traditionnels à accomplir (ménage, cuisine, enfants);
– elles ont une faible connaissance des circuits formels du marché de la pêche artisanale où elles doivent se mouvoir;
– elles ont une compétence insuffisante en gestion, leur activité reste «artisanale»;
elles sont la cible de mareyeurs et autres exportateurs malhonnêtes; leur activité restant journalière, elles sont obligées de vendre même à bas prix le poisson qu'elle ne peuvent conserver;
- elles sont insuffisamment informées des possibilités (même limitées) qu'elles peuvent avoir au niveau du crédit formel.

Ces contraintes, dont elles sont conscientes, sont atténuées par l'existence des réseaux de solidarité dont nous parlions plus haut. Il existe sur cette plage un système de cotisation par groupe de femmes variant de dix à une centaine de membres avec des interrelations. Ces cotisations, véritables épargnes fonctionnelles, permettent chaque jour, chaque semaine, chaque mois ou chaque année, de faire acquérir à chaque femme, à tour de rôle, un capital. Ainsi les cotisations journalières (nattubès) sont reversées à quelques unes chaque jour et la rotation s'établit sur tous les jours de l'année. Ces sommes journalières, bien que modestes par rapport à un crédit bancaire, sont un apport significatif pour une ou plusieurs opérations de vente selon la saison. Par ailleurs, les autres systèmes de génération de fonds plus importants permettent d'augmenter le capital, mais aussi de se lancer dans d'autres activités génératrices de revenus. Par exemple, nous avons observé une tontine\(^2\) annuelle où les «gagnantes» peuvent effectuer un pèlerinage et en même temps acheter des bijoux ou des tissus précieux à revendre dans le quartier, afin de pallier les difficultés de remboursement de crédit ou de résoudre des problèmes familiaux qui ne manquent pas de se poser en période de basse saison.

Par leur dynamisme, les femmes de Hann ont aujourd'hui gagné la confiance de pêcheurs (souvent parent, mari ou ami) qui n'hésitent pas à leur confier la vente des produits débarqués. Elles supervisent le débarquement et négocient avec les mareyeurs la vente du produit sur la plage. Certaines, avec l'aide de leurs familles, on réussi à être propriétaires d'embarcations (une petite minorité). Mieux, certaines usines de transformation de poisson s'adressent directement à elles quelquefois pour s'approvisionner.

Connaissant le rôle traditionnel assigné aux femmes, on ne peut manquer de s'interroger sur la manière dont elles doivent gérer le temps, quand on sait qu'elles sont mères et épouses. Les plus démunies effec-

\(^2\) Association d'épargne dont les membres se réunissent régulièrement, en versant à chaque réunion la même somme d'argent. Les membres disposent à tour de rôle de la somme réunie.
tuent les tâches ménagères journalières en même temps que leurs activi-
tés, si elles n'ont pas de filles assez grandes pour les remplacer pendant
qu'elles sont sur la plage. D'autres sont obligées d'engager des jeunes
filles qui effectuent les tâches ménagères et s'occupent de leurs enfants.
Les maris, qui d'ailleurs ne s'opposent généralement pas à leur activité,
voient la contribution des femmes essentielle pour l'économie familiale.
Comme les femmes rurales, leurs revenus sont d'abord destinés à la
famille et à l'épargne pour accroître l'opérationnalité de leur travail,
améliorer l'habitat, la santé et l'éducation des membres de la famille.
Quelquefois, elles arrivent à réaliser une épargne qui leur permet d'avoir
des biens mobiliers, ce qui est une aspiration quasi générale.

Qu'en est-il des circuits officiels qui tentent d'aider les opératrices?
Réputées bonnes payeuses, certaines institutions financières, lorsqu'elles
n'exigent pas de garantie, essayent d'attirer ces opératrices, bonnes éparg-
gnantes et innovatrices dans les systèmes de génération de revenus. La
nécessité de se constituer en groupement formel pour accéder au prêt
bancaire est le premier handicap (formalités administratives, division en
petits groupes conseillés par la banque etc.) qu'elles résolvent à leur
manièrê: se scinder en petits groupes par affinité afin de mieux profiter
des services offerts. Toutes ces opératrices n'ont pas le même niveau de
conscience de cette nécessité d'adopter une nouvelle forme d'association.
Leur analphabétisme les maintient hors des institutions financières
qu'elles sentent encore étrangères à leurs habitudes sociales de généra-
tion de revenus.

Ainsi, lorsqu'elles sont constituées en Groupement d'Intérêt Économique,3
elles peuvent accéder au Crédit Agricole4 qui a enregistré une nette
augmentation des crédits destinés aux femmes dans son Programme
Pêche. Pourtant, cet effort semble insuffisant pour satisfaire les besoins
journaliers de ces opératrices. De plus, en ce qui concerne le secteur de la
transformation du poisson, leurs faibles revenus ne leur permettent pas
d'améliorer leurs moyens de production (couteaux, tables de salage, bass-
sines, claires de séchage etc.), souvent détériorés et insalubres, ce qui rend
leur production difficilement compétitive sur le marché international.

Comme les femmes de Yassi, les opératrices de la pêche artisanale
sont encore inconscientes du rôle économique de plus en plus important
qu'elles prennent dans ce secteur. Elles restent dominées par la hiérarchie

3. Structure légère, sans capital, permettant de développer la prospection et la
commercialisation sous un intitulé commun.
4. Une des plus importantes banques de dépôt françaises.
des rôles et des responsabilités dans l’organisation sociale traditionnelle, encore en vigueur.

Même si aujourd’hui, par la situation géographique de Hann (près de la capitale), elles sont enquêtées, «encadrées» par des animatrices de programmes de développement ou d’autres structures qui cherchent à leur faire prendre conscience de leur part véritable dans l’économie, elles restent dépendantes du carcan tradition-religion et étrangères aux modèles mis en place pour elles. Il est vrai qu’elles essayent de se faire une place dans les organisations de quartier, cependant elles y sont souvent «épaulées» par des hommes aux motivations diverses.

On peut constater qu’on ne parle plus de la pêche artisanale sans au moins faire allusion au travail de ces opératrices. Cela constitue un grand pas dans la prise en compte ne serait-ce que de leur existence dans le champ économique de la pêche artisanale.

SURVIVANCE ET ADAPTATION DES PRATIQUES TRADITIONNELLES DE SOLIDARITÉ

Nous pouvons dire sans risque de nous tromper que la plupart des formes d’organisation et d’innovation mises en œuvre par les populations féminines du Sénégal doivent leur survie et leur efficacité à leur profond ancrage. Ces racines sont comme de «vieilles recettes» retrouvées pour s’adapter et s’insérer dans la problématique générale de survie des peuples défavorisés. Cette capacité et cette détermination des femmes ont leurs sources principales dans leur rôle traditionnel de productrices et de reproductrices. En milieu rural aussi bien qu’en zone périurbaine de la pêche, les femmes, quel que soit leur degré d’implication dans des programmes officiels, sont d’abord une couche sociale avec une forte tradition de rassemblement et de création de réseaux divers qui leur permet, plus qu’aux hommes, de trouver ensemble des solutions ponctuelles.

Une typologie des réseaux de solidarité «informels» en vigueur aujourd’hui chez les femmes sénégalaises pourrait être exposée comme suit:

- les dahiras à caractère religieux sont des associations qui rassemblent les personnes d’une même confrérie;
- les tours de famille sont des regroupements qui renforcent les liens de solidarité familiale;
- les associations de classe d’âge;
les **natt** (une sorte de tontine) sont les plus sophistiqués. Ils sont créés selon divers critères à des fins bien précises: fêtes, soutien alimentaire, ustensiles, etc;

les **associations sportives et culturelles**, bien que nouvelles et créées par les jeunes, sont soutenues par les femmes.

Il faut dire que tous ces réseaux ont un système de caisse alimenté par les cotisations des membres et parfaitement adapté au tissu socio-économique en place. Une femme peut se retrouver dans plusieurs réseaux à la fois. Ainsi, sans affirmer qu’une transformation d’identité face à la crise économique se réalise, nous parlerons plutôt d’un enclenchement du processus de transformation du vécu quotidien des femmes, dans une situation de paradoxe: la survivance de la domination des hommes et la place de plus en plus grande prise par les femmes dans le tissu socio-économique.

Dans ces micro-sociétés observées, il est encore notoire que l’autorisation accordée par l’homme à la femme dans l’exercice de son activité est généralement primordiale. Analphabètes dans la plupart des cas, leurs droits juridiques, aussi mineurs qu’ils soient, sont inconnus des femmes. Cet ordre juridique qui leur est presque étranger est souvent opposé à la conscience traditionnelle et religieuse dans laquelle elles ont été éduquées. Il en résulte que dans les deux cas, les activités sont pour la plupart développées à partir de connaissances héritées de leurs mères, acceptables dans la conscience de la société comme normales.

Seulement, c’est par leur travail que ces femmes arrivent à sortir du carcan familial, à saisir des opportunités, à rencontrer d’autres réalités. Les paysannes, géographiquement éloignées de la capitale et vivant dans un environnement qui ne cesse de se dégrader, ont comme uniques possibilités de sortie les réseaux tracés pour elles par les notables (chef de village, marabout), par les techniciens du développement et les réseaux de solidarité informels indiqués ci-dessus. Elles sont encore, du point de vue du développement de leurs activités et de leur épanouissement, «derrière les cases» pour faire du maraîchage, de l’embouche ou transformer des produits pour la consommation, même si les techniques sont parfois nouvelles.

Cependant, les **opératrices** de la pêche artisanale qui, apparemment, du fait que leur activité est intermédiaire dans un secteur en plein essor, développent de nouveaux réseaux et de nouvelles idées à partir de leur domaine de travail, car elles sont «hors des maisons» toute la journée.
Tout se passe comme si les identités des femmes se révèlent et s'affirment différemment lorsqu'on tient compte de leur champ d'action selon qu'il se situe dans ou hors de la maison.

CONCLUSION

Il est certes connu que les femmes souffrent de la domination culturelle des hommes. Nous sommes convaincus que la recherche pour l’amélioration de la situation des femmes au Sénégal perdrait beaucoup à s’obstiner dans la généralisation. Il n’existe pas une réalité féminine une et homogène, mais des réalités qui, si elles ont pour base commune le poids de la tradition et de la religion, se différencient par les domaines d’action, par l’histoire et par la culture du groupe de base dont elles sont issues: les relations entre les divers facteurs qui caractérisent la complexité sociale.

On constate une nécessité de spécifier, par une recherche rigoureuse, la situation des femmes et leur participation à l’effort général pour le développement. Nous nous référons ici aux couches les moins informées: les femmes défavorisées. Nous parlons d’une couche sociale, composée d’individus, avec leurs aspirations, leurs intérêts propres, à des moments précis de leur histoire, dans des endroits divers et en relation constante avec d’autres acteurs sociaux. Ne faut-il pas se donner le temps, les moyens et les instruments adéquats pour analyser à chaque fois la complexité de la situation des femmes en vue d’actions de développement pertinentes?
Abstract:

The Situation of Rural Women and Women Engaged in Small Scale Fishing in Senegal: Some Elements of Analysis

Ndèye Coumba Fall Diop

This chapter supports the idea that women are a diversified population, about which one cannot generalize. They constitute a highly heterogeneous group with less things in common than politicians, researchers and ‘developers’ sometimes seem to believe. The presentation of women in Senegal from two different sectors; one rural and one consisting of small scale fishing, illustrates this fact. The analysis is based on a study of a rural village in the centre of Senegal and a fishing village in the outskirts of Dakar.

Compared with the fishmongers the rural village women are spatially more limited to the domestic domain, where they remain invisible to other people than the household members and the villagers. Rural women in groups are actively engaged in agricultural and forestry work, using the loans that they have got through their cooperative for common income generating activities. The cooperative is founded with the help of the state and based on the women’s traditional associations.

The female fishmongers on the beach near the capital are fully visible in their daily work as they buy and sell fish. The men have got used to their presence and their husbands accept their efforts, which generates badly needed income. Due to the bank restrictions for individuals without considerable sums of money, the women engaged in small scale fishing often lack the opportunity of taking loans for bigger investments. Instead they have their own skilfully elaborated rotating funds system, which provides them with some capital, though never sums big enough to compete with the big men in the small scale fishing trade.

One thing that unites the two groups of women is, though, the men’s domination over the women. Even if the women provide more or less alone for their families, they remain without the power of decision taking of any importance in society and at the household level. At the same time, diversified socio-economic conditions affect women’s identities in different ways. As shown in the chapter, the variations could be understood in terms of whether the women are visible or invisible, and if women work outside or inside the household.
La *la shwo cwo*, «la femme qui prend la grossesse»

Les accoucheuses traditionnelles dans la société senoufo du Mali

*Jasmine Abel Jessen*

Au Mali, les accouchements contrôlés par les services de santé ne représentent que treize pour-cent. Ce qui veut dire que le reste des accouchements est fait par les accoucheuses ou sans aucune assistance. Or, le corps des accoucheuses traditionnelles a été plus ou moins, depuis long-temps, rejeté par les services officiels de santé jusqu’à l’avènement des Soins de Santé Primaires. Considérées comme une ressource locale qui répond pleinement aux critères de l’accessibilité, dès lors, l’organisation Mondiale de la Santé a recommandé leur utilisation en tant que «technologie appropriée», c’est-à-dire adaptée au niveau technologique des villageois et acceptable culturellement. Cette solution semble être la plus indiquée pour résoudre les problèmes de santé des mères et des enfants en milieu rural, mais elle ne va pas sans difficulté.

Nous chercherons à travers cette étude à mettre en lumière le rôle et statut de l’accoucheuse traditionnelle ainsi que son identité par rapport à la communauté féminine du milieu rural. Nous nous interrogerons par ailleurs, dans quelle mesure son utilisation dans le système de santé moderne n’induirait pas une transformation de son identité.

Les recherches menées se situent au sud du Mali; elles s’intéressent aux Senoufo résidant au nord de Sikasso, plus précisément dans la région du Sonodougou.
COMMENT DEVIENT-ON ACCOUCHEUSE?

Les Senoufo désignent l'accoucheuse par le terme de *la shwo cwo* (la=grossesse; shwo=prendre; cwo=femme). Le verbe prendre doit ici être compris dans un sens actif. Ce n'est pas la femme qui est prise par la grossesse, mais c'est l'accoucheuse qui prend et soustrait la grossesse à sa propriétaire. Prendre la grossesse a une double signification: la prendre physiquement explique la position de l'accoucheuse qui au moment de l'enfante ment reçoit le bébé dès son expulsion. Mais prendre la grossesse, c'est aussi la maîtriser, la diriger et l'empêcher de tourner au drame. Leurs voisins, les Minyanka, la dénomment *la ya tyere cho* la «femme qui prend la gourde de la chose» (Jespers 1986:123). La gourde ou la calebasse symbolise aussi la fécondité chez les Senoufo. C'est pourquoi la jeune mariée reçoit le jour de ses noces une calebasse qui lui apportera les chances de fécondité.

Passeuse de vie, la *la shwo cwo* joue un rôle capital au moment de la naissance. La venue au monde de l'enfant apparaît donc comme un événement capital et dangereux, à l'occasion duquel l'homme entre en contact avec «un sacré à la fois fascinant et redoutable» (Erny 1985:11). Du fait de ce caractère dangereux du contact, l'exercice de la fonction d'accoucheuse requiert des conditions spécifiques.

L'ÂGE

Le statut d'accoucheuse traditionnelle est reconnu à une femme généralement âgée, qui a achevé son cycle biologique, c'est-à-dire une femme ménopausée et qui a fini d'élever ses propres enfants. L'accoucheuse traditionnelle est une femme qui se déplace, qui doit aller partout, chez tout le monde. C'est aussi une personne que toute la communauté villageoise sollicite à tout moment. Dès lors, l'âge lui confère une immunité morale dans la liberté de circulation qui est refusée aux plus jeunes: en milieu traditionnel; les jeunes femmes qui circulent beaucoup n'ont-elles pas mauvaise réputation dans la communauté? L'âge de l'accoucheuse est un facteur important, car cela suppose qu'elle a déjà rempli «le contrat social», c'est-à-dire celui d'épouse et celui de mère.

La notion d'âge est habituellement liée à celle de sagesse, car celle-ci s'acquiert par des années d'expériences pendant lesquelles l'accoucheuse traditionnelle a elle-même vécu les rites de passage tels que l'initiation à la période pubertaire, la grossesse et l'enfantement. L'âge inspire aussi le
respect, ce qui permet à l'accoucheuse d'être autoritaire devant des femmes qui s'agissent pendant le travail.

LE PASSÉ OBSTÉTRICAL

Le milieu rural est sensible aux preuves de fécondité. On attend d'une accoucheuse qu'elle ait eu beaucoup d'enfants en bonne santé. Une bonne accoucheuse doit sa réputation à sa fécondité qui porte chance aux parturientes. C'est pour cette raison qu'une femme qui n'a pas elle-même mis d'enfant au monde ne sera jamais acceptée par la communauté des mères. Mais cette condition n'est pas uniforme: dans certains villages, on peut rencontrer des accoucheuses qui n'ont jamais eu d'enfant. Qu'est-ce qui peut justifier ce choix apparentement singulier? Y-a-t-il d'autres critères de sélection dans la fonction d'accoucheuse?

LE SAVOIR-FAIRE

Les pratiques thérapeutiques de l'accoucheuse traditionnelle font appel à un savoir-faire qui s'acquiert peu à peu par expérience. Dans de nombreux cas, l'art de faire accoucher les femmes est un savoir hérité. Lorsqu'une accoucheuse se considère comme trop vieille pour continuer à pratiquer des accouchements, elle cherche à transmettre ses connaissances à une personne de sa famille ou de son groupe parental, en qui elle a confiance. L'initiation porte sur les techniques de l'accouchement et sur les cérémonies et rituels religieux. Certaines formules d'incantation qui sont destinées à faciliter l'accouchement seront divulguées seulement à sa mort.

Il ne va pas de soi qu'une femme dont la grand-mère ou la mère était accoucheuse le devienne aussi. Cela dépendra de ses prédispositions dans ce domaine, c'est-à-dire sa disponibilité physique et mentale, qui lui permette d'assister les gens, et son dévouement. Son apprentissage n'est pas alors fondé sur les liens de parenté, elle acquiert ses compétences en aidant d'autres accoucheuses traditionnelles plus âgées qu'elle.

L'art d'accoucher ne résulte pas d'un apprentissage organisé, il ne fait pas l'objet d'un contrat officiel et n'entraîne pas d'honoraires pour l'enseignante. Il se fait progressivement, au bon gré de l'initiatrice qui décide des étapes et du contenu. L'élève doit s'adapter au rythme de l'enseignante. Certaines accoucheuses sont des herboristes accomplies ayant une connaissance parfois étendue des herbes, racines, écorces et de
leur usage. D'autres ont, en plus de cette connaissance, un don de guérisseuse, qui constitue une compétence supplémentaire, mais aussi un pouvoir.

L'apprentissage du métier se base sur des normes inflexibles. La relation de maître à élève exige une soumission et une obéissance absolues aux règles de l'enseignement. Cet apprentissage est sacrifié, il véhicule des gestes qui ont une signification profonde et rituelle. C'est une éducation traditionnelle conservatrice, parce qu'elle doit garantir la pérennité du groupe par la transmission des rites et du savoir dans la règle du secret.

L'enseignement est diffusé à petite dose, au fur et à mesure des capacités d'assimilation et des preuves d'aptitude de l'élève. La méthodologie de l'éducation traditionnelle est conçue comme une éducation permanente que ne commence que lorsque l'élève est choisi.

L'accoucheuse n'intervient que de façon externe et s'abstient souvent de toucher le corps de la mère, car l'accouchement est avant tout un événement qui dépend de la volonté de Dieu, des ancêtres ou des génies. Le principe d'abstention est de rigueur. Les conditions de l'intervention de l'accoucheuse sont définies par un certain nombre d'objets utilisés avec des rites précis, dans un lieu approprié et en présence de témoins connus.

Les accoucheuses traditionnelles connaissent un arsenal de plantes qui leur servent à préparer des infusions ou des décoctions auxquelles est attribué un pouvoir préventif et curatif. En dehors de la ligature et de la section du cordon, le rôle de l'accoucheuse est strictement rituel. Elle n'est pas initiée à la magie, les rites auxquels elle procède ont une action symbolique. Le geste explicite ce qui est voilé ou trop abstrait, il permet de donner une explication, de concrétiser le rite. Sur le plan symbolique, il a une signification prophylactique et sert d'écran de protection. Le langage métaphorique justifie l'intervention, tout en permettant un transfert d'idées ou de qualité. Les paroles accompagnent les gestes pour rendre l'intervention plus efficace. Elles coordonnent et subordonnent les gestes à elles. C'est le caractère sacré de ces paroles qui donne un pouvoir préventif et curatif au rite.

**LE SAVOIR-ÊTRE**

L'intervention de l'accoucheuse traditionnelle ne consiste pas seulement en une simple aide physique. Elle a une personnalité familière, rassurante et très attentive aux moindres manifestations de gêne et de souffrance de
la parturiente. Chez les Bambara, l’accoucheuse est appelée la *timminè-muso* (*tin*=travail, *muso*=femme). On l’appelle aussi *musokòròba* la vieille femme, la grand-mère. Cela dénote le caractère quasi familial du type des relations qui s’établissent entre l’accoucheuse et les femmes qu’elle assiste.

L’accoucheuse n’est pas seulement une femme qui aide, elle est aussi la grand-mère, elle connaît l’histoire de la famille et il lui arrive de s’être occupée de l’accouchement de la grand-mère, puis de la mère, pour finir par la petite fille. L’accoucheuse est la personne qui connaît le mieux les lignées généalogiques. Pour cette raison, son influence se fait sentir dans la vie quotidienne de la famille et de la communauté. La confiance est la base même de la reconnaissance légitime de son statut. C’est d’elle que vont dépendre le bon ou le mauvais déroulement du travail et l’issue de l’accouchement. La maîtrise de soi, le calme et la douceur de l’accoucheuse sont autant de facteurs contribuant à un accouchement harmonieux. Par sa patience, sa sérénité et sa disponibilité, elle est une présence sécurisante pour les femmes. L’accouchement est une épreuve initiatique qui introduit les femmes au groupe des mères. Dans cette expérience, l’accoucheuse a une attitude d’attente. Sa présence dans la case d’accouchement est un soutien moral et psychologique important. Elle est chargée par la communauté d’inculquer aux femmes la maîtrise de la douleur qui constitue une des principales valeurs morales.

**AUTRES RÔLES DE L’ACCOCHEUSE SELON SON ORIGINE SOCIALE**

Dans de nombreux cas, la pratique de l’accouchement n’est pas la seule occupation des accoucheuses. Selon leur origine sociale, leur caste et leur âge, elles exercent d’autres fonctions dans la communauté. Pour illustrer ces cas nous allons déborder géographiquement de notre terrain de recherche parce que la notion de caste est étrangère à la société Senoufo où il n’existe guère de stratification sociale, contrairement à ce qu’a décrit B. N’Diaye (N’Diaye 1970:287). Par exemple les forgerons, les cordonniers et les sculpteurs sur bois ne sont point des hommes de «castes inférieures» (Diop 1985:42); de même qu’il n’existe pas de griots chez les Senoufo.
La conseillère nuptiale

Chez les Saracollé, dans la caste des non-artistans musiciens, les Guesseré ou Diaro qui sont des griots, l’accoucheuse, si elle n’est pas trop âgée, joue un rôle important au moment des noces. On l’appelle la manio mankan muso (manio=jeune fiancée en soninké, mankan=bruit, renommée, muso=femme). En fait, la manio mankan muso est la femme qui «fait la réputation» de la jeune mariée. Elle est désignée par les parents des jeunes époux pour exhiber à la communauté le pagne dont les tâches de sang témoigneront de la virginité de la jeune mariée, dès que le mariage est consommé. Ayant le rôle de conseillère nuptiale du couple au moment des noces, la manio mankan muso est chargée par les vieilles femmes de la famille de donner à la jeune mariée un apprentissage à l’acceptation des relations sexuelles conjugales et à la reproduction. Présente durant toutes les noces, elle aide la jeune mariée à prendre son bain. Elle lui prépare des bouillies et lui donne aussi des conseils quant à l’emploi de certains artifices tels que les aphrodisiaques pour exciter le mari ou pour conserver son amour (Newman 1981:4).

L’exciseuse

Chez les Bambara, les accoucheuses qui appartiennent à la caste des Nyamakala artisans (nyama=ordure, kala=brin) principalement les numu (forgerons), font de la poterie leur activité principale et pratiquent par excellence l’excision des jeunes filles. Chez les Senoufo, l’excision est pratiquée par la cixuncowé (mot venant du verbe xoure qui veut dire couper) qui est la femme du forgeron. Elle n’est pas potière, mais fabrique les vins et la bière de mil. L’exciseuse est chargée par la communauté féminine d’opérer une coupure anatomique et sociale permettant aux jeunes filles de passer à l’état de femme, puis à l’état d’épouse, pour accéder plus tard à l’état de mère. La cixuncowé leur inculque des connaissances à travers de multiples chants, devinettes et proverbes et leur prodigue des conseils concernant leur comportement vis-à-vis du mari et de sa famille. Nombreux sont les conseils qui apprennent aux femmes à intérioriser les contraintes de la vie collective par la force morale et physique, le courage, la persévérance, la résistance, l’obéissance, la solidarité, la maîtrise de la douleur et de la parole.
L’assistante de culte


La nyaghefaa est chargée par le chef de culte de le servir lors des cérémonies et de s’occuper du sanctuaire. Son rôle est limité essentiellement au travail ménager dans le sanctuaire, qui consiste à balayer la cour, à préparer la crème de mil offerte aux visiteurs lors des cérémonies et aux initiés au cours de certains travaux champêtres. La nyaghefaa est censée ne pas connaître les secrets du culte. Elle assiste aux cérémonies habituelles : imposition de nom des enfants, cérémonies de possession, traitement des malades, mais elle n’est pas initiée aux connaissances des poudres. Certaines d’entre elles sont initiées à l’accouchement. Si elles ne sont pas trop vieilles, elles peuvent exercer la double fonction. D’après notre investigation, il semblerait que les nyaghefaa accoucheuses sont peu nombreuses. Leur faible nombre ne découle pas d’une incompatibilité de fonction, mais plutôt d’un manque de disponibilité dû à la fréquence des cérémonies dans le village. Chez les Minyanka l’assistante de culte ne fait pas les accouchements mais elle en est souvent le témoin (Jespers 1986:175).

La présidente des femmes

C’est un statut nouvellement créé par l’existence de l’UNFM (Union Nationale des Femmes Maliennes) où l’on trouve que l’accoucheuse du village est en même temps la présidente des femmes de l’UNFM. Cette fonction est tout à fait récente dans la communauté. Les présidentes des femmes sont chargées de représenter les femmes du village pour toutes les affaires et les décisions qui les concernent. Ce statut dans la communauté est un facteur supplémentaire de prestige auprès des femmes, d’autant plus que certaines d’entre elles sont également épouses des chefs de village. Les musewkun font partie de la classe des Horon (noble en bambara) et de Fanga n’tan (fanga=force puissance, et n’tan=qui ne pos-
sède pas, sans). Elles font partie de la petite noblesse terrienne qui ne possède ni grande fortune, ni pouvoir.

Ce qui ressort de la fonction d'accoucheuse lorsqu'elle est associée à d'autres rôles, c'est une vertu de médiation qui se situe à plusieurs niveaux. Qu'elle soit exciseuse, conseillère nuptiale, assistante de culte ou accoucheuse, elle intervient à des moments critiques de la vie d'une femme. Elle est à la charnière de l'instant où, inéluctablement, on doit basculer dans un autre univers. Elle est présente à tous ces rites de passage: l'excision qui fait entrer la jeune fille dans le monde de la femme adulte, le mariage qui la fait passer de l'état de femme à l'état d'épouse et l'accouchement qui transforme une épouse en mère.

LA RECONNAISSANCE DU STATUT D'ACCOUCHEUSE TRADITIONNELLE

Au-delà des critères mentionnés plus haut, nous nous sommes posé la question de savoir comment la communauté reconnaît à une vieille femme le statut d'accoucheuse. Lors de nos prises de contact, les accoucheuses présentées ne sont pas les plus compétentes, et ont souvent le double statut de femme du chef de village ou présidente des femmes.

Ce fait nous porte à croire que ce ne sont pas seulement les aptitudes techniques qui font qu'une femme devient accoucheuse. La part du rituel dans l'acte thérapeutique occupe une place importante: dégagée de la maternité et initiée à ses mystères dont elle détient la clé, l'accoucheuse est chargée par la communauté de procéder à l'accueil du nouveau-né conformément aux prescriptions de la coutume. En raison de leur personnalité, les accoucheuses apportent à l'accouchement une dynamique particulière: leur vécu de femme, leur rang social, la famille dont elles sont issues, leur autorité, sont autant de facteurs qui ne peuvent qu'aider l'enfant à venir au monde dans les meilleures conditions possibles. La notoriété de la la shwo cwo comporte un aspect humanitaire ou social, sans aucune connotation mystique. L'itinéraire professionnel de l'accoucheuse traditionnelle peut se présenter de la façon suivante:

- la communauté reconnaît à une vieille femme le statut d'accoucheuse traditionnelle;
- les femmes du village font appel à elle lors de l'accouchement;
- l'accoucheuse acquiert sa compétence au fil des années grâce à cette sollicitation.
Ce cheminement soulève le problème de la reconnaissance par la médecine moderne du statut des accoucheuses traditionnelles: celles qui sont à notre avis plus compétentes ne sont pas forcément celles que la communauté a choisies. Comme le fait remarquer Claude Levi-Strauss: «le problème fondamental est donc celui du rapport entre un individu et le groupe ou plus exactement entre un certain type d'individu et certaines exigences du groupe» (Levi-Strauss 1985:207). La reconnaissance du statut des accoucheuses est, nous paraît-il, un phénomène de consensus social. Ce processus semble être opposé au schéma habituel qui attribue la réputation d'une accoucheuse à ses succès dans les soins de l'accouchement. Suivent alors la confiance que l'on accorde à son savoir-faire et enfin la reconnaissance de son statut d'accoucheuse dans la communauté.

LES ACCOUCHEUSES TRADITIONNELLES DANS LE SYSTÈME DE SANTÉ MODERNE

Toute société est un tout qu'une innovation transforme. Le changement remet donc en cause les modèles acquis par les individus et il en résulte souvent des situations de crise. Nous considérons que la formation des accoucheuses constitue l'introduction de nouvelles techniques dans un système thérapeutique traditionnel, qui entraîne des modifications dans les méthodes de travail, dans l'organisation sociale, mais aussi dans l'identité même de l'accoucheuse.

Dans l'acquisition du savoir traditionnel de l'accoucheuse, il n'existe pas de division entre la vie professionnelle et la vie quotidienne. Son savoir a une relation directe avec la vie et le temps. Nous avons vu que son apprentissage est progressif, il commence par l'imitation pour acquérir des habitudes, avant d'assumer des responsabilités. Par opposition, l'accoucheuse acquiert à la formation un savoir stéréotypé, organisé dans le temps et dans l'espace. De ce fait, elle perd toute sa spécificité et son indépendance parce qu'elle est désignée par les villageois auxquels elle doit ce nouveau savoir. La formation a, en quelque sorte, institutionnalisé le rôle d'accoucheuse. Dès lors, on passe du sens du devoir à l'obligation de remplir un contrat.

Plus qu'un changement dans la relation entre l'accoucheuse et les villageois, son statut tel qu'il a été reconnu dans la communauté, se trouve quelque peu modifié après la formation. Si dans certains villages le prestige des accoucheuses se trouve augmenté au retour de la formation, elles
sont par contre dans d'autres villages rejetées par la communauté des femmes.

Ceci explique toute la difficulté des accoucheuses formées à adopter des innovations qui pourraient les singulariser au niveau du groupe. C'est sans doute l'un des traits importants des sociétés rurales traditionnelles; elles fonctionnent comme des «machines à étêter les arrivistes» pour reprendre l'expression de R. Bureau (Bureau 1978:141). La formation des accoucheuses traditionnelles amène une remise en question de la rationalité et un changement d'ordre idéologique. Par la formation, on demande à l'accoucheuse d'être plus interventionniste, plus opérationnelle en appliquant une technique, un savoir de plus en plus rationalisé. Cela suppose une reconversion totale de la mentalité. Dès lors, l'acte thérapeutique perd le caractère de service rendu qu'il tend à revêtir dans le cadre de la médecine traditionnelle, il devient standardisé. L'introduction des pratiques thérapeutiques modernes change aussi le niveau d'intervention. Elle privilégie le plan technique qui traite les causes immédiates et abandonne le plan rituel qui s'intéresse aux causes premières. A quel niveau du changement se situe l'accoucheuse traditionnelle? C'est là le point d'inflexion capital. Si elle adhère entièrement aux nouvelles méthodes, ne risque-t-elle pas de se trouver en décalage par rapport au discours qui la rend crédible? Pour de nombreuses accoucheuses, la formation telle qu'elle a été conçue a entraîné leur marginalisation progressive face au système traditionnel.

Face à l'introduction d'une nouvelle technique, le milieu peut réagir de deux façons: il accepte l'innovation et l'assimile en la réinterprétant, il la refuse en la stérilisant ou en lui résistant. À ce propos, R. Bastide explique ce que l'anthropologie nous apprend d'essentiel: «c'est de nous faire comprendre le phénomène de résistance au changement comme un mécanisme de défense culturelle contre les influences venues du dehors qui menacent l'équilibre de la société». Et plus loin «la résistance n'est pas, en fait, absence de propension au changement, elle est refus actif de changement» (Bastide 1971:56–57).

Les pratiques traditionnelles ne sont pas immuables. Elles suivent le cours de l'histoire, elles évoluent, s'adaptent aux exigences nouvelles et parfois finissent par disparaître. Les sociétés rurales senoufo, comme d'autres sociétés, subissent des mutations socio-économiques engendrées par l'évolution des conditions technico-économiques. Le processus de modernisation des communautés rurales s'amorce irréversiblement. Les nouvelles générations senoufo sont de moins en moins attachées aux
représentations collectives. Soucieuses d’une certaine qualité de vie, elles sont à la recherche d’un confort matériel et d’autres modes de consommation. Face à cette évolution, certaines pratiques traditionnelles vont disparaître progressivement.

Que deviendra alors la la shwo cuwo telle que nous l’avions étudiée? Et lorsque les maternités existeront en nombre suffisant dans les villages, les femmes continueront-elles à solliciter ses services ou iront-elles accoucher dans ces structures? Si cela est le cas, l’accoucheuse traditionnelle sera amenée, elle aussi, à disparaître...

Bibliographie


Abstract:

The *La Shwo Cwo*, The Woman Who Takes Charge of the Pregnancy: Traditional Midwives in Senoufo Society, Mali

*Jasmine Abel Jessen*

Our study proposes to analyse the socio-cultural implications of modern therapeutic practices introduced among traditional midwives in the course of their training and their application in the context of Primary Health Care. Bringing light to bear on the role and status of the traditional midwives within their social space, and their identity within the rural female community, will show that their utilisation within the modern health care system has brought about a transformation of their identity.

Life-bearer, the "la shwo cwo" plays a central role at the birth. More than physical help, the midwife brings moral and psychological support vital to child-bearing. That is why midwifery requires special qualifications such as age, obstetrical experience, know-how and maturity.

For many midwives, according to their social origin, the art of midwifery can be combined with other roles in the community. Thus a midwife can at the same time be a marital counsellor, an exciser, participate in religious cults, or be women's president. Such multiple functions derive from a mediatory gift exercised at critical junctures in a woman's life, moments when she inescapably has to topple into another universe. The midwife is present during each rite of passage: excision, which takes the young girls into the world of adult women; marriage, which takes her from womanhood into wisehood; and childbirth, which transforms the wife into a mother.

In the course of her training, the midwife acquires a stereotyped form of knowledge, organised in time and space. She thereby loses her specificity and her new independence, because she is appointed by those villagers to whom she owes her new science. In a way, the training has institutionalised the role of the midwife. Thereafter, we see a transition from a sense of knowledge to a duty to fulfil a contract.

The introduction of modern therapeutic practices also modifies the level of intervention: it favours the technical plane, treating immediate causes, and levels aside the ritual plane concerned with primary causes. By totally adhering to the new methods, the midwife has discovered she
is no longer in tune with the message which made her credible. For many midwives, the training, such as it has been devised, has led to their gradual marginalisation from the traditional system.
Section 3

Religious Associations
A Nigerian Sisterhood in the Transformation of Female Identity

Esther Shebi

Nigeria has a population which is characterized by its diversity of cultures; despite this diversity, the indigenous Nigerian cultural entities have not developed in isolation. There is a common blend of cultural practices as a result of for instance trade, migration and inter-marriage. Against this background we can confidently say that the female identity in Nigeria is transcultural.

Once married, the Nigerian woman has the cultural role of child bearing and child rearing. She is also the backbone of traditional agricultural activities. Nigeria is predominantly an agrarian society. The Nigerian woman cultivates and tends her own farm and also participates in the cultivation and tending of the family farm which is usually owned and controlled by her husband, who is the head of the household. Women are principally seen as child bearers and workers. The more wives a man has, the more children he will have. And the more wives and children a man has, the greater the workforce, hence the greater the output and the richer he becomes.

The Nigerian woman is, however, also engaged in various kinds of trade within and outside the country. With her organizational skills, she is able to combine farm work with homemaking as well as other enterprising activities such as pottery, weaving, painting, poetry, music and other art forms.

In the areas of the Plateau State studied, women are highly valued and esteemed by their husbands for what they can extract through their
wives especially in terms of agricultural benefits and not for what they are in themselves. In view if this we, the Our Lady of Fatima Sisters, have made women one of our target groups in our social and pastoral apostolates\(^1\) in these areas. We create awareness of the available resources around the women, for example regarding nutrition, education and primary health care services and any other programme that will educate them to become aware of their own value as women.

**OUR LADY OF FATIMA SISTERS**

Our Lady of Fatima Sisters of Jos (OLFS) is an indigenous group of religious women\(^2\) brought together from different parts of Nigeria to share a common charism of proclamation of the good news\(^3\) through the giving of a dedicated and generous service to God’s people in various fields of life. The group was founded by Bishop John Reddington of the Society of African Missions, in 1965. Despite the fact that some missionary congregations existed in the Diocese\(^4\) for years, Bishop Reddington saw the need for local sisters to work hand in hand with the priests in the work of evangelisation and more than so to reach out in a more effective manner to the women at the grassroots level. It is this charism of generous service that has spurred us on in our ministry\(^5\) of education, health, pastoral and social work and any other apostolate we undertake to meet the needs of the times.

As OLFS we identify ourselves as women to the core and are at home with our womanhood, feminine gifts and potentials and are out to develop the same in the women we interact with in our various ministries. Despite the current cultural definition of the female mainly in terms of wife and mother in Nigeria, the OLFS have taken the bold step of professing the three religious vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. By our vow of celibacy we renounce marriage and child-bearing so as to be

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1. Within religious life, life as a priest or a nun, the work you accomplish in society and the church is referred to as an *apostolate*. It can consist of both paid and unpaid jobs and other services as well as just praying.
2. Nuns/sisters within the Catholic church are called *religious women*.
3. *Charism* is here intended as a specifically Christian gift, to share your faith with others.
   *Proclamation of the good news*, means to spread knowledge about the New Testament, but is here referred to as general missionary work.
4. *Diocese* is an ecclesiastical division of a state, subject to a bishop.
5. *Ministry* means the duties and the work the sisters undertake.
more available for effective service of our people. Our celibacy disposes us to generous and universal love of the people we serve, thus promoting our total self-giving to God and to the people. Our vow of poverty empowers us to live simply, sharing our resources, talents and time with one another and with the people we serve in our various apostolates. It also helps to strengthen our local spirit of simplicity and cultural solidarity with our people. By religious obedience, we are helped by our superiors to be more dedicated to God's will in our lives and together with them we discern the need around us and how best to meet such needs.

Having come together from different ethnic, cultural and family backgrounds we still maintain our family ties and promote our cultural values that are in line with the values of Christ: a strong sense of God, solidarity and strong community ties, spontaneity, hospitality etc.

Generally, people see us as a dedicated, simple, godly and out-going group of women who are out to meet the spiritual and social needs of the society. As sisters we have, however, been viewed and evaluated from various points of view by different categories of people. Some men for example are puzzled by the fact that we do not marry or bear children and are not under the control of men as our female counterparts in the secular world and yet live happy and fulfilled lives.

There are also men who see our work as curtailing their power and control over women. Our experience of men's reaction to our work with women in Nassarawa Kuki for instance is a typical example of this latter reaction. The men in this area resent our work with their wives who have risen to the challenge to live to the fullest their female identity and develop their own potential. Some of the men have confessed that the women have become 'uncontrollable' since they came into contact with us; women are no longer as submissive as they used to be. Some of the women have taken the radical decision of refusing Christian marriage until they have studied their husbands enough and found them to be suitable partners in marriage. The case is the opposite of what usually happens, i.e. men studying the women only. Our presence can be annoying to such men.

These views and reactions are no doubt influenced by the cultural understanding of female identity. It is, therefore, in the context of our identity, life-style and apostolates that I wish to discuss the challenges we face as a group of religious women.

Even though our culture initially saw religious life as a foreign way of life meant only for Europeans, today our presence among our people
and the living out of our avowed life, characterised by a deep sense of
culmination and joy of living, has changed their opinion about the Sister-
hood and also women's identity in general. Some men and women have
come to accept the fact that religious life is credible and that it is possible
for a woman to find fulfillment in life outside marriage and child bearing.
They have come to believe in women's worth and potential and find it
comfortable to approach us, relate cordially with us and share their
problems with us.

Today women in general, including religious women, form the major-
ity and the most active group in the church and are yet denied full partici-
pation in decision-making in the church. To a certain extent this is
related to our culture's portrayal of men as being superior to women. In
addition to enjoying full power of decision making in the church, men
also enjoy priority over women in terms of church celebrations such as
ordinations, jubilees etc. For instance, in the preparation for a priest's
ordination the whole Diocese is involved in terms of finance, organiza-
tion etc., while at a sister's profession, the burden of preparation rests
with the sisters' congregation. We, as an indigenous congregation,
receive some financial help from the Diocesan headquarters for our cele-
brations. Today religious women have come face to face with much dis-
crimination and many of us have taken radical steps to speak out against
such abuses in the church. This is expressed in the works of one of the
conferences of the Religious Women in Nigeria. "Since we say we are a
prophetic group, we will have the courage to speak out against abuses in
the church e.g. ostentatious materialism, discrimination against women
in the church in which they are denied their rightful positions corre-
sponding to those occupied by women in secular society. Sharing in
Diocesan planning we will see ourselves as part of the Diocesan team:
consulted, given moral and where necessary financial support, a goal
which can only be achieved through the development of mutual trust.
We will no longer, therefore, see ourselves as second class citizens."

Religious women today are striving for equal participation with men
in the church. Some radical ones are even agitating for the priesthood
because they believe that they too are authentic daughters of God. How-
ever, men are still hanging onto power and are threatened by the slightest
revolt by women, especially religious women. Some priests have reduced
sisters to mere altar cleaners and decorators.

Being a young congregation with a Diocesan rite, the OLFS enjoy
both moral and financial support from the Diocese of Jos and yet have a
government of our own. We run our finances separately and the affairs of the congregation independently of the Diocese. This gives us cultural, political, social and religious autonomy.

Challenges

The first challenge we face is of living out our female sexuality and celibacy in a culture that questions celibate credibility. We are faced with the challenge of testifying to the world that celibacy is possible and of teaching the world fidelity. It is important to note here some of the recurring questions people ask us with regard to the credibility of celibacy: “Tell me, is it true that you don’t marry or relate with men? How do you cope with your sexuality?”

Moreover, in a world of growing needs we are faced with the challenge of discerning and prioritising the needs around us and of working out appropriate strategies for meeting such needs. Still, in this area of needs we are few in number and sometimes feel we are not doing enough. This calls for strong faith.

In our work of enabling women to discuss, own and foster themselves, we have discovered that some of the women pose as stumbling blocks in this task due to their low self esteem, underestimation of their gifts and potential, strong male domination and the poor cultural image of women which men have imposed on them. To work with such women for their liberation and better understanding of their female identity demands a lot of patience, understanding and gentleness on our part.

Another challenge we see is that of undertaking a more detailed study of the culture of the people among whom we work to enable us to understand both the male and female people better, hence to challenge them to review some of their negative cultural practices and so effect change for the better.

OLFS Apostolic Strategies and the Impact on the Transformation of Female Identity

As an indigenous congregation, our apostolic strategies are peculiar to our local and simple spirit. It is these strategies that help us to discern as a group how best to serve the people among whom we work in line with our charism at any given time.
We are engaged in the medical apostolate, ranging from curative to preventive health care depending on the needs of the people among whom we live and work. Namu and Lankuku are some of the rural areas where we provide health care and medical services to mostly women and children.

We are also as a congregation engaged in the educational apostolate especially in areas where the needs seem particularly great. We run primary and secondary schools in both rural and urban areas to meet the educational needs of children and youth respectively. Considering the low standard of education in most of our government institutions, we strive to give high quality education to the pupils and students we serve in our schools and also challenge them to make the best of the opportunities offered them.

One of the strategies we use as OLFS is to live out our charism of generous and spontaneous service to people. This strategy challenges us to live our local spirit to the fullest. Our socio-pastoral apostolates include visits to families and homes, conducting marriage encounters, counselling programmes and retreats. Attendance at various organizational meetings and functions exposes us to reaching out and rendering selfless service to various categories of people, especially women in their local settings based on their needs.

One of the practical ways in which we help is by, for example, helping widows with legal advice and in claiming of their husbands’ properties. Our celibate life also serves as a challenge and source of encouragement and strength to some widows who decide not to re-marry after the loss of their husbands.

Very often women invite us to their organizational meetings, retreats, functions etc. to enlighten them on health, political, social, religious, legal or cultural issues. Topical issues discussed at such meetings include the rights of women; human sexuality; liberation of women; how to live marriage as a vocation successfully; daughter-in-law/mother-in-law relationships; how to resolve marital conflicts; the role of women in the church/society; and women in development.

The case study below shows the ways in which the women in Kuru are striving to enhance their identity in their local setting and to rise to

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6. Being a good Catholic, you are expected to lead your life (work, marriage) as if it was a vocation.
the challenges we pose to them in our interactions with them and in the programmes we offer them in our various apostolates.

THE CASE STUDY—KURU WOMEN

In this study I intend to discuss rural women in a Kuru village: how they look at themselves and their role in society; how they are seen by the men of the society and the challenges they face as women in the society. I will also examine the impact of women’s organizations, particularly the Catholic Zumunta Mata Organisation, on the social, economic, religious and political life of women in Kuru and lastly the impact of the OLF sisters on Kuru women.

Kuru is a village situated along the Akwanga–Jos highway in the Plateau State. It is a rural area populated predominantly by the Birom. The inhabitants are mostly farmers although they are also involved in tin mining. Tin mining as an economic activity among the Biroms began during the colonial era, with the result that most of the men abandoned farming leaving a situation where mostly women gained the main responsibility for the farm work. This situation has left the Birom women with a formal and permanent role of tilling and cultivating the land.

According to Birom tradition, when a woman gets married everything she owns becomes her husband’s property. The husband has the power to use her property, salary etc. without consulting her. We have even come in contact with situations where the woman works and her husband goes to collect her salary without her consent. There are other situations in which women who take to live-stock farming on a small scale lose their animals to their husbands. At the slightest revolt or protest, the woman is stopped from working by her husband or divorced.

According to the women, a woman is traditionally seen as wife, mother and a cultivator of the family farm. In her marital home she is expected to cook, fetch water and firewood, wash, look after the children and cultivate the family farm. Any deviation from these activities makes the man consider the woman as being lazy and unable to play her role as a good wife, mother and home-builder.

In relation to her husband a woman is expected to be obedient and submissive, especially with regards to the sexual relationship irrespective of feelings, moods etc. When she becomes pregnant, it is her responsibility to look after herself and her needs. When the baby arrives she looks
after the baby as well as nurtures it through the various stages of life until the child becomes independent of her. The husband claims ownership of the child when she or he reaches the age of independence. When the daughter is getting married her father claims the dowry while the mother is given a small token amount of money for buying salt.

A childless woman on the other hand is looked upon as having no female identity since she has no children with whom she could be identified. She cannot be called “Mama Kachollom” or “Mama Dung” as her other female counterparts who enjoy the privilege of being called after their children. On many occasions childless women have been divorced by their husbands on account of their childlessness and some husbands of such women take second wives.

When women’s opinions were asked for on what men think of them they said: “Men see women as slaves or as wrappers to be used and changed at will or thrown away when they are old for new ones”.

Women see themselves as “all and all” in the family. One woman described a woman as the “meat and knife” in the family implying that she is the breadwinner of the family. They further described themselves as being dynamic, organized and powerful and resourceful.

The women see their men, on the other hand, as being selfish and drunkards. They are said to have very little time for their families and yet like to dominate women in every way. Having acknowledged the domination of men over women, women are still of the opinion that their role as women and their contribution in development whether in the church or in the state is very vital and irreplaceable. It is interesting to note that some right thinking men have remarked that it is women that will save our nation.

Despite the hardships of the marital life to which a Birom woman is exposed she is expected and indeed encouraged to endure her grievances in silence and to remain in her husband’s house as a mark of self-discipline. A woman is forced to succumb to such injustice and maltreatment from her husband for the love of her children and for the sake of maintaining her marital status. This often exposes them to emotional stress. In our dealings with the women we have discovered that their confidence in us helps them to share their problems with us and they are often relieved when this is done. Other social outlets that serve as a source of relief are their religious organizational meetings, get-togethers and functions.
Kuru women participate fully in religious activities. They see their participation as an act of service to God who in turn will bless them and answer their prayers.

They have formed a strong women’s fellowship, the Zumunta Mata, in the church in which the majority of women are members. They mobilise themselves to keep the church and its premises clean, contribute financially towards the development of the church, the upkeep of priests and catechists and towards the training of priests and sisters.

Their fellowship organization is very powerful. They use it as a strategy for exerting influence and power and for gaining security. It also serves as a good social outlet for relieving stress. The organization is so powerful that some women even register as members without the consent of their husbands. Men have recognised the power that this organization gives their wives and the great influence it has on their political, social and religious life. In moments of serious quarrels or crisis in their homes they turn to the organization for help in disciplining their wives. On the other hand, men also see this organization as a threat and have subsequently formed a similar organization of their own, the Zumunta Maza.

One intriguing thing about this organization of women is that despite the power they possess as a group, they have not made a radical move to fight against the discrimination levelled against them as individuals in their family settings. Women’s desire to comply with societal and biblical norms (e.g. St. Paul’s advice to married women never to revolt against their husbands and always be submissive to them, Col. 3:18) could be responsible for their unwillingness to protest against what is hindering the promotion of their rights in their family settings or on an individual level.

In addition to the religious organization of women discussed above there are other social and economic organizations formed by Kuru women such as: the Better-Life-for-Rural-Women, Kuru branch, a cooperative organization which offers them the opportunity for getting a loan to be paid back with little interest at the end of each month; and the Birom Women Association which brings women together and offers the members support and financial help in times of need.

A development project—“hamlet electrification”—undertaken by the Birom Women Association, testifies to the women’s effort of developing their community. This group of women have collected a certain amount of money to electrify their community. However, when they had
completed one hamlet and were in the process of electrifying the second hamlet, they were stopped by a group of men, according to one of the women. She quoted one of the men as saying: “Who gave you the permission to organize this project? If the government gets to know about it you will be punished.” At this the women were scared and they abandoned the project. Since then no initiative has been taken by any women’s group to carry through the abandoned project or take up any similar one.

Another woman, on the other hand, later commented with regards to the reaction of the men to the above project: “This happened in the past but it cannot happen today”. The statement implies that women are now becoming aware of their rights and are determined to contribute their quota to development without any inhibitions.

The women have generally confirmed that the various organizations have had a tremendous impact on their economic, political, social and religious life. Economically, the organizations help in raising the financial status of the women, enabling them to manage their homes more effectively through the help they have received in terms of getting loans; buying goods at subsided prices; modernizing farming, the various crafts learned etc. Politically, they are becoming recognized as women in acting publicly. They are given the right to vote and be voted for and even though no woman in Kuru has campaigned for a political post yet, most of the women went out to vote for candidates of their choice.

Socially, the organizations give the women a sense of belonging in society. In religious circles, the woman is recognised as a dynamic force in the building of the church. She is seen as a teacher of the faith and a transmitter of religious and moral values and principles. To a certain degree she also participates in the leadership of the church, for instance in Kuru there are about five women holding leadership positions in the church.

Hence, the organizations seem to serve as sources of power for women. This creates in the husband a sense of cautiousness in dealing with his wife because of the simple fact that she belongs to a powerful organization. This has served as an incentive for women to become members of various organizations even without the consent of their husbands.

I want to remark here that these achievements have not been arrived at without challenges and difficulties. An interview with some women officials has brought to light the following as among the problems faced
by women in their struggle to discover and promote their female identity and take their place comfortably in the home and society: Some men stop their wives from attending their organizational meetings and force them to go to work on the farm; some women are faced with the option of choosing between their marriage and the women's organization, if they insist on attending organizational meetings. Some women are left with the responsibility of caring for the family single-handedly, thus they work so hard to meet the family needs that they have little or no energy left for their organizational meetings and functions. In certain situations, men take more wives so as to curtail the power of the women within the home.

As OLF Sisters (our novices inclusive) we work and interact with Kuru women on various levels. On being asked to give their opinions on the impact our lifestyle has had on them as individuals and as a group, the majority of the women strongly felt that our presence, lifestyle, companionship and work among them have been an "eye opener". They have increasingly come to discover the dignity and worth in women, their feminine potential and how to use it for their self-development and that of their families and the community at large. Some women said the sisters have made them aware of the available resources for development within their community such as the Better-Life-for-Rural-Women and literacy programmes, crafts, co-operative societies etc. from which they are benefiting immensely. Most of the women have confirmed that the talks given to them by the OLFS on health, spiritual and political issues have generally improved their standard of living.

When asked what they need from us to improve themselves and their standard of living, they disclosed that we should use our influence to review some of their negative cultural values and practices especially those that are discriminatory against women. These should be discussed with their husbands to effect change.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, I think I can comfortably say that the issues that have become so topical in Nigeria today and especially in the women's quarters are women's identity, women's role and women and development. For me, I interpret this as a symbol of the start of liberation for our women, liberation from the inhibiting identity and role of our culture, which men have imposed on them and which has enslaved them for ages.
Women are becoming more and more aware of who they are, their worth and dignity of their womanhood, their potential, rightful roles in the home and in the society, what they can offer to the development of their homes, church, states and the nation at large, as clearly portrayed in their better life programmes and other religious, political and cultural organizations all over the place.
Résumé:

Une congrégation féminine au Nigeria dans la transformation de l'identité féminine

Esther Shebi

Dans leur vie quotidienne, les religieuses appartenant à Notre Dame de Fatima à Jos, s’occupent des femmes les plus défavorisées. Au cours de leur travail dans les domaines de la santé, de l’instruction, de la religion et de l’aide sociale, elles cherchent à répondre aux besoins qu’elles rencontrent. Leur travail dans le domaine médical couvre aussi bien les soins que la prévention, les conseils d’alimentation et les entretiens pour aider les femmes à mieux prendre en charge leur santé en tant que femmes et mères. En ce qui concerne l’instruction, les religieuses dirigent des établissements primaires et secondaires, mais dispensent aussi une instruction non-formelle destinée à aider les femmes à mettre en valeur leurs talents et leurs aptitudes. Certaines pratiques culturelles brutales appliquées aux veuves font qu’une grande partie du travail des religieuses dans le domaine social concerne ces veuves, sous forme de conseils juridiques et de réconfort social.

Comme religieuses, elles sont à l’aise dans leur féminité, leurs dons et leurs potentialités, indépendamment de leurs relations avec les hommes, et leur objectif est de développer chez les femmes qu’elles rencontrent ce même état d’esprit. Étant donné la forte domination masculine dans la société nigérienne, la mauvaise opinion que les femmes ont d’elles-mêmes, la sous-estimation de leurs dons et de leurs potentialités, la tâche des religieuses consiste à entreprendre une étude détaillée de la culture du peuple nigérien, indispensable pour mieux aider les femmes dans leur lutte pour se libérer. Certains hommes se plaignent de ce que leurs femmes sont devenues «incontrôlables» depuis leur contact avec les religieuses et qu’elles ne sont plus aussi soumises qu’auparavant.

Les religieuses appartenant à Notre Dame de Fatima font partie de l’église catholique romaine, et y jouent un rôle important. Elles en constituent le groupe majoritaire et le plus actif, et pourtant, on nie leur capacité à participer pleinement aux prises de décisions au sein de l’église.

Cette contribution décrit les différents champs d’action des religieuses ainsi qu’une étude concernant leur projet avec les femmes à Kuru.
In Search of Women’s Dignity and Greater Freedom
Fieldwork on Women and Identity among the Catholic Fatima Sisters in Jos, Nigeria

Ulrika Bamidele Erlandsson

While the numbers having religious vocations to the sister- and priesthood in the Catholic Church in the West have decreased since the 1960s, they have increased dramatically in Nigeria. Interestingly enough, statistics show that in the Catholic Church in Western Africa, vocations to the sisterhood are five times as many as those to priesthood (Hastings 1989:3). In spite of this, African sisters, their role in society and the tremendous work they accomplish have received very little academic attention.

During my fieldwork in Jos and its surroundings in Nigeria, I was interested in the role of women’s networks and organizations within the Catholic Church. Although the Catholic Church is an hierarchical institution where most structures are well-defined, I found that it permits a great variety of forms and contents when adapting to local conditions. I discovered that Nigerian women had taken the initiative to organize themselves within the Church in very many different groups, each with a particular profile and often playing a vital role in both Church and society. This they attended to beside their ordinary work or family-life. I was particularly interested in women belonging to a sisterhood congregation.

To choose to become a sister in a society where the value of women is so closely related to motherhood is a radical step. In a more conscious way than the average African Christian woman, the sisters are forced to
break with the traditional pattern of womanhood, renouncing marriage and family-life. They form their identity in a society where traditional, western and Islamic views of a woman’s position interact and choose to follow their Christian vocation. In my fieldwork, I was interested in the place of the congregation and the individual sister in society. I also wanted to know how the sisters define their own identity as women and how they relate to the traditional religion where many of them have had their roots. I often asked myself what had driven these sisters to choose a religious life in a Christian community.

During my stay in Nigeria in 1991, I had the privilege of meeting the Our Lady of Fatima Sisters. My fieldwork deals with this Nigerian congregation. I followed the sisters in their work, participated in their spiritual life and undertook several interviews with them. I was interested in their history, in their activities today and the challenges they face in their society. I also undertook two case-studies where, in more personal interviews, the sisters present their life-stories. In the following, one of these will be presented.

OUR LADY OF FATIMA SISTERS

The congregation of the Our Lady of Fatima Sisters was founded in 1965 by the bishop of Jos, Rt. Rev. John Reddington. The name “Fatima” refers to the event that took place in the little Portuguese township Fatima in 1917, when the Holy Mother made an appearance in front of a group of children. To Nigerian Muslims, the name “Fatima” is simple to learn, to them she is the daughter of the Prophet Muhammed.¹

In 1965, indigenous sisters existed in the Christian-dominated south of the country, but were unprecedented as far north as Jos. The small group of novices were pioneers in a venture that threatened to end with the crisis of the civil war. “Our founder as well as the Irish Novice Mistress who had taken the responsibility for our formation had more or less given up”, says Sister Mary Patrick. “They said it was up to us to decide whether we wanted to continue building up an indigenous con-

¹ Information on the history of The Fatima Sisters was given to me through The Silver Jubilee Magazine (written by the sisters themselves) and through interviews I did with Superior Sister Mary Patrick, Sister Martin de Porres and Sister Sarah Njoku.
gregation or not". It was during this crisis that the sisters took the future of the Congregation into their own hands. Later on, this resulted in a General Chapter where the sisters themselves, through democratic processes wrote their own constitution (that is the rules they want to follow, as well as the general aim with the Congregation). They also formed their own government with a Superior General and councillors. Facing many social demands around them in a society marked by poverty, the sisters together make up five-year plans deciding where they want to set priorities in their work.

Today the Fatima Sisters are dispersed in six different communities: Akwanga, Jos, Pankshin, Shendam, Kaduna and Kuru. They work in schools, hospitals and in various social undertakings. Growing slowly but steadily in number, there are today twenty-eight sisters.

The sisters feel a special dedication to help women in Nigerian society. More than half of the sisters are engaged in the Catholic Women’s Organisation.

“We especially care for those women who for different reasons haven’t had the opportunity to receive an education,” explains Sister Mary Patrick, Superior General of the Congregation. “An inadequate education often goes hand in hand with little awareness of human rights. The Nigerian culture is not free from discrimination and prejudice against women. Marriage customs in some parts are simply brutal against women and their dignity. In some areas, widows without sons and women in general are not entitled to the inheritance of either any of their parents or of their deceased husband’s property.”

“There are different ways of helping a woman against this oppression”, continues Sister Mary Patrick. “For instance we explain to them that a registered marriage gives them much better legal protection than only a Church wedding or a traditional one.”

“We also help women to form groups. This enables them to give organized help to each other when problems occur.”

“We’ve taught women how to work in cooperation to facilitate more effectively organized farming. It gives them the right to get credit and take loans in banks. These activities raise women’s self-esteem.”

The Novitiate

The Fatima Sisters sometimes organize “Vocation-tours”. They travel across the Diocese to visit schools and other institutions in order to

2. Interview with Superior Sister Mary Patrick 28 February 1991.
3. Interview with Superior Sister Mary Patrick 22 March 1991.
spread information about the Congregation. Many aspirants (young women interested in becoming sisters) receive their first contact with the Congregation on these occasions. An aspirant is expected to pay several visits to the community. She is also invited to live in the community for a certain time before she takes any further decisions to join the religious life. The sisters on their side do two long interviews and take part in a prolonged weekend retreat before admitting anybody to the novitiate.

“We would love to let the Congregation grow faster,” says Novice-Mistress Sister Lucy Gidado. “There seems no end to the work we could do, to all the help needed by our people. But we prefer to be selective in our admission to the Congregation. Our Congregation is young and needs to grow in depth, not only in numbers. It also gives us strength to know that only three sisters have left up to now.”

The novitiate, beautifully situated in Kuru, offers a formation-period of three years. After this period, the novices take their first profession (or vows) and are placed in a community to work or for further education. The final profession is taken six years later. Naturally, the sisters can still choose to leave the Congregation, even after their final profession. It is also possible for the Congregation to decide that someone should be excluded. Until now this has only been necessary once. The nine formation years offer a long preparation for the final decision to live as a sister.

“A problem we face when admitting the young women (they have to be over eighteen) is the frequent opposition we meet from the parents, even when they are devoted Catholics,” continues Sister Lucy. “Religious life implies celibacy which is the greatest obstacle to the family. The girls have to be very strong in their faith in order to cope emotionally with all this resistance. To reduce conflicts with the family, we have started to have talks with them, where we explain what the novitiate implies, and that no vows are made during the first three years. Luckily, after a few years, the parents in most cases appreciate their daughters choice.”

Under the guidance of Novice-Mistress Sister Lucy Gidado, the novitiate gives a spiritual, a practical and an intellectual formation.

“We are well aware of our African heritage,” says Sister Lucy. “The concept of God is right in the centre of our African tradition and it enables us to see a certain continuity with the religion of our ancestors. Sometimes there has to be a filtration, Christian values give a new light to life. But our tradition has

given us a strong sense of community that we try to preserve in our daily life."

CASE-STUDY 1

One of the sisters I had a closer encounter with was a sister from Akwuke, close to the township of Enugu in Anambra State. This sister belongs to the ethnic group Igbos. In Nigeria it is common to refer to your father’s village as your home town, even if you did not grow up there, as was the case here.6

Her father moved to Jos in the 1940s already and when she was born in 1944 her family lived in Dorowa, about forty miles south of Jos. Her father was a wealthy man with three wives and twenty-seven children. He owned a lot of land and small farmers rented land from him. Her mother was a member of mitiri, a women’s organization in the village. Her father was Anglican, but he was not very interested in active church-life. Her mother adhered to traditional religion. The whole family participated in traditional religious ceremonies.

They had many gods, but they also prayed to the one almighty Lord at a special ceremony once a year. On these occasions animals, calves and goats, would be slaughtered in a ritual way, and everyone thanked God for his creation. At that time we didn’t know, but today we know, that God was the same as our Christian God.

My father liked me a lot. I was his first child. To take good care of me, he gave me an expensive education. I was the first girl in Dorowa to attend Secondary School. The Catholic school was the best one in the area, so my father sent me there.

When I was ten years old, I saw a sister for the first time in my life. I asked my teacher who this woman was and he answered the woman was working for God. This I will never forget, because immediately after I felt a longing in my heart to come closer to this kind of life. I also wanted to work for God. A little later I was baptized and received the first holy communion in the church.

The same year my father married me to a man, although I was just ten years old. He had planned that I was going to move to my husband when I had finished Secondary School. But already when I was fifteen, my mother started preparing for my departure. I had told them that I wanted to become a sister, but they didn’t take it seriously. My father said that only white people could become sisters. I ran away from home a week before the final wedding feast. I lived at a priest’s house, who let me continue my studies. After

three months, my parents found me. They were angry, but also careful, because they were afraid of losing me once more.

After some time I started to enjoy life at home and got friendly with a young Catholic man. He was well-educated and very much devoted to his faith. We went to mass together every day. We started planning a future together. Shortly after I had a dream. In my dream I celebrated a beautiful wedding with a big party. But after the party I sat alone in the church and cried. This I dreamt twice. Then, on the third night I took part in a different wedding, a ceremony with just sisters. After that wedding, I felt filled with joy. Through these dreams, God showed me his will.

A little later I went to see the Our Lady of Apostles Sisters to ask them to accept me as a novice. But they informed me about a new congregation, the Our Lady of Fatima, and suggested that I should go and see them. I only wanted to serve God, I didn’t know a lot about different congregations.

But then came the Biafra-war and all my dreams were shattered. My whole family fled to the south, where we travelled from one place to another. I don’t want to talk about the war. It was a terrible thing for the whole country.

In 1971, I was accepted as a postulant in the novitiate at Shendam. The novice-mistress gave me all the support she could, but my situation was a difficult one. My parents had rejected me. Before I went to Shendam my father called me and asked me to promise I would never join religious life. My father loved me. In our tribe ancestors are very important. There is a belief in my tribe that ancestors are born again, reincarnated in their offspring. My grandmother died when my father was only ten years old. Before she died she told him she would come back. When I was born everybody said I looked like her, so my father gave me her name, Nkem, it means “Let my people stay”. That is why I always had a special importance to my father. He said a curse would come upon the entire family if I didn’t have children. Once, he even said he was prepared to let one of my younger sisters become a nun, if only I would marry. It can be very dangerous to go against your ancestors’ will.

All this was passing through my head while I was staying in the novitiate. A friend from my village who came by, told me my father had wished I was dead, that he had declared this in front of all the family-members. It was a difficult time in my life. I think of what Jesus says: anyone who leaves his family for my sake will be rewarded a thousand times. God has made me strong.

I have made a great sacrifice in my life. I had everything: a loving and wealthy family and a father who wanted the best for me. But I say like St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians: I throw it away like rubbish for the sake of Christ.

When three years later I took my first vows, I saw my mother in the church. It felt like a miracle. In that year, 1974, we celebrated the holy year in Nigeria, so all the bishops came in to take part in the ceremony. My mother was highly impressed and invited me home for a party. My father was friendly, but asked in a severe manner that I should stay in the family. He
could never accept my vocation. After this visit I didn’t see him for many years.

Two weeks before his death I came home and we spoke. He asked me to come to his funeral. I understood this as an act of reconciliation and I thanked God.

After his death, my mother wanted to become a Catholic. It was me who gave her the necessary teachings!

CASE STUDY 2

During the past four years Sister has lived in Pankshin, 100 km south of Jos. Just like the community in Jos, the sisters in Pankshin run a private school, Fatima Private School, situated just next to the community. Two of the sisters in the community work at the school, the third works at a hospital as a nurse and Sister works at a public school. During my stay in their community, many people visited the sisters and in the evenings, the sisters themselves visited the homes of people in the area. My impression was that they had close relations to the local people, but Sister says she is often confronted with misunderstandings among the ordinary people.

Sometimes, when we are out on the streets or in town, people don’t understand that we, as women, can live just by ourselves. The other day my car was involved in a small car-accident. When the policeman came, the first thing he did was to ask for my husband’s name. I told him I have no husband. At first, he would not even believe me. Then he asked for my father’s name, or my brother, or any man, because he wanted a man’s name in his file. I explained to him that we sisters don’t have male authorities around us. This sort of thing happens often.

So many find it difficult to understand that we freely chose this way of life. They don’t understand how we could renounce family-life and children. Once a woman asked me if we took injections to keep men away. Our injection is Christ! I replied to her. Religious life is an invisible happiness. Other women can show their children, but our pride is Christ, who is not visible to your eyes.

Some, especially men, are insulted by our way of life. Often we have to defend it. On the other hand, people have great expectations of us. They think we have special qualities, almost like superhumans who will never make mistakes. They only laugh at me when I ask them to remember me in their prayers. This also means that they have high expectations of us. If a sister gets into trouble, nobody will accept it and it quickly becomes a great scandal. A friend of mine in southern Nigeria became pregnant. Every newspaper wrote about her disgrace and many people pursued her. She was hated. She had been raped, but who believed her?
I hate injustices and I only accept the truth. When I studied in Great Britain I met people who were not afraid of criticizing the former prime minister, Mrs. Thatcher. I wish that we Nigerians would be just as brave and stand up for our rights. We have plenty of examples of the governor and others who are guilty of dishonourable behaviour and crimes. Christ did not smile at everyone; he was outspoken when somebody did wrong. He helped people, not only spiritually.

I work as a teacher at a secondary school. Sometimes our girls become pregnant. Most of the time they have been raped, but the word rape is not even used in Nigeria. It is seen as self-evident that the woman herself has all the responsibility and guilt through being a coquette, but it is not true. I try to defend those women's honour in school and also with her parents. Abortions are illegal in Nigeria and many young girls take dangerous risks when having them.

Another group that faces huge problems is widows. They don't have the right to inherit from their husbands, even if the couple had a bank account together. The husband's family will take everything from her: the house and everything in it, even the children if they are above seven years of age. Before Christmas we organized help for a woman who found herself in this predicament. We raised more than two thousand Naira for her. But when we had given it to this woman, her husband's family came and took all the money away from her.

I also work with lay-organizations in the parish, especially the Young Catholic Students. They meet once or twice a week to read the Scripture. Then they try to apply the message of the gospel to their own social reality. Sometimes this will result in visiting the sick or trying to better the situation for the poor in Pankshin.

Society is full of injustices and we try to help people to become aware of their rights. The inhabitants of Pankshin pay as much taxes as anybody else. Then why don't we have asphalt roads and why is our water-supply so bad? When the Vice-Governor comes to visit us we will speak openly about our needs.

The way I see it, I first of all want to serve my people with my apostolate. We live to serve in Africa, that is why our Congregation is African. "Ngosi" in our language means God's blessing. We sisters have a lot to give to our people, because they have so much to cope with: poverty, injustice, women's suppression and ethnic conflicts.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE CASE-STUDIES

In contrast to the established place which history has given to the Church in Europe, the Church that this sister met was practically new to her and had only had a short history in her country. To lead a religious life in itself was something quite unprecedented in African tradition.
When talking with the sister I felt that Christianity and the Church were still perceived as novelties in her life.

Both sisters I interviewed had received the call to their vocation in a dream. The decisive role of dreams is well known in African traditional religion and in African Christianity. The Bible contains many episodes where God chooses to communicate with his people through dreams. Dreams, highly valued both in the Bible and in African tradition, are one way of upholding continuity with the perception of life one has had before. On several occasions during my interviews with the sisters (especially at the Novitiate), I was given the impression that the sisters had given the relationship between African religion and Christianity serious reflection. In a conscious way, elements of African religion and tradition were incorporated into their Christian spirituality.

Whatever the reasons underlying these women’s decision to join the Sisterhood as their profession, religious conviction, admiration for other sisters, attraction to the material and secure aspects of life in the convent, the wish to avoid marriage, desire to get education, in both my case-studies the women took their own decision in their struggle to assert control over their own lives and strive for greater dignity as women. In spite of the formal authority structure that the Catholic Church represents, it is possible to discover that these women had a good deal more power over their lives than one would traditionally expect from women in religious life. Within the framework of the rules of obedience, (rules that they had themselves written during the General Chapter), less irrational than in a marriage, the sisters discovered potential for greater choices in religious life. For the sister I interviewed, this became important in her strives for a continuity with the cultural and religious traditions of the past. It also gave her a platform from where to realize her struggle for greater justice among her people.

Unfortunately, the opposition the sister met from her parents is rather the rule than the exception. The struggle she had to go through deepened her consciousness of her identity as a sister. At the same time as the devotion she gives to her work is highly appreciated by the people, she still meets a lot of misunderstandings regarding her lifestyle. “Our pride is Christ” says the sister when she meets people who find it hard to understand that she has given up motherhood. The sisters find their dignity in more spiritual values and through this can help other women who have lost their status (widows, barren or unmarried women), for instance by
introducing the concept of “spiritual motherhood” (this concept was mentioned to me on various occasions).

CONCLUSIONS

In my encounter with the Fatima Sisters I found that they had successfully integrated Christianity into their identity as African women. The many challenges that await the Congregation make it future-oriented. Their experience with Western missions has mainly consisted of personal encounters with priests and sisters, which have changed their lives in a way they themselves conceive of as positive. The European outlook of the Church has not stopped the sisters from preserving their African heritage. In the five year plan of the Congregation, the sisters express a hope for the future: “We are open to the challenge of being evangelized by those we evangelize”.7 This I think, expresses their affirmation of precious enculturation and an open-minded attitude to the ethnic roots of their proselytes.

The ambition of this paper has not been to present the Catholic Church as a feminist movement. Also, the lifestyle that these sisters have chosen can never become an alternative for the great majority of women in Nigeria. My encounter with the Fatima Sisters did surprise me positively considering the following: the sisters belong to a Church with clear patriarchal structures. They also live in a society where culturally and traditionally, male domination is more the rule than the exception. In spite of this, I found that they had a freedom over their lives (without having to break with Church regulations) that most women in their society seem to lack. Their identity and dignity rests simply in experiencing themselves as independent women, that is, not dependent on a role as daughter, wife, mother or sister to a man. The independence they have struggled for and now can enjoy is, therefore, an important example to all women striving for less oppression in their society.

Life in a religious community is often perceived as limited and unfree. Considering the resistance many of the sisters met when choosing a religious life, to them freedom was fulfilling their vocation. An important expression of this freedom was the democratic work that preceded the General Chapter in 1985, when all the sisters participated actively. Another is their ability to maintain almost complete economic independ-

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7. Target/Aims 5 Year Plan 1989:3.
ence from the Diocese, which gives them the possibility to independently choose their jobs and activities. This independence within the Church is not sought for in itself but is a means for achieving a way of living in which they believe.

This is an edited resume of a paper that has earlier been published in *Det mångreligiösa Jos. Om kyrkoliv och kristen–muslimska relationer i Nigeria* (*Multireligious Life and Christian–Muslim Relations in Nigeria*). Uppsala Universitet, Teologiska fakulteten, Uppsala 1991.

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Résumé:

A la recherche d’une dignité et d’une plus grande liberté pour les femmes: Travail de terrain sur les femmes et leur identité dans la communauté catholique des sœurs de Fatima à Jos, Nigeria

Ulrika Erlandsson

Dans l’église catholique romaine de l’Afrique de l’Ouest, les vocations des femmes à faire partie d’une communauté religieuse sont cinq fois plus nombreuses que l’engagement des hommes. Malgré cela, l’immense travail que les religieuses africaines fournissent à l’Église a suscité très peu d’attention auprès des universitaires, comparée à celle portée aux prêtres. Aujourd’hui, il existe trente-six congrégations de femmes au Nigeria, dont neuf indigènes c’est-à-dire créés au Nigeria, contrairement aux congrégations internationales.

Choisir de devenir religieuse, vivre dans le célibat, s’exclure des liens naturels de la famille, tout cela constitue un pas radical, surtout dans une société où la valeur de la femme est si étroitement liée à la maternité. Les religieuses sont obligées de rompre avec le modèle traditionnel de la féminité, d’une façon bien plus consciente que la femme chrétienne moyenne.

Dans mon travail de terrain, je me suis intéressée à la communauté comme organisation féminine, à ses structures et à son travail dans la société. Je me suis également intéressée à la sœur en tant qu’individu dans la congrégation, à son passé, à ses stratégies au moment où elle choisit la vie religieuse, et à la relation qu’elle entretient avec la société et avec la religion chrétienne.
Les femmes, l’Islam et les associations religieuses au Sénégal
Le dynamisme des femmes en milieu urbain

*Penda Mbow*

Poser la relation entre le dynamisme des femmes et les associations religieuses en milieu urbain peut paraître de prime abord assez paradoxal. La ville se présente souvent, dans les pays du Tiers-monde et plus particulièrement en Afrique, comme le lieu de liberté et surtout de rupture avec les formes traditionnelles d’organisation sociale. De ce point de vue, la religion est souvent perçue comme une idéologie dont les intérêts entrent en conflit avec les mutations préconisées par la ville africaine. Mais c’est oublier deux faits très importants:

- La place de la ville dans la formation de la civilisation islamique. Nous ne développerons pas cet aspect, mais on peut retenir le rôle primordial joué par les villes comme la Mecque et Médine au début de l’Islam, par exemple.
- L’évolution de l’Islam dans la société sénégalaise. L’analyse devra tenir compte du fonctionnement de la société féminine au Sénégal. Nous pouvons d’ores et déjà retenir que les conditions de vie précaires des femmes, surtout en milieu urbain, semblent décisives dans la mise en place des structures associatives. La volonté d’entraide se manifeste à travers une mosaïque d’activités axée certes sur les besoins pratiques, mais aussi psychologiques. C’est à ce niveau qu’il faut situer le rôle des associations religieuses dans une société où l’Islam s’avère de plus en plus comme une religion en pleine expan-
sion, avec un grand impact sur les relations interindividuelles. On assiste à de nombreuses tentatives nouvelles de redéfinition de la foi et le statut de la femme se trouve être au centre du débat sur la religion.

Avant d’aborder le rôle de la femme dans les associations religieuses, nous allons dans une première partie analyser brièvement l’impact de la ville sur le devenir de la femme sénégalaise. La deuxième partie sera consacrée à l’Islam sénégalais, pour terminer sur les associations religieuses comme mode d’expression des femmes.

**IMPACT DE L’URBANISATION SUR LA FEMME SÉNÉGALAISE**

Dans une étude sur les tendances de l’évolution de la situation mondiale en ce qui concerne les établissements humains par le Centre des Nations Unies, il est établi que les femmes sont au centre du problème démographique en général et de l’urbanisation en particulier. Leur prépondérance dans les courants migratoires vers les zones urbaines est un fait que l’on observe de plus en plus. L’évolution rapide de la situation socio-économique et la diminution de la population masculine dans les campagnes entraînent un exode croissant des femmes vers les zones urbaines.

Le Sénégal fait partie de ces pays d’Afrique de l’Ouest dont l’indicateur d’urbanisation est de 22%, tandis qu’il est de 16% en Afrique de l’Est et de 34% dans le Centre. Dakar, la capitale du Sénégal, a un taux de croissance très élevé; sa population qui s’élevait à 559 000 habitants en 1970 sera triplée en l’an 2 000 (1 880 000) (Guy 1987:29). A côté de l’accroissement naturel de la population, on note une migration de plus en plus massive des populations de l’intérieur vers Dakar. Les cycles de sécheresse, les politiques d’ajustement structurel qui ne permettent plus les subventions naguère accordées au monde rural, expliquent en grande partie l’exode rural.

Pour les hommes, Dakar s’avère de plus en plus comme une étape vers les villes européennes ou américaines, tandis que les femmes viennent agrandir le lot des citadines déshéritées. Privées de leurs réseaux d’appui social, elles se retrouvent dans un milieu hostile et étranger où il leur est beaucoup plus difficile d’exercer une activité rémunératrice. Elles vont donc chercher plus loin des emplois mal payés, subalternes et précaires. Étant donné leur faible niveau d’instruction, (81% des Sénégalaises sont analphabètes) et les possibilités de formation très limitées qui s’offrent à elles, les femmes se trouvent systématiquement écartées des
secteurs modernes. Les femmes d’origine rurale s’engagent souvent comme bonnes à tout faire pour des salaires dérisoires et rarement comme journalières dans les poissonneries, par exemple.

Depuis les années 80, le Sénégal connaît une crise sans précédent caractérisée par une montée du chômage et l’incursion des femmes dans le secteur informel. Les jeunes âgés de 20 à 30 ans ont de plus en plus de mal à trouver du travail et continuent à être entretenus, surtout par leur mère. Les femmes, membres des mariages polygames en milieu urbain, sont épuisées par une fécondité très élevée; une femme met au monde en moyenne 5 à 8 enfants. Notons aussi l’abaissement de l’espérance de vie au Sénégal: 45 ans. Avec comme toile de fond ces conditions difficiles, les associations religieuses apparaissent pour ces femmes comme des refuges où elles peuvent se ressourcer sur le plan social et spirituel.

Pour mieux saisir la place des femmes dans les associations religieuses, nous allons d’abord présenter l’Islam sénégalais.

L’ISLAM SÉNÉGALAIS: PRÉSENTATION

L’islamisation de ce qu’on peut appeler aujourd’hui le Sénégal (puisqu’il faisait partie d’une entité beaucoup plus vaste: le Soudan occidental) est indissociable du commerce transsaharien du VIIIe au XVIe siècles.

Au XIe siècle, les Berbères conquièrent l’Empire du Ghana et c’est la première percée réelle de l’Islam sur les bords du fleuve Sénégal. L’Islam apparaîtra non comme une frontière mouvante de conversion des masses dans une zone continue, mais plutôt comme une série d’enclaves urbaines dans les centres du commerce et du pouvoir politique, tandis que les populations seront très peu touchées. Il faudra attendre la deuxième moitié du XIXe et le début du XXe siècle pour que, face à la pénétration coloniale, l’Islam infiltrer les masses populaires à travers ses mouvements religieux (le mouvement omarien,\(^1\) différentes confréries...). De nos jours, près de 90% de la population sénégalaise est musulmane.

L’Islam sénégalais est essentiellement confrérique, ce qui n’exclut pas la dichotomie entre un Islam populaire et un Islam d’élite. Ses visages multiples se reflètent par la place que la femme y occupe. Nous y reviendrons.

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D’un point de vue philosophique, les confréries religieuses relèvent du soufisme qu’Henri Corbin définit comme «la fructification du message spirituel du Prophète, l’effort pour en revivre personnellement les modalités, l’introspection du contenu de la Révélation coranique» (Corbin 1974). Le soufisme nécessite une technique d’ascèse spirituelle, qui varie selon les confréries: le zikr ne s’effectuant pas partout de la même manière, ni le fait de franchir les différentes étapes ou daraja. Au Sénégal on note l’existence de plusieurs confréries, dont les plus importantes sont: la Tidjaniyya, la Mouridiyya, la Quadriyya et celle des Layènes.

Pour revenir à notre sujet, peut-on définir la place exacte de la femme dans cet Islam sénégalais? C’est ce que nous allons essayer de voir.

Il est évident que chaque confrérie a sa manière de traiter la question de la femme, même si les sources dont elles se réclament sont identiques.

Pour mieux comprendre les ambiguïtés qu’on retrouve dans l’Islam vis à vis de la femme, il faut savoir que ses préceptes se basent non seulement sur le Coran (Parole de Dieu) révélé dans un langage poétique et symbolique (ce qui laisse la place à l’exégèse), mais également sur la sunna du Prophète, modèle de comportements normatifs, ainsi que sur les dires du Prophète (hadiths transmis par ses compagnons et les membres de sa famille).

La négation du rôle de la femme dans l’Islam sénégalais s’est surtout basée sur certains travaux ayant trait aux confréries sénégalaises mais aussi sur la place conférée à la femme par le dogme islamique. Une analyse superficielle de la société peut faire penser, comme le dit un marabout mouride à Donal Cruise O’Brien, que «la femme a les mêmes droits qu’un enfant» (O’Brien 1971:85–86). Il se réfère à la tutelle que l’homme doit exercer sur la femme considérée comme un être mineur.

Au Sénégal, aucune femme n’est fondatrice de confrérie, même si le rôle de la mère du fondateur est toujours mis en exergue; elle est tou-

2. Le zikr, l’appartenance à la confrérie se manifeste par la récitation de certains noms de Dieux que l’on ne peut exécuter qu’avec la permission d’un marabout au cours d’un rite particulier appelé «prendre le writ».

jours présentée comme une femme d’une obéissance et d’une patience exceptionnelles (vertus hautement appréciées chez une Musulmane par un Musulman). Les croyances populaires véhiculent à son endroit plusieurs légendes qui lui confèrent un caractère presque surhumain. Il faut aussi reconnaître que, dans toutes les confréries, gravir les échelons relève d’une véritable gageure pour une femme, sauf peut-être dans la confrérie Quadriyya, la plus ancienne d’Afrique, où on trouve certaines femmes cheikh (dignitaires de la confrérie) mais là aussi cheykhal⁴ ne signifie pas initiation à tous les secrets de la confrérie. Le problème de la souillure éloigne souvent la femme du Coran, lui complique la pratique du zikr sauf peut-être pour les femmes ayant atteint la ménopause. La femme acquiert d’une manière générale une éducation religieuse peu approfondie.

Comment la femme vit-elle son rôle marginal, voire inexistant, dans l’Islam sénégalais, sans la possibilité d’être iman ni leader de confrérie? De nos jours, on note certaines modifications dans les normes islamiques avec un impact sur le rôle et le statut de la femme, comme la valorisation du mariage et la notion d’obéissance. Le Coran incite tout musulman à se marier et à fonder une famille: «de toute chose, nous avons fait un couple. Puissiez-vous vous en souvenir», rappelle la Sourate 51, verset 49. Ainsi chez certaines ethnies comme les Haal Pulaar, on encourage des mariages précoces, parfois même avant la puberté de la femme. Mais la fonction du mariage est de plus en plus remise en question. Le pouvoir dévolu à l’argent, surtout en temps de crise, l’école, l’urbanisation accélérée modifient sensiblement les comportements des jeunes vis à vis du mariage. Le fait de ne pas rester vierge n’est plus pour une jeune fille cause de divorce en milieu urbain et l’importance de la dot constitue de moins en moins une entrave.

L’obéissance de la femme à son mari, son père, son tuteur ou son frère, constitue une question importante en Islam, et les hadiths dans ce domaine sont nombreux. Au Sénégal, l’obéissance se traduit par une exigence de patience de la part de la femme, surtout la femme mariée. Avant d’aborder le rôle des femmes dans les associations religieuses, qui relève de l’aspect le plus populaire de la religion, disons quelques mots sur l’existence d’une élite féminine dans l’Islam sénégalais.

Dans une étude sur «L’Islam au féminin: Sokhna Magat Diop de la confrérie mouride (au Sénégal)», C. Coulon et O. Reveyrand soutiennent

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4. Cheykhal ou «lui confier la dignité.»
que l'Islam au féminin existe bel et bien, malgré le statut subordonné de la femme et que la dépendance religieuse institutionnelle des femmes n'exclut pas leur intervention dans le champ islamique (Coulon et Reveyrand 1990). En effet, Sokhna Magat Diop, khalife et fille d'un dignitaire mouride à Thiès, et Sokhna Mariama Niass, exégète et maîtresse d'école coranique de la confrérie Niassène, constituent autant de figures qui montrent l'existence d'une élite féminine dans les confréries religieuses.

Cette situation atteste, même si les femmes ne peuvent pas accéder aux fonctions d'Iman ou de Khalife de confréries, de la vitalité et de l'importance du rôle de la femme dans les confréries religieuses. Il est évident que cette élite recrute au niveau des sokhnas (épouses et filles de dignitaires religieux) qui jouent un rôle beaucoup plus social que religieux. Enseigner à des garçons aussi bien qu'à des filles, ou bien recevoir l'allégeance de disciples, est certes le fait de cas isolés, mais tout à fait significatifs. Il semble que la confrérie tidjane est un peu plus réfractaire à la «promotion féminine», ce que nous pouvons expliquer par l'influence nord-africaine et arabe, qui continue à marquer cette confrérie.

Il ressort de l'étude de Coulon et Reveyrand que ce que l'on considère comme des éléments limitatifs de la piété sont en réalité fondamentaux pour restaurer le soufisme. Peu importe dans ce cas que Sokhna Magat n'ait pas les mêmes pouvoirs légaux que les hommes, elle n'en est que plus sainte. Dans sa logique mystique, les limitations apportées à son pouvoir, qui semblent tenir à sa condition de femme, deviennent des actes religieux supérieurs: son silence et sa réclusion sont la preuve de sa sainteté; et ses exercices privés de piété acquièrent un statut religieux plus élevé que la simple prière publique. S'il est évident que le mysticisme autorise d'une certaine façon un dépassement des catégories sexuelles et permet ainsi à des femmes d'atteindre des degrés élevés dans la carrière religieuse, il n'en demeure pas moins que leur rôle est complètement occulté. Sokhna Magat est khalife depuis 1943, mais malgré sa baraka et sa piété, a-t-elle un impact aussi réel que n'importe quel marabout?

La mobilisation des femmes dans un contexte de crise se manifeste de plus en plus dans les associations religieuses ou dahira. Le rôle des femmes dans les associations religieuses relève d'une part de l'organisation des confréries religieuses et de l'autre de la structuration même de la société féminine.
Pour ce qui est de la structuration des confréries, il faut surtout retenir l’existence d’une relation de dépendance entre le marabout et son disciple ou talibé. C. Coulon insiste sur le fait que «le lien personnel qui unit le marabout à son talibé repose sur un système complexe de croyances faisant appel à l’aureole sacrée du chef religieux mais aussi aux avantages que son prestige est supposé procurer à ses fidèles» (Coulon 1990:103). A partir de ce moment se développe toute une politique de clientélisme qui, à quelques nuances près, se retrouve dans toutes les confréries.

Chez les tidjanes, par exemple, l’attachement personnel au marabout est moins marqué que chez les Mourides; et il se dégage dans l’organisation de la zawiya (communauté religieuse où l’on enseigne) l’établissement de nouveaux rapports sociaux basés sur «l’égalité et l’entraide». Cette notion d’entraide sera bien comprise par les femmes, à leur manière, nous y reviendrons. Chez les Layènes de la région de Dakar, le fondateur de la confrérie, Seydina Limamou, introduit une différence de taille: il donna aux femmes le droit de participer pleinement aux cérémonies et aux chants religieux. On note alors un dynamisme particulier des femmes lors des différentes manifestations et rassemblements Layènes. Dans toutes les confréries, la présence des femmes est surtout très forte dans les dahira ou associations religieuses. Il faut avant tout noter qu’une femme ne peut faire son djebelu — se livrer à un marabout chez les Mourides — ou prendre le wîrd au sein des autres confréries qu’à travers son mari ou son père. Même si on note à cet égard que les jeunes marabouts prennent de plus en plus de liberté, étant donné qu’ils sont beaucoup plus intéressés par les relations de clientélisme. En règle générale, il est admis qu’une femme a le même marabout que son mari.

LES FEMMES ET LES ASSOCIATIONS RELIGIEUSES

Les associations religieuses sont établies selon:

- Le lieu d’habitation. Les associations de quartier sont les plus nombreuses puisque la majorité des femmes au Sénégal reste à la maison. Elles obéissent aussi à l'organisation de la société traditionnelle divisée par classe d’âge.

- Le lieu de travail. Les associations des marchés à Dakar sont connues pour leur dynamisme. L’exemple des vendeuses de poisson du village de Yoff dans la région de Dakar est très apprécié en milieu tidjane.
Ces associations religieuses des lieux de travail ne sont pas seulement le fait des femmes souvent illettrées travaillant dans le secteur informel. Dans les années 80, on voit la ferveur religieuse gagner les femmes travaillant dans l'administration ou enseignant dans certains collèges de Dakar. Ainsi Khady K \(^5\) a présidé pendant très longtemps le da\(\text{hi}ra\) mouride très dynamique des femmes secrétaires de l'administration sénégalaise. O. K. Dieye, professeur de lettres au Lycée J. F. Kennedy se présente comme l'une des pionnières ayant impulsé en milieu intellectuel l'organisation religieuse. En effet, la ferveur religieuse n'a pas épargné le milieu universitaire et scolaire. On a noté l'existence d'un embryon de da\(\text{hi}ra\) tidjane à la cité Claudel des jeunes filles de l'université. Dans les jeunesseś tidjanes on retrouve aussi Mustarchidina wal mustarchidati\(^6\), un bon exemple, car cette association compte parmi ses membres certaines élèves et étudiantes.

Dans les da\(\text{hi}ra\) qui sont de véritables structures de mobilisation, les talibés, maris ou pères, permettent aux femmes de manifester leur foi à diverses occasions. Ainsi, aux \(\text{zi}^{\text{ara}}\), (pèlerinage pour renouveler sa fidélité au marabout), aux magal (commémoration chez les mourides du retour d'exil de Cheikh Amadou Bamba) ou aux maouloud (célébration de la naissance du Prophète), on voit les femmes, souvent vêtues de blanc (symbole du caractère sacré de leur entreprise) et parées de leurs plus beaux bijoux, prendre d'assaut les autobus (en général loués par les da\(\text{hi}ra\)), pour converger vers le lieu de la commémoration. Dans toutes les manifestations religieuses, il revient aux femmes de préparer et de servir les repas, ce qui les empêche souvent de prendre part aux cérémonies. Mais l'essentiel pour elles est surtout de trouver une occasion pour exposer leur foi. Les da\(\text{hi}ra\) sont aussi connues pour la régularité avec laquelle les femmes s'acquittent de leur cotisations, en général mensuelles et pas aussi élevées que celles des tontines traditionnelles. Ces cotisa-

\(^{5}\) Secrétaire au siège du gouvernement sénégalais.

\(^{6}\) \(\text{Dahiratoul Mustarchidina wal Mustarchidati}\) est une association religieuse créée par le marabout tidjân Moustapha Sy, qui est orientée principalement vers la jeunesse sénégalaise. L'association a aussi le caractère de mouvement politique et elle a attiré les masses dans tout le pays. Avec sa base maraboutsique et tidjane, l'association a émergé comme un mouvement de masse.

\(^{7}\) La tontine est associée à des pratiques de solidarité. Il s'agit d'un groupe d'épargne dont les règles de fonctionnement varient. Les membres cotisent selon une périodicité définie à l'avance. Après un certain temps, également fixé à l'avance, cet argent est remis à l'un des membres. Chacun à son tour «touchera» sa part.
tions sont multipliées par 5 au moment des cérémonies ou par 10 à l’occasion de l’organisation d’un maouloud populaire. Dans le dahira mouride dirigé par Khady K, la cotisation s’élève à 1.000 CFA par mois et de 200 CFA par semaine. En 1992, ce dahira a remis au grand marabout mouride une somme s’éllevant à près de 5 millions de CFA.\textsuperscript{8} L’argent des cotisations est utilisé pour payer l’assaka,\textsuperscript{9} (déformation de la Zakat, aumône) chez les Mourides. Elle est normalement destinée aux nécessiteux, mais on laisse au marabout le soin de faire la charité. L’argent est aussi utilisé pour l’ahdhiya ou le takhdim de la ziara, versé une fois par an, au cours de la visite pieuse appelée ziara. Les femmes participent aussi aux contributions exceptionnelles, par exemple pour l’édification d’une mosquée.

En dehors de la consolidation du lien que le disciple peut avoir avec son marabout, les associations religieuses ont une fonction sociale bien évidente.

Les dahira s’organisent sur le même modèle que la société elle-même, stratifiée en castes ou parfois en ordres. La plupart sont dirigées par des femmes issues de la caste des geer, considérée comme la caste supérieure, à l’exception des dahira organisées sur une base familiale. Le rôle de collecter l’argent, de distribuer les convocations, de faire la cuisine, revient souvent à une femme griot, en tout cas issue des castes dites inférieures. Après chaque cérémonie, la présidente est tenue de faire des cadeaux en argent ou en nature à la griot.

Le fait d’être présidente de dahira permet à la personne de mieux asseoir son prestige et son influence dans son milieu. En général, elle n’est pas choisie parmi les plus démunies. Gérer la caisse du dahira lui donne la possibilité d’avoir à sa disposition de l’argent liquide qu’elle peut prêter à celles qui en ont besoin ou de l’utiliser comme fonds de roulement pour son petit commerce. Le fait d’être porte-parole des siens auprès du grand marabout est un élément considérable. Dans cette dernière tâche, la présidente est toujours supervisée par le président du dahira des hommes, son homologue masculin.

\textsuperscript{8} Un dollar US équivalait à 300 francs CFA. Cette somme est énorme vu le niveau de vie au Sénégal: le revenu par tête s’élève à 650 dollars par an. Pour atteindre cette somme, le dahira reçoit des dons et des cotisations exceptionnelles de ses membres.

\textsuperscript{9} Un des piliers de l’Islam qui consiste à donner aux nécessiteux 2,5 pour mille de son épargne annuelle.
La présidente du *dahira* peut bénéficier, en récompense de son zèle, d'un billet de pèlerinage à la Mecque ou à Fez, que le marabout a toujours la possibilité d'obtenir auprès des autorités gouvernementales. Le marabout peut aussi toujours intervenir pour aider à l'obtention d'une licence de commerce, pour négocier des droits de douane etc. A ce niveau, il est très difficile de faire la part entre la ferveur religieuse et les intérêts de l'individu.

Les *dahira* sont aussi des lieux de convivialité. Ils permettent aux femmes de lutter contre l'oisiveté, d'avoir des loisirs et surtout de s'évader des problèmes de la vie quotidienne, en participant aux différentes cérémonies religieuses. Elles y trouvent aussi une certaine solidarité financière au moment des cérémonies familiales, les deuils en particulier.

Les *dahira* sont aussi des lieux de rencontre au niveau matrimonial. La recherche d'un mari est un élément important, et le marabout joue un rôle primordial dans les relations matrimoniales, surtout en ces temps de crise où il est difficile pour la femme de trouver un mari et pour l'homme de rassembler la dot. Ainsi l'exemple du Cheikh Bethio Thioune est édifiant à ce niveau: au cours de l'année 1991, il a célébré de nombreux mariages entre ses talibès des deux sexes.

**CONCLUSION**

Pour saisir le rôle des femmes dans les associations religieuses au Sénégal, il faut surtout se reporter aux travaux des anthropologues. Ainsi selon G. Balandier: «Dans toutes les analyses, la femme, malgré sa fonction irremplaçable dans la reproduction n'intervient jamais comme vecteur d'organisation sociale. Elle disparaît derrière l'homme: son père, son frère ou son époux» (Balandier 1974:58). Quant à I. Droy, elle pose cette question fondamentale: «Peut-on à l'intérieur des sociétés inégalitaires (lignagères, à castes, etc.) distinguer une société féminine superposée à la stratification sociale?» (Droy 1985:26). La réponse semble affirmative, il existe bel et bien une société féminine où les rapports sociaux entre hommes et femmes seraient soumis aux mêmes aléas que ceux existent entre toutes les catégories de dominant et de dominé.

Cette situation se manifeste à travers la marginalisation des femmes du pouvoir politique, de la participation aux affaires publiques, du contrôle des terres et du leadership de la pratique religieuse dans les lieux publics. Mais, la femme va asseoir son pouvoir à travers une certaine société féminine, à partir de laquelle elle va jouer un rôle pour dynamiser
la religion et, surtout, utiliser la religion pour son propre épanouisse-
ment.

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Abstract:

Women, Islam and the Religious Associations in Senegal: The Dynamics of Women in an Urban Setting

Penda M'Bow

This chapter consists of three parts. The first one analyses the influence of the city on Senegalese women’s current life and their future. The second part deals with women and Islam in Senegal and the third one is dedicated to the religious associations as a space for women to express themselves.

The rural exodus towards the capital has increased rapidly during the latest decade in Senegal. While the men migrate to Europe and the US, women mostly have Dakar as their final destination. The city life is hard for these women, who lack their village network and have to fight hard to find work. The religious associations play an important role to compensate the women’s loss of social contacts and family support.

Islam in Senegal is dominated by the religious fraternities, among which the Tijaniyya is the largest one. Traditionally women have a lower status than men within the fraternities. This is the also case today, due to several factors such as lack of education and ideas about female impurity. Only a few women have reached a high position in the religious hierarchy, usually as daughters of famous holy men/marabouts.

In the religious associations (Eng. daira, French: dahira) women are active as collectors of money to their marabouts. They also arrange religious meetings and organize pilgrimage trips and visits to holy places. The shared social activities of the dairas offer an important alternative to the women who are marginalised in political life and separated from the religious leadership in public places. It is through this kind of ‘female societies’ that the women can use the religion to their own benefit.
Le *dahira* de Mam Diarra Bousso à Mbacké

Analyse d’une association religieuse de femmes sénégalaises

*Eva Evers Rosander*

**INTRODUCTION**

Les femmes et le soufisme au Sénégal\(^1\) constituent le sujet principal de cet article. Plus précisément, je m’intéresse aux femmes mourides, le mouridisme étant la deuxième *tariqa* («sentier», «confrérie» ou «ordre» soufi) du Sénégal, ainsi qu’aux associations de femmes mourides. J’ai tout particulièrement étudié une association religieuse, vouée à la vénération de la mère du fondateur du mouridisme, le célèbre *Cheikh* Amadou Bamba. L’association porte le nom de sa mère, Mam Diarra Bousso. L’image de la mère, personne pieuse qui par son influence fait de son fils un grand saint, est très importante dans le soufisme en général, et centrale en Afrique de l'Ouest, indépendamment même du soufisme. La femme a comme mère un incontestable statut et même une certaine autorité, ce qui n’est pas le cas des femmes sans enfant.

Mon travail sur le terrain s’est effectué à Mbacké, ville située à 180 km à l’est de Dakar, à proximité de Touba, la ville sainte des mourides. Je me suis concentrée principalement sur les femmes membres de l’association Mam Diarra Bousso et sur sa présidente. En participant à leurs réunions, en visitant leurs maisons, j’ai essayé de me faire une idée de

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1. Le soufisme au Sénégal est caractérisé par le lien fort qui existe entre un marabout et son disciple. Le marabout est considéré comme l’intermédiaire puissant entre Dieu et l’individu.
leurs vies, de leurs aspirations et de leurs engagements dans l'association. J'ai aussi participé à un pèlerinage à Porokhane, à la mémoire de Mam Diarra Bousso.

L'objectif principal de cet article est de décrire la pratique religieuse mouride des femmes. Cette pratique des membres de l'association Mam Diarra Bousso n'est pas seulement à considérer comme le produit des idées religieuses dominantes, mais également a interpréter en termes de capacité des femmes à «manipuler» le système de valeurs, sans toutefois vouloir le défier ou le changer.

LES ASSOCIATIONS INFORMELLES DE FEMMES

De manière générale, les associations informelles de femmes au Sénégal constituent non seulement une base collective pour l'action, mais aussi un moyen d'expression et de renforcement de l'identité culturelle féminine. Dans la société sénégalaise, chacun vise à être intégré à un groupe. Personne ne veut ou ne peut rester seul, sans appartenir à un ou plusieurs groupes. Être seul, c'est être marginal, isolé, et il n'y a que les fous pour le faire. La vie de chacun doit être «transparente» ( wolof: leer) et bien connue de son entourage social. Il y a là une obligation sociale et morale pour la femme en tant que membre reconnu de la communauté. Comme pour souligner l'honnêteté de la personne, tout doit être fait en commun: les repas, le travail, les loisirs. Les associations fournissent le cadre adapté et la forme légitime de la vie collective. L'entraide est importante dans toute les formes d'activités et de cérémonies sociales. Elle signifie collaboration avec les autres sur une base réciproque. Pour qu'un individu puisse se réaliser pleinement, il a besoin d'un groupe, d'un cadre collectif.

Les associations religieuses et rituelles s'appuient sur une autorité plus élevée. Cette autorité influence les associations féminines et leur donne un aura d'essence spirituelle, en situant les rapports entre les sexes dans un ordre mondial plus vaste. L'association Mam Diarra Bousso en constitue un exemple permettant d'analyser la place des femmes dans la communauté locale, pour tenter quelques généralisations sur leur statut dans la société au sens large. De la même manière, je tenterai d'éclairer quelques institutions et rituels religieux du point de vue de l'idéologie et de la pratique des relations entre les sexes. Pour clarifier ces thèmes, je les diviserai en questions portant sur l'autorité religieuse et sur les relations entre ceux qui ont et ceux qui n'ont pas accès au pouvoir religieux. La
participation des membres est souvent motivée à la fois par une volonté de s’affirmer et un désir de protection, éléments de la stratégie informelle des femmes. L’intérêt se porte naturellement vers la distribution des ressources matérielles et immatérielles.

Les associations sont structurées de façon informelle autour des réseaux de communication féminins qui s’étendent également jusqu’aux domaines masculins du pouvoir et de l’autorité. Les critères significatifs pour définir la position des femmes dans les associations sont à la fois d’ordre social, économique et politique. La réputation morale des femmes, leaders ou membres des associations, réputation parfois manipulée par les femmes avec plus ou moins de succès, est aussi à prendre en considération. Ceci invite à une réflexion sur les idées des hommes et des femmes concernant les relations entre les sexes chez les mourides. Mam Diarra Bousso est, comme nous allons le voir, une personnalité féminine religieuse idéale, dont les mourides racontent la vie maintes et maintes fois, sous forme de légendes, comme exemple d’épouse et de mère idéale, et dont le comportement se distingue par la patience, la capacité à garder les secrets de famille et à supporter les épreuves.

QUELQUES CONCEPTS EN MATIÈRE D’ANALYSE

Mon analyse s’articule autour de trois mots clefs ou concepts: pureté, éducation religieuse et bénéédiction religieuse, qui sont intimement liés aux différentes positions de la femme et de l’homme dans les institutions et les rituels religieux. Ces concepts clefs, dans le discours religieux dominé par les hommes, sont souvent relevés par les marabouts soufis au Sénégal, comme par les Islamistes. Ils ont un impact sur la participation des femmes au mouridisme, puisque le soufisme et l’islamisme sont pour partie interactifs et s’influent mutuellement dans la société sénégalaise contemporaine.

«Naissance» est peut-être le facteur le plus déterminant dans la position des femmes dans la société sénégalaise. «Caste», religion, ethnicité, descendance des grandes lignées maraboutiques, tout cela attribue un statut à la femme, comme à l’homme, bien entendu. Cependant, si on les compare aux femmes, il semble qu’il y ait plus d’espace transactionnel pour les carrières sociales des hommes; ceux-ci sont socialement plus mobiles et leurs carrières moins conventionnelles. Le statut des hommes

2. Classement hiérarchique de groupes, selon les métiers.
semble être plus facile à construire et à transformer sur d'autres modes, alternatifs ou complémentaires, comme par exemple dans le cas des migrations. Le rôle de la femme comme modèle moral pour la société fait obstacle pour elle à la reconnaissance de certaines formes de changement de statut plus novatrices. En ce qui concerne la bénéédiction, le lignage est déterminant pour l'homme comme pour la femme, comme nous allons le voir. Mais là aussi, la femme est désavantagée. Pour elle, la reconnaissance sociale attachée à la bénéédiction héritée de son lignage maraboutique est plus faible, même si elle est sokhna, c'est-à-dire si elle descend d'un marabout ou si elle en est l'épouse. En résumé, les femmes donnent et reçoivent moins de bénéédiction que les hommes. Ceci renforce leur marginalisation dans la vie publique par rapport aux hommes dont les idées sur eux-mêmes et sur les femmes sont dominantes et monopolisent l'idéologie concernant les relations entre les sexes ainsi que les pratiques religieuses et séculaires.

Par pureté (arabe: tabara), on désigne la pureté rituelle exigée de ceux qui approchent Dieu par la prière et la lecture du Coran, et qui entrent dans des espaces sacrés, par exemple des mosquées. Il s'agit surtout des hommes, car la femme menstruée ou la femme qui donne naissance est impure pendant les périodes de saignement. Le sang est considéré comme signe de souillure. Cette donnée physiologique prédestine la femme à une position secondaire dans la hiérarchie établie entre les sexes dans l'Islam, car la femme qui ne peut pas contrôler ses saignements ne peut donc éviter d'être régulièrement «impure». Ceci limite sa participation aux rituels et contribue à abaisser sa position par rapport à celle des hommes.

"L'éducation" et "le savoir religieux" ont toujours été un critère important pour être musulman. Une connaissance de l'arabe suffisante pour lire le hadith, 3 savoir des prières et connaître par cœur au moins certaines parties du Coran, tels sont les exemples courants de ce qui définit le véritable fidèle de l'Islam. L'ignorance religieuse, jahaliyya, devient aujourd'hui un concept moral négatif, qui n'indique plus seulement, comme à l'origine, une méconnaissance de la religion islamique, caractéristique des non-Musulmans vivant à l'extérieur des régions islamisées: ce concept a aujourd'hui des connotations d'hérésie ou même de déniement des valeurs musulmanes. L'éducation religieuse des garçons comme des filles est aujourd'hui surtout à l'ordre du jour des Islamistes, dans le

3. Parole du Prophète dont la somme constitue la tradition (sunna).
monde musulman. Cependant tel n’est pas toujours le cas parmi les leaders soufis. Il est vrai que la connaissance de l’arabe, langue religieuse, donne beaucoup de prestige et gagne du terrain aussi parmi les Soufis. Mais les mourides considèrent toujours leur identité religieuse comme fortement liée à l’identité (ethnique) wolof et à l’usage de la langue wolof. Dans les familles pauvres, ce sont surtout les jeunes filles et les femmes qui restentilletées et sans éducation, ce qui renforce l’inferiorité de leur position religieuse par rapport aux hommes.

«La bénéédiction religieuse» (wolof: barke, arabe: baraka) est une qualité plutôt masculine, liée à la descendance masculine du lignage maraboutique. Les femmes issues de familles maraboutiques héritent de la baraka, comme les hommes, mais en réalité à un degré moindre. Si elles y ont accès et peuvent en tirer une reconnaissance, c’est sous des conditions négociées et fortement variables. La personnalité est probablement plus importante que le lignage pour la reconnaissance de la baraka féminine. La bénéédiction transmise par les hommes est un phénomène dont l’importance ne saurait être trop soulignée lorsqu’on discute des critères de l’autorité religieuse dans un contexte soufi. Le rôle déterminant du marabout dans une tariqa est intimement lié à sa capacité à conférer la baraka à ses disciples. Ici, il ne faut pas négliger l’importance de la tiyaba (wolof: mérite religieux) des femmes. Le travail qu’elles effectuent et l’argent qu’elle donnent à leur marabout leur confèrent un mérite religieux, considéré comme une récompense accordée directement par Dieu. Certes, les hommes comme les femmes reçoivent la tiyaba pour leurs actes pieux, mais les femmes semblent la rechercher plus que les hommes. La raison en serait-elle que leur possibilité d’obtenir la baraka par les marabouts est plus limitée? (cf. Buitelaar 1994).

L’ÉPOUSE ET LA FEMME IDÉALE: MAM DIARRA BOUSSO

Au Sénégal, les relations entre les sexes semblent à la fois conflictuelles et contradictoires, en partie interactives, en partie en opposition dans la vie de tous les jours. Deux discours se distinguent parmi beaucoup d’autres au sujet des relations homme-femme au Sénégal. Le discours islamique identifie la femme comme un être soumis et patient; tandis que le discours «africain» souligne la mère à la personnalité forte et puissante, et en même temps aimante et attentive.

L’image de mère de Mam Diarra Bousso, la mère de Cheikh Amadou Bamba, répond aux attentes d’un idéal aussi bien Wolof que Soufi. Elle
est patiente (wolof: muñ) et sans se plaindre supporte toutes les épreuves et les injustices que son mari lui fait subir; elle trouve par elle-même les moyens secrets de subvenir aux besoins des siens, sans désapprouver son mari et sans lui reprocher son incapacité à entretenir sa famille. Le principal concept est celui de soutura, qu'il s'agit d'avoir ou de montrer. Le mot, d'origine arabe, désigne un voile ou un morceau de tissu utilisé pour cacher quelque chose, comme une sorte de mur. Dans ce contexte, il s'agit surtout de cacher les méfaits ou la mauvaise fortune du mari. On attend de la femme qu'elle dissimule les secrets désagréables concernant sa vie familiale et donne avec stoïcisme et courage l'apparence d'une épouse heureuse et sans problèmes. Il s'agit d'éviter la diffusion de toute information dévalorisante concernant le mari, pour lui épargner le mépris d'autrui. (cf. Ly 252–264).

Ces caractéristiques idéales féminines sont décrites de manière vivante dans les légendes que connaissent la plupart des femmes mourides et qui constituent la tradition orale féminine. L'une d'entre elles conte la façon dévouée dont Mam Diarra Bousso finançait la nourriture familiale lorsque son mari n'était pas capable d'apporter sa part. Sans une plainte, sans un reproche, cette femme de coeur partait tous les jours avec son collier, rendait visite à un des Peuls (nomades) vivant à l'extérieur du village et lui achetait du lait et du mil pour son mari, les coépouses et tous les enfants, payant chaque jour avec une perle. Lorsque la mère de Mam Diarra lui rendit visite, elle demanda à voir le collier. Et c'est alors seulement que la fille raconta à sa mère à quoi elle avait utilisé le collier. La mère, impressionnée par le bon comportement de sa fille, racheta au Peul toutes les perles et en fit cadeau à sa fille.

Une autre légende populaire montre la patience extraordinaire de Mam Diarra et sa soumission totale à son mari. Un soir, le mari voulut sortir du foyer pour faire ses ablutions. Mam Diarra l'accompagna pour lui ouvrir la barrière. De retour, il ne lui demanda pas de refermer la barrière et de venir dormir. Il l'oublia et se mit au lit tandis que Mam Diarra passait la nuit à côté de la barrière, sous une pluie battante, attendant que son mari l'appelle. C'est seulement tôt le lendemain matin qu'il remarqua son absence, et l'appela pour lui demander où elle était allée. Lorsqu'elle lui dit la vérité, il fut surpris de sa patience, de son obéissance et de sa force dans une telle épreuve.

Ses qualités de mère sont aussi décrites en termes d'honnêteté et de transparence. L'idée générale est que le destin d'un enfant dépend entièrement du comportement moral de la mère. Ceci pese lourd sur les épau-
les de la mère, seule responsable des actes de ses enfants, de leur succès ou de leur échec dans la vie. Par ailleurs, la bonne ou la mauvaise influence du père sur les enfants, tenant à son propre comportement, est réduite à néant. Ici le lignage du père n'est pas pris en considération, mais ce sont la moralité et les responsabilités sociales de la femme, qui semblent bien plus importantes que celles de l'homme. La maternité a une véritable signification, comme je l'ai souligné ci-dessus, et selon l'esprit mouride, Mam Diarra Bousso mérite remerciements et honneurs pour avoir engendré un fils tel que Cheikh Amadou Bamba. C'est seulement grâce à cette vie moralement sans tache, à cette patience, à cette capacité à supporter des souffrances personnelles, à cette persévérance, que le mouridisme a eu un fondateur et un chef religieux aussi extraordinaire que Cheikh Amadou Bamba. Tout ceci est exprimé avec éloquence dans une des légendes: l'enfant apprit à parler miraculeusement tôt. Il était âgé de quelques années seulement lorsqu'il dit en confidence à sa mère qu'il était un saint, un prophète, et que c'était grâce à elle qu'il avait acquis ce pouvoir. Sa soumission et son obéissance à ses parents et surtout à son mari, père de l'enfant, lui avaient permis d'avoir un fils comme lui. «Tu le mérites et je ne serai jamais à quelqu'un d'autre qu'à toi, seulement à toi», dit à Mam Diarra Bousso le petit garçon qui allait devenir le grand Cheikh Amadou Bamba.

LA PARTICIPATION FÉMININE

Le dahira est une association religieuse, qui n'est en rien de nature spécifiquement féminine, mais qui cadre très bien avec d'autres formes d'organisations, que ce soit les tontines ( wolof: nat), les associations d'épargne, ou les mbotaye, associations d'entraide sociale des femmes. Non seulement dans le mouridisme, mais également dans d'autres confréries, la présence des femmes dans les dahiras est remarquablement importante et leur participation souvent très active. La contribution des femmes est considérable: elles apportent de l'argent, participent par leur travail à l'organisation pratique des activités de la dahira, et préparent la nourriture offerte lors des fêtes religieuses. Elles aident activement à l'organisation des gammadous, réunions religieuses, avec des invités spéciaux qui chantent des airs religieux et prononcent des discours sur des thèmes religieux. Cependant, à cause de la souillure, les femmes ne peuvent satisfaire au rituel d'initiation le plus important, le voeu d'obéissance à leur marabout. Elles ne participent pas non plus activement aux
chants religieux. Elles sont bien entendu autorisées à écouter, assises pendant des heures, les chants des hommes. Elles peuvent cependant chanter quelques chants qui ne contiennent pas des citations du Coran. Je me réfère ici aux femmes fertiles, car les jeunes filles et les femmes ménopausées obéissent à des lois en partie différentes. Elles ne sont pas considérées comme impures, mais sont quand même des femmes, sources de souillure pour l’avenir ou dans le passé.

Les dahiras, auxquels adhèrent les hommes aussi bien que les femmes, sont dirigés par un Conseil avec un président pour les membres masculins et une présidente pour les membres femmes. Les marabouts n’y prennent pas part et restent pour la plupart dans leur village à la campagne, loin des activités urbaines du dahira. Une seule fois par an, ils reçoivent leurs disciples et les membres du dahira qui se rendent en pèlerinage auprès du marabout pour lui donner l’argent amassé durant l’année. Il en fait un usage idéal: il procure de la nourriture et un toit aux pauvres et aux visiteurs qui arrivent pendant le magal (pèlerinage), il améliore la vie de sa communauté (construction de mosquées par exemple). L’aumône est remise au khalifa général à Touba lors du pèlerinage annuel.  

LE DAHIRA DE MAM DIARRA BOUSSO

Le dahira de Mam Diarra Bousso à Mbacké m’a été présenté comme un dahira uniquement composé de femmes, ce qui m’a troublée, car je n’avais jamais entendu parler d’une chose semblable. Ses membres célèbrent la mémoire de Mam Diarra Bousso, au travers d’activités communales, consistant à collecter des fonds pour le pèlerinage annuel qu’elles effectuent ensemble à Porokhane, dans le sud du Sénégal.

En réponse à ma question sur le choix du dahira de Mam Diarra Bousso, plutôt que d’une association honorant un marabout plus proche, qui pût leur donner baraka et protection, mon interlocutrice a dit d’une voix emplie de chaleur et de tendresse: «Parce que nous aimons Mam Diarra».

Lors des entretiens ultérieurs avec la présidente, elle dit que le dahira était mixte. Se pouvait-il que des hommes fussent membres d’un dahira voué à Mam Diarra Bousso, figure maternelle mystique vénérée surtout

4. Le magal de Cheikh Amadou Bamba est la plus grande manifestation mouride de l’année. A cette occasion les mourides se rassemblent à Touba pour célébrer le souvenir de leur fondateur.
par les femmes? La présidente a affirmé qu’il y avait en effet des hommes parmi les membres. Au total, a-t-elle dit, 80 femmes et 30 hommes. Toutes les femmes provenaient d’un même quartier de la ville, et la plupart d’entre elles étaient de petites marchandes, faisant le commerce de tissus, de fruits et de cacahuètes grillées. La présidente avait un fils tailleur dont elle vendait les vêtements à Mbacké et dans quelques villages des environs. Les jeunes hommes membres de l’association exerçaient différents métiers, surtout tailleurs et artisans. Tous célibataires, ils arrondissaient leurs fins de mois en chantant les qasaid, les airs religieux de Cheikh Amadou Bamba, pour d’autres personnes, et parfois dans d’autres dahiras, ou épisodiquement lors de manifestations religieuses. A Mbacké, ils avaient une solide réputation de bons chanteurs de qasaid.

Auparavant, l’association se réunissait tous les vendredis, mais comme il était difficile pour les hommes de participer au dahir après la prière du vendredi à la mosquée, les réunions avaient lieu désormais le lundi après-midi. C’est-à-dire que les femmes se réunissent chaque lundi et les hommes y participent parfois. Une fois par mois, on collecte les cotisations. Les fonds, appelés «Calebasse de Mam Diarra Bousso», sont un élément absolument central dans les activités du dahir. La moitié de l’argent est, comme nous l’avons mentionné, mise de côté pour le magal de Porokhane et remise à un représentant de la famille de Mam Diarra Bousso (Sokhna Astou Boury Mbacké à Porokhane), tandis que l’autre moitié est utilisée pour les frais de transport au lieu du pèlerinage et la nourriture. Les hommes ne font pas de contributions en argent. Les cotisations sont faibles: en 1994, chaque femme payait 300 F CFA par mois (100 F CFA équivalent à 1 franc français).

Mais pourquoi des hommes dans le dahir? «Nous avons besoin des hommes», m’a expliqué la présidente, «pour trois raisons: pour nous chanter les qasaid, pour faire les travaux trop pénibles et pour nous protéger». Elles ont particulièrement besoin des hommes pour le pèlerinage annuel de Porokhane. De plus, ils transportent l’argent et les jattes de nourriture, car l’argent peut facilement être volé et les jattes sont lourdes. Il est aussi plus respectable d’avoir des hommes avec soi et de ne pas rester entre femmes. «Etre loin de chez soi, et seulement entre femmes, ça peut être provoquant», disait la présidente, «ça ne se dit pas, mais c’est comme ça». Comme les jeunes hommes aident les femmes à assurer la bonne marche du dahir par leur présence physique et leur chants religieux, les femmes essayent de les encourager en leur donnant de l’argent
et des tissus et en contribuant à l’organisation des fêtes rituelles de passage.

Le but principal du dahira était et reste la participation au magal de Mam Diarra Bousso à Porokhane. L’on passe beaucoup de temps dans des réunions à planifier et à discuter du voyage annuel. Une fois que ce grand événement appartient au passé et une fois les participants revenus, on se réunit pour réviser tous les détails du pèlerinage et pour mettre au courant les membres qui n’y ont pas participé. Est alors servie une boisson spéciale appelée café Touba, au goût de café amer, considérée comme typiquement mouride. Les femmes âgées dominent la conversation dans ces réunions. Les femmes plus jeunes sont assises ensemble sur des nattes dans un coin de la cour; leurs aînées occupent la partie centrale, et les jeunes hommes, lorsqu’ils sont présents, se rassemblent au fond autour de l’ampli.

Quelles sont les attractions du magal de Mam Diarra Bousso? A part toutes les caractéristiques d’une très importante fête religieuse, avec un vaste marché, le magal comporte deux événements saisissants: la remise de l’addiya, argent collecté pendant l’année écoulée, à Sokhna Astou Boury, de la famille Bousso-Mbacké, et d’autre part le ziyara, visite pieuse des lieux sacrés de Porokhane. Le moment capital du ziyara est la visite de la tombe (khabru), lorsque le pèlerin demande à Mam Diarra d’exaucer ses vœux. D’autres moments du ziyara consistent à puiser l’eau «sacrée» du puits, à visiter les endroits où Mam Diarra pilait le mil pendant que son fils Cheikh Amadou Bamba rampait dans le sable avant d’apprendre à marcher. La mosquée se visite le soir de l’arrivée et à nouveau pour la prière de l’après-midi du vendredi, le deuxième jour du magal étant habituellement un vendredi.

La place du marché est également un élément important du magal, et le vendredi matin est habituellement consacré à la visite du marché. On y fait deux sortes d’achats: les femmes achètent des cadeaux qui apportent la bénédiction à ceux de leurs proches qui n’ont pas pu se joindre au pèlerinage, mais aussi des articles pour la revente, surtout des tissus. À Porokhane, la marchandise importée de Gambie est vendue hors taxes, et les prix sont en général plus bas qu’à Dakar. La seule difficulté, c’est la douane, qui a tendance à attendre le long des routes et à arrêter les véhicules quittant Porokhane, à la recherche des marchandises hors taxes. Les femmes sont contraintes, soit de payer la douane, soit de laisser la marchandise sur place aux mains des douaniers.
Des milliers de personnes participent au magal dans une ambiance agréable, l’air heureux. Au lieu de rester assis dans la maison du marabout des heures durant, comme il est de coutume dans d’autres magals, les gens se promènent à Porokhane. La plupart des pèlerins semblent détendus et de bonne humeur en faisant le tour des différentes activités et des lieux du ziyara. Les pèlerins, hommes et femmes, imitent Mam Diarra pilant le mil, en empruntant un mortier aux disciples de Bai Fall qui guident les visiteurs et demandent l’aumône. Le maniement symbolique du pilon, effectué par les pèlerins hommes, transgresse les normes ordinaires du comportement masculin. Il en va de même pour l’imitation de Cheikh Amadou Bamba lorsqu’enfant, il rampait dans le sable, imitation effectuée avec un sourire par tous les visiteurs, dans l’espoir de faire entrer dans leurs corps et dans leur âme un peu de la baraka du lieu. Ces activités physiques, alliées à l’espoir de profiter du pouvoir miraculeux et mystérieux qu’avait Mam Diarra Bousso de répondre aux besoins et aux désirs les plus ardents, confèrent au magal de Porokhane une dimension particulière de grâce, de plaisir et d’animation.

En 1994, il s’est avéré que trente femmes seulement étaient membres du dahira de Mam Diarra Bousso. Seules 17 d’entre elles avaient payé leur cotisation (addiya), et étaient donc autorisées à faire le pèlerinage organisé par le Conseil du dahira. L’activité principale du dahira était toujours le pèlerinage de Porokhane, mais l’intérêt des femmes jeunes n’était plus semble-t-il aussi grand qu’auparavant. La majorité des femmes du dahira actuel et des pèlerins de Porokhane étaient des femmes âgées et de petites marchandes. Tous les membres, à l’exception de la trésorière (engagée dans un autre dahira par son mari), étaient parallèlement membres d’un autre dahira, appelé Willaya (wolof: maison) où l’on vénéraría Séérine Mbacké Sokhna Lô, cheikh célèbre et populaire, vivant non loin de Mbacké. Lors des réunions du lundi de Mam Diarra Bousso, une rétribution spéciale de 50 F CFA était prélevée chaque semaine pour son addiya. Tous les ans, les membres faisaient le magal vers sa maison de Darou Khoudoss. Donc, les femmes membres du dahira Mam Diarra Bousso vivaient avec le soutien et la protection spirituelle d’un marabout d’aujourd’hui, qui pouvait donner à ses membres la baraka si convoitée. Femmes et hommes pouvaient travailler pour lui à sa demande ou à la demande du khalifa général, et obtenir ainsi la bénéédiction et le mérite religieux.
CONCLUSION

L’exemple du dahira de Mam Diarra Bousso démontre comment les femmes mourides peuvent s’organiser pour participer à un magal comme celui de Porokhane, surtout si elles ne peuvent pas se faire accompagner par leur mari ou un membre de la famille. Il est également évident que ces mêmes femmes qui, pour des raisons idéologiques, sont considérées comme des Musulmanes inférieures dans les rituels les plus importants, ont parfois recours à la présence et au soutien des hommes pour pouvoir continuer à faire fonctionner de façon prestigieuse et attractive un dahira féminin, comme celui de Mam Diarra Bousso. Dans le cas présent, les hommes jeunes sont appelés pour servir de médiateurs entre les participantes du dahira et la société qui les entoure. Ces jeunes célibataires sont plus accessibles à ces femmes qui pourraient difficilement trouver des hommes mariés et plus âgés pour les assister dans un dahira féminin. Ainsi, on peut peut-être dire que les hommes jeunes aident les femmes à atteindre à la sainteté. Les voix des hommes quand ils chantent les qasaids, constituent un élément important; on les attend puissantes, ce qu’elles sont en effet, amplifiées par un équipement électronique. Les femmes, au contraire, sont censées rester silencieuses, ou bien, dans le cas des chants de Mam Diarra Bousso, chanter à voix basse, «pour ne pas troubler les hommes», comme on dit.

Dans ce contexte, on peut dire que les femmes ont besoin des hommes pour leur pureté rituelle, et que ces derniers exécutent pour elles les chants mourides rituels. Le manque de connaissances religieuses et l’analphabetisme des femmes les rendent dépendantes des hommes qui leur lisent les prières et leur interprètent les légendes évoquant Cheikh Amadou Bamba et sa mère. Les femmes ont également besoin des hommes pour la baraka que ces chants procurent, indépendamment du prestige qu’elles gagnent dans leur quartier (n’oublions pas que la plupart des participantes sont voisines).

Dans le cas des mourides, l’autorité religieuse revient toujours au marabout. Le leadership du dahira de Mam Diarra Bousso appartient à la présidente qui détient une position importante et une grande influence. Elle a pour principaux atouts son entretien et sa réputation de piété. Avec la trésorière, elle gère aussi l’argent rassemblé dans la calebasse de Mam Diarra Bousso. La présidente appartient à un groupe non caste (geer), considéré comme supérieur. Elle est le chef des membres de son dahira, composé de femmes castées d’un statut inférieur (ñeeño), et de
femmes non castées. Ces femmes la considèrent comme une sorte de mère sociale, dont les nombreux contacts avec des groupes sociaux prestigieux et les liens avec un ou plusieurs marabouts peuvent leur être utiles. La présidente elle-même maintient des liens avec le marabout du dahira, ou dans le cas présent avec les sokhnas de la famille Bousso.

La famille Bousso aime avoir une présidente active, car elle recrute les membres et les visiteurs du magal. De son côté, la présidente a besoin des membres pour conserver sa position, agissant en tant que mère protectrice de ses clientes ou filles. La participation des femmes au dahira doit être considérée à partir de la perspective des femmes mourides. Les femmes considèrent tout ce qu’elles font en relation avec le dahira comme des actes religieux qui leur conféreront la baraka et le tiyaba, le mérite religieux.

L’identité féminine mouride est, nous l’avons dit, liée à la participation aux dahiras, aux magals, et aux ziyaras, comme à l’organisation des gammous et au travail et à l’argent qu’elles procurent à leur marabout. A mon sens, ce qui perpétue la position des femmes dans le mouridisme, c’est l’accent mis couramment par les hommes sur l’impureté, le manque de connaissances et l’insuffisante bénédiction ou baraka des femmes. Les idées concernant la religion et les relations entre les sexes semblent constituer de fortes structures normatives relativement résistantes au changement et se renforçant mutuellement. Il est cependant évident que ces structures s’adaptent de façon permanente aux multiples changements de l’environnement, et, ce faisant, connaissent de multiples transformations. Tout dahir féminin, comme celui de Mam Diarra Bousso, constitue une preuve d’adaptation à une ère nouvelle, qui permet aux femmes de surmonter en partie ce handicap idéologique et culturel, construction religieuse et plus largement construction sociale. Elles y parviennent, comme on l’a vu, en impliquant les hommes jeunes dans leurs activités pieuses, en troquant la protection, le prestige et la baraka de ces hommes contre une contribution financière et la prestation de services dans les cérémonies religieuses. Pour qu’une femme puisse mener à bien ces activités, il faut une concordance entre l’argent, l’âge et le statut social. Une bonne réputation, reposant sur la piété, l’honnêteté et une certaine aisance financière, ouvre à la femme un vaste champ d’action sur les plans religieux et économique. De plus, comme l’image maternelle véhiculée au Sénégal des connotations positives religieuses en même temps que laïques, les femmes mourides ont une motivation toute particulière à
devenir membres d’un *dahira* où se vénère la mémoire d’une figure maternelle idéale et presque sacrée comme celle de Mam Diarra Bousso.\(^5\)

**Traduction: Cecilia Monteux**


**Bibliographie**


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5. Quelques ouvrages intéressants sur le mouridisme:


Abstract:

The Mam Diarra Bousso Daira of Mbacké, Senegal: An Analysis of a Female Religious Association

Eva Evers Rosander

Women in Senegal are more often than not members of informal groups or associations. These associations provide a collective basis for action and consolidate the female members’ cultural identities as respected women. In this article, my main focus is on Murid women in Senegal, Muridism being the second largest tariqa (arab. “path”, Sufi order) in Senegal, and their religious practices.

I describe one particular women’s association, dedicated to the veneration of the mother of the founder of Muridism, the famous Cheikh Amadou Bamba. This association is situated in the town of Mbacké, 180 km east of Dakar, and has the name of the founder’s mother, Mam Diarra Bousso. First I briefly present the Murid brotherhood, followed by an account of the female gender ideals as manifested in the legends about Mam Diarra Bousso. These ideals are recommended by husbands and religious specialists to be applied in the Murid woman’s daily life. Thus, characteristics such as submission, patience and soutura (Wolof: to conceal sufferings and endure hardships) are described, as well as the organization and activities of the Mam Diara Bousso Association. The main purpose of the association is to collect money at the regular meetings to enable members to participate in the yearly pilgrimage to Porokhane, where Mam Diarra Bousso used to live (in the middle of the 19th century), and to give addiya, a gift of money, to the female representative of the Bousso family in Porokhane.

In the final analysis, the Mam Diarra Bousso Association, is seen as a moral and religious space not only for the practice of the dominant Murid ideas and concepts. This association is also interpreted in terms of offering a respectable platform to women, who as members are able to “manipulate” the value system without challenging nor aiming to change it.
Section 4

Organizing Female Lives
Costs and Rewards—Exchange in Relationships
Experiences of Some Ghanaian Women

Akosua Adomako Ampofo

INTRODUCTION

Since the disease of AIDS struck sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s and because of the continuing interest among demographers in persistent high fertility rates in much of the region, the nature of marriages, informal unions and sexual relationships has come under renewed scrutiny in the last decade.¹ Contrary to the expectations of some demographers, that “modernization” would lead to delays in marriage due to lengthening education and that traditional norms such as polygamy would be abandoned (Goode 1982), what appears to be happening is the integration of Western conjugal-type and traditional unions (Kayongo-Male and Onyango 1984). The processual² nature of marriage seems to have

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2. See next page.
become intensified, with young women entering sexual relationships while still at school and new forms of polygyny emerging. Other important changes noted in qualitative reports include increases in the prevalence of couples who start marriage without formal ceremonies and increases in the prevalence of unions without co-residence of spouses (Brandon and Bledsoe 1988; Kayongo-Male and Onyango 1984; Meekers 1992). Furthermore, although men may not formally contract multiple marriages, they maintain informal liaisons which have all the appearances of marriage, variously referred to as “outside wives” or “deuxième bureau” (Meekers 1992).

Love, affection, sexual desire and the desire for children continue to play important roles in partner selection. At the same time, it appears that increasingly many young women in contemporary Ghana choose partners depending on the latters’ ability to support them financially (Adomako Ampofo 1995; Anarfi and Fayorsey 1995; Ankomah and Ford 1993). Women seem to see this as one option to supplement their incomes in situations of declining alternatives and, not infrequently, a woman can test potential partners with her family’s tacit or overt approval (Adomako 1995).

This paper explores the relationship between low income and the nature of sexual relationships among a group of young single women in contemporary Ghana. My hypothesis is that to different degrees and in varying forms, women in low-income sectors such as the “informal economy”, or low-paying salaried employment such as the civil service, have began to see sexual relationships as an economic strategy. As women’s income-earning options decline, they may view sexual relationships as either a direct means of support, or as a means of gaining access to capital.

In order to place the discussion in context, the paper begins by offering a background to the economic situation in Ghana. I then go on to

2. I briefly address the issue of the processual nature of marriage in Ghanaian society later in this paper, however, see Evans-Pritchard (1951) for a more detailed discussion.

3. In spite of the fact that informal work has been characterized by such features as being domestic, personal, labour-intensive, unstable, seasonal, officially uncounted and involving cash-barter payments, the concept cannot be captured by any single, strict definition. By “informal” I mean here sectors of the economy outside the environs of strict state control or support, generally small-scale and with a low or fluctuating income and wages, such as trading, hairdressing, selling of cooked food, etc.
provide some explanations surrounding traditional sexual relationships and finally suggest a picture of the contemporary situation by analysing data from a study among single Ghanaian women.

A BACKGROUND TO THE GHANAIAN ECONOMIC SITUATION, MID-1980s TO 1993

Abayie Boaten (1992:2-7) describes how, in the early 1980s, the main features of Ghana's economic policy under the then People's National Defence Committee (PNDC) government gradually shifted away from commitment to self-reliance and popular mobilization. The result was the drawing up of the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) in 1983. The ERP was mainly aimed at reducing fiscal and balance of payment deficits and external debt arrears (1983 to 1986), enhancing conditions of growth, improving incentive structures, stabilizing wage bargaining and reducing the role of the state in economic activity. This further led to the implementation of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which involved "stabilization measures" and "structural reforms".

In most accounts, Ghana's SAP is presented as a success; budget deficits were wiped out and even showed meagre surpluses between 1986 to 1988 (Abayie Boaten 1992). Real incomes of farmers and traders of local foodstuffs fell, however, while at the same time they faced increased competition from cheap imports. The Institute of Social, Statistical and Economic Research (ISSER) of the University of Ghana estimated that industrial output slowed from 25 per cent in 1985 to a mere

4. In this paper I concentrate on the period up to 1993 because the interviews among Ghanaian women I discuss were collected prior to this period (between September 1992 and September 1993).

5. Ghana was governed by a military dictatorship, the PNDC, headed by Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, from 31st December 1981 to November 1992. In November 1992 elections were held and the PNDC, now named NDC (National Democratic Congress) was returned to power with Jerry John Rawlings as president. When the PNDC first came to power, it had a strong socialist rhetoric and spurned Western intervention and international economic control.

6. These words later came to be synonyms for the selling of many state enterprises, scaling down others and the laying off of workers. This also heralded the advent of "trade liberalization" and the influx into the country of many cheap products, from South-East Asia especially, with which local products could not compete.
1.7 per cent in 1989 (*The Statesman*, 24 January 1993). The structural reforms were also responsible for the massive trimming down of the labour force in the public sector. Women are typically among the first victims, because they have fewer requisite skills and less education. As a result, increasing numbers of women were being pushed into sectors of the informal sector which were already choked, such as trading (Adomako Ampofo 1995).

Several years after the inception of SAPs in Africa and after years of controversy about their impact, several writers agree that the programmes have had negative effects on women, especially small-scale farmers and traders (Anker et al. 1988; Clark and Manuh 1992; Elson 1991; Palmer 1988, 1991). Work done by Clark and Manuh (1992) and corroborated by Abayie Boaten (1992) indicate the worsening economic position of many Ghanaian female traders and farmers. Traders stated that people “don’t buy” since “there is no money”. This “there is no money” syndrome also referred to traders’ own lack of capital. Clark and Manuh found that those who remained in the markets were vulnerable to bankruptcy. The majority of the traders interviewed by Abayie Boaten in July 1992 felt that government policies had adversely affected their work since the mid-1980s (Abayie Boaten 1992). Almost all the women claimed that household budgets had gone up without corresponding increases in incomes and that generally their quality of life had declined. Many traders were still on the markets doing business because “bad business is not the same as stealing”.

**CHANGING PATTERNS IN UNION FORMATION**

In this section I focus on traditional and changing marriage patterns in order to provide a background to sexual relationships in contemporary

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7. In 1988, a wide gap still existed between male and female school attendance. Between 1990 and 1993, the percentage of females enrolled in Primary, Junior Secondary/Middle and Senior Secondary Schools was around 33 per cent (Source: Ministry of Education, Ghana).

8. The controversy generally has to do with the methodologically problematic requirements of measuring the impact of SAPs. This is mainly because such an attempt requires controlling for what would have happened without SAPs and also because the longitudinal data required to make such assessments are not widely available. This provides an even greater constraint when attempting a gendered assessment, since many countries still do not have data that is adequately delineated by gender.
Ghana. Although it is difficult to generalize for Ghana (since her people are made up of a rich ethnic mix of matrilineal and patrilineal groups), or for any generic "pre-colonial" period, it would appear that marriage was almost universally viewed as enhancing a woman's status (Nukunya 1992; Boamah-Wiafe 1993). Consequently, in order to increase her eligibility, and contrary to what some writers have said (see for example Caldwell et al. 1989; Dinan 1983; Rushing 1995), premarital chastity appears to have been highly valued in traditional societies. Varying degrees of religious and state sanctions existed to regulate premarital sexual activity ranging from being disowned (see Nukunya 1969, on the Anlo Ewe; and Sarpong 1977, on the Ashanti) to a death sentence (see Bleek 1976, on the Kwawhu). In cases of pre-marital pregnancy, the "offending" male was made to pay a kwaseabu fine (literally you-have-made-a-fool-of-me).

I pay particular attention in this section to marriage among the Akan, a matrilineal group, since they make up 63 per cent of the study sample discussed later in this paper. Unlike what pertains in most Western societies, marriage in most Ghanaian societies is not a ceremony that takes place on one day. The procedure for the contraction of a marriage is quite complex and normally proceeds by stages, a process which can take from a few months to several years. The basic formality for the contraction of a marriage among the Akan was the payment of tri nsa (head wine) and seda (thanks) (Danquah 1928; Fortes 1970; Rattray 1927; Sarbah 1897). Among almost all groups, some transfer of wealth or valuable commodities from the groom to his prospective wife's family took place. This giving of gifts served as an indication of the seriousness of the suitor's intentions. Often a "knocking fee", usually a bottle of schnapps, was paid before the amount for the tri nsa was agreed upon. This knocking fee merely established the suitor's intention to marry the young woman and did not entitle him to sexual relations with her (Church 1978). According to custom, a man could not call a woman his wife until representatives from her family had accepted and partaken of the drinks, symbolizing their being witnesses to the marriage. The marriage ceremony itself among most groups and the Akan especially, was simple

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9. The lineage may be regarded as a group of people, male and female, who are descended through a single line from a common ancestor (patrilineage) or ancestress (matrilineage). In other words, an individual belongs to only one descent group, his or her mother's (matrilineal descent) or the father's (patrilineal descent). This is referred to as unilateral descent.
and inexpensive; it was important for the families to witness the man and woman’s intention to live (together) as man and wife. The presentation of drinks and token gifts remains essential to the sealing of marriage among most ethnic groups in Ghana.

Segregation and separation of conjugal roles, residences and property was the norm among most matrilineal people such as the Akan, (as well as some patrilineal groups, such as the Ga). Some writers believe that the relative strength of the matrkin bond as opposed to the conjugal bond among the Akan has contributed to the ease with which divorce could be entered into (Oppong 1970, 1974). Even though divorce was normally preceded by extensive arbitration between both families, traditionally divorce procedures in themselves were simple; basically they entailed the refunding of the tri nsa and seda, together with any portable property the man may have given his wife during the course of the marriage. Any debts either party may have incurred against the other also had to be settled.

Marriage in itself offered a woman little economic security except so long as she remained married or her husband remained alive. It has been argued that this insecurity has led many women to be more interested in acquiring their own property than investing in joint resources with their spouses (Oppong 1970). These facts, coupled with the strong matrkin bond, have contributed, some argue, to the relatively high levels of instability of Akan marriages especially (Oppong 1970) and the declining interest in “formal” marriage among many young people today.

The performance of puberty rites which preceded the onset of marriage and sexual intercourse in most traditional Ghanaian societies and which afforded families the opportunity to prepare young people for marriage, is almost non existent among most groups today. One reason for this of course is the many years spent away from home getting an education, often in boarding school. At the same time, men are finding it more difficult to get married because of the harsh economic environment (Anarfi and Fayorsey 1995). This, coupled with the costly and sophisticated contributions being demanded of them, makes it difficult for many to perform even the basic customary rites required. A convenient way out seems to be the concept of mpena aware, literally “lover marriage”. Generally this concept of “lover marriage” is not considered to be a social function in itself, but rather a feature of the marriage system. The union is blessed by neither traditional nor secular rites and although it is not encouraged neither is it exactly frowned upon, being generally
viewed as a prelude to marriage. Today couples tend to remain in an mpema aware union for long periods, sometimes several years, without formally informing their families about the relationship. In some cases, the customary knocking fees may have been paid and the woman’s family tacitly accepts the man as a son-in-law, especially after children have been born to the couple. Even where no drinks have been given by the prospective groom, mpema unions may be institutionalised to allow the couple to cohabit (Meekers 1992) especially in cases where the man supports the woman and/or her family (Adomako Ampofo 1995).10

Although mpema aware may be an indicator of a relaxation of norms regarding marriage in general and the inadequacies in the Akan marriage institution specifically, the intense socio-economic pressures people face today cannot be ignored in its analysis.

FEMALE ECONOMIC STRATEGIES

Some writers indicate that preextra marital sexual relations, especially in modern African urban centres, are basically reciprocal, if not downright exploitative (Acquah 1972; Assimeng 1981; Bleek 1976; Little 1973). “Reciprocal transaction”, rather than exploitation, would seem to be a more appropriate description of these modern relationships (Ankomah 1992). Several theoretical models can be applied. Burns’ Exchange Theory (Burns 1973) assumes that social behaviour is largely determined by rewards and costs. People attempt to maximize rewards and minimize losses with social interaction viewed as an exchange of mutually rewarding activities in which the receipt of a needed valuable article or service is contingent upon the supply of a favour in return.

Mauss’ (1967) theory of gift-giving and sexual bargaining can also be used to analyse such reciprocal relationships.11 So can Homans’ work

10. Anecdotal evidence suggests that frequently, in the case of a death of an in-law, or the woman herself, the male partner is expected to perform the rites expected of a son-in-law or spouse.

11. Describing the tradition in which a Trobriand husband regularly gave his wife a gift, Mauss suggests that the husband is recompensing his wife for sexual services. He describes how each “gift” is part of a system of reciprocity in which the simple rule is that each gift has to be returned in some specified way. In sum, there are no “free” gifts, since these cycles engage people in “permanent commitments that articulate the dominant institutions” (Mary Douglas in foreword to The Gift by Marcel Mauss, 1990). In other words, Mauss concludes that in the economy of gift-exchange, people maintain “profitable alliances” (Mauss 1967:71).
(Homans 1961) which is useful for examining reciprocity in sexual relations.¹²

Although young people may have sexual intercourse for a number of reasons, financial need would appear to play an important role in the initiation of a sexual relationship for many lower-income women today (Adomako 1991; Adomako Ampofo 1995; Ankomah and Ford 1993; Assimeng 1981; Konotey-Ahulu 1989).

From a study carried out by Akuffo (Akuffo 1987) among 6 to 19 year old school children and drop-outs in Asamankese in Ghana, including 125 school girls and 125 out-of-school girls, as a result of parents' difficulties in paying school fees and providing school uniforms, pocket money or other school and social requirements, many girls sought boyfriends who could provide these for them. "Twenty-four per cent of the school girls claimed they got pocket money from their boyfriends or through their own efforts, in ways they did not specify, but which would not exclude getting it from boyfriends" (Akuffo 1987:159). Ten per cent of girls also claimed their school fees were paid by boyfriends. The economic aspect is also revealed by the fact that most said their boyfriends were men in regular employment. Akuffo summarizes it this way, "the girl's involvement in sexual relationships is not simply aimed at looking for husbands, nor a result of any early desire for motherhood. Nor is it considered an experiment. It is an attempt to provide for basic needs" (Akuffo 1987:160). Many girls were given less support than males and as a result had insufficient food or no food at all, which had an adverse effect on their school work. Out of the 125 school girls, 80 per cent were involved in some form of trading almost daily. More likely than not, if such a young school girl who wishes to stay in school finds a man who will alleviate her burden, she may not hesitate long before giving in to his sexual demands.

In another study¹³ among so-called "street kids" in Accra a high level of sexual activity was found among the young people with girls appar-

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¹² Homans argues that rewards tend to increase the frequency with which a person performs an action and costs, being a punishment, tend to decrease it. Furthermore, within this exchange agreement between individuals, the person who sets a higher value on the exchange process is the one with less power and thus the one more likely to change his or her behaviour to increase the rewards of the other.

¹³ The name of the study is "The Study of Factors Affecting AIDS-Related Sexual Risk-Taking among Out of School Youth in Accra", 1992. Unfortunately we do not have the author of this article.
ently receiving about C500\textsuperscript{14} a day from their boyfriends. Other girls complained bitterly about their wares being seized by the Accra Metropolitan Authority (AMA)\textsuperscript{15} task force and that this had caused them to graduate from petty trading into commercial sex.

In the next section I analyse some of the dynamics surrounding entry into sexual unions among a sample of young women.

THE SAMPLE

The sample described below forms part of a larger study among 177 Ghanaian women in two cities in Ghana, on their sexual relations; and knowledge and attitudes regarding sexually-transmitted-diseases (STDs).

The research technique employed was an interview guide in which specific issues were outlined. This freed the interviewer from the restrictions normally imposed by a more rigid questionnaire while allowing for innovation and follow-up of interesting comments. Interviewers would make contact with a woman, explain that a study was being carried out to find out women's perceptions, knowledge and experiences regarding sex and AIDS and ask whether they would be interested in taking part in the study. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and that the interviewer was not interested in their real identity. They were free to discontinue the interview should they have any misgivings; however, if they did agree to be interviewed then this would be recorded. All the women received a small honorarium upon completion of an interview but this was usually not made known to them beforehand. Fifty-one women were purposively selected from predetermined occupational categories (including sales girls, typists, clerks, hairdressing assistants, seamstresses apprentices, small-time traders and students). Thirty-one women were interviewed in Accra and 20 in Kumasi, and 46 interviews were eventually analysed.\textsuperscript{16}
Ethnicity

Sixty-three per cent of the respondents come from Akan groups; the remaining 37 per cent are almost entirely made up of Gas and Ewes (26 per cent) and a mixture of different Northern groups (9 per cent).

Age

Most of the women are aged between 20 and 25 (82.6 per cent), however, since the intention was to interview single women, no particular significance can be attached to this. The rest of the sample are between 25–35; one woman is 41 and one 46 years old.

Relationships

All the women are single, however, one woman is in a relationship where her partner has performed the preliminary customary rites towards marriage. Eight of the women interviewed had no (male) partners at the time of the study and two were in non-sexual relationships. Table 1a and Table 1b describes further socio-cultural characteristics of the sample.

Table 1a. Social Characteristics of Single Women in Accra and Kumasi (Educational Level)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post Secondary(^a)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary(^b)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational/Commercial</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Secondary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary/Middle</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>99.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Includes universities, teacher training colleges and professional schools.

\(^b\) Includes respondents who completed 5 ("O" Level), 7 ("A" Level) and those who dropped out.
Table 1b. Social Characteristics of Single Women in Accra and Kumasi (Occupation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprentice&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student/NS&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seamstress/hairdresser</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typist/clerk&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales girls</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traders</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>100.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Either haidressing or sewing (seamstress).
<sup>b</sup> NS (National Service) is a scheme whereby graduates from secondary/tertiary institutions “serve” the nation for 2 years and receive an allowance.
<sup>c</sup> Includes civil servants.

Financial Situation

Most respondents (N=36) live with family members, either parents or other relatives; four live alone; three with their boyfriends; two with friends; and one woman shuttles between her parents’ and her boyfriend’s home.

Twenty-seven (58 per cent) of the respondents are financially supported by parents or other family members, but also receive support from their boyfriends (mainly money, but also clothes and shoes). Three women are almost wholly supported by their boyfriends. The remaining 16 women do not receive any significant support from boyfriends; 8 of these women are not in a relationship with a man and two are in non-sexual relationships.<sup>17</sup>

All the women claim that they spend almost all their income or allowances from family members on food and transportation; assistance from boyfriends is thus useful or necessary for items like clothes and shoes.

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<sup>17</sup> Three of the women who do not depend on boyfriends at all, but partly or wholly on family support, express deep Christian objections to pre-marital sex. Three have boyfriends who are students and are therefore themselves not financially independent. One young woman stated clearly that she did not think it was “proper” to accept money from a man.
EXCHANGE IN SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS: “I WANT A MAN WHO WILL TAKE RESPONSIBILITY”

I devote this section to an analysis of some of the responses of the women regarding the role of their boyfriends’ financial support in their relationships. Although in this paper I do not make reference to specific sexual aspects of the relationships, the elements of exchange and value placed on the relationship as measured in economic terms are apparent. The selected cases are reflective of the overriding themes in the interviews.

Partial Support—Rewarding Relationships

Many of the respondents describe their relationships primarily in terms of financial support, how “good” their partner was in providing for their needs. “All I can say is that he is really good to me and helps me in my training”, says Grace, a 21-year-old seamstress apprentice. Indeed, women take it for granted that a “good” partner will automatically support them financially. Comfort, a 22-year-old hairdressing apprentice, says that, if her boyfriend says he does not have the money she requests, and she needs it urgently she will often “not agree to that” and they will argue about it. Her insistence may be explained in part by the fact that she has two children with her boyfriend and expects him to support her and the children. Generally he is a good provider and so although he is a “womanizer” she plans to marry him. Frequently, other personal qualities are only mentioned as secondary, as if they would be insignificant in the absence of support.

Even parents encourage their daughters’ relationships if these will ease some of their own burdens in supporting their daughters. When asked what her mother thought of her boyfriend, Abena, an apprentice seamstress, said she approved of him essentially because, “He takes good care of me”. Yaa, a 21-year-old apprentice seamstress explained her situation this way, “I have a male friend who helps me”, adding that her family like her boyfriend, because of the way he is assisting her to continue her apprenticeship. Yaa says that her boyfriend “even gives me something to take to my mother and has told my mother that he would marry me after I’ve completed my apprenticeship ... so my mother is impressed by the way the boy looks after me and how I am not being wayward”.

For the majority of respondents, boyfriends could be relied on to pitch in when salaries or pocket money from parents could not meet their needs. Caro, a 19-year-old student, explains that sometimes when she needs a pair of shoes and her father does not have the money, or not enough for the shoes she wants, she asks her boyfriend to make up the difference. Or take the case of Ama, a 23-year old seamstress who also sells milk to supplement her income and lives with her brother. Explaining the initiation of past sexual relationships she says, “By all means, some boy will say he likes you, you examine your life, you may need a few things, if he can help you, stay with him ... I can’t ask my brother for everything, so that was why I got involved” (emphasis mine).

A boyfriend who could not be relied on to offer such simple assistance, or who did not appear to have the potential to offer financial support in the foreseeable future, would simply not make for a rewarding relationship. Very few women in the sample were willing to remain in relationships for purely altruistic reasons, no matter how caring their boyfriends, if these could/would not support them. The consensus seemed to be that men could generally not be trusted, so if one was to remain in a relationship then, at least, the man would need to be financially supportive.

Other respondents, however, claim they are supporting themselves, or are being supported by their family and then add, as an afterthought, something about a boyfriend’s contribution. Twenty-two-year-old Tine, a student, says, “It’s my mother and aunt who sponsor my schooling ... I rely solely on them ... and sometimes too I collect money from my boyfriend for my clothing”. Then there is Marti, an apprentice seamstress who says her parents bear the cost of her food, then adds, “And my husband too gives me”. (This husband has not performed the rites yet and Marti describes herself as “married but not married”.) Haja, a 22-year-old secretary, who asserts that she supplements her income with money from her brothers, states emphatically that she does not like to accept money from men and so will not ask for or accept money from her businessman boyfriend. Later on in the interview, however, Haja explains that her boyfriend pays for her sports club membership, he also bought her sports wear and occasionally gives her money, “Not much, about C50,000 a month”. Yet this is about as much as she earns from her secretarial job. What Tine, Marti and Haja have in common are explanations throughout the interviews that they sometimes feel compelled to give in to their boyfriends’ sexual (or other) demands because of the sup-
port they provide. Marti is unique in referring her boyfriend as a husband, many of the other women do not foresee any long-term future for their relationships.

Some of the women’s boyfriends are married men (N=4, two of whom would be willing to become second wives). Others know that their boyfriends have other girlfriends, but are unwilling to confront them for fear of jeopardizing their relationship. Although they do not state this specifically, it becomes apparent that as Homans theorizes, the women have placed a higher value on the exchange in the relationship and therefore are more willing to adapt their behavior to suit their partners’ inclinations. Yvonne is a 23-year-old secretary whose Italian boyfriend and engineer in the company she works for, has a wife back in Italy. At the time of the interview, Yvonne’s boyfriend had gone to Italy on vacation and when asked if she expected him back she replied, “If he comes fine, if he doesn’t I’m stranded”, for his regular gifts of clothes, shoes and jewellery had enabled her to save most of her income in treasury bills. Esi’s boyfriend is a married businessman who shuttles between Ghana, the United States and the United Kingdom. He brings her beautiful clothes and shoes whenever he comes to town and gives her money whenever he leaves. Despite the fact that he is married and she sees him only for a few weeks a couple of times a year, Esi is frightened to so much as date other men because her boyfriend has warned her not to. Both Yvonne and Esi are not “really in love” with their boyfriends, nor do they appreciate that they are second sexual partners, yet neither feels willing to confront their partners about this issue for fear the relationship will end.

Total Support—Everything to Lose

Regina is a 19-year-old seamstress apprentice whose boyfriend is paying for her vocational training. Explaining his support she says, “I get all from my boyfriend, I will be dead without him”. When asked what she considered to be her main reason for being in the relationship she says, “He’s told me the plans he has for me,” which includes setting her up in her own sewing shop. When she finishes her training she expects her boyfriend to approach her parents to perform the initial customary rites towards marriage. In this case too Regina’s parents like her boyfriend because “He’s been helping me financially”. Regina, in her own words, would be “dead” without her boyfriend and powerlessness in the rela-
relationship is evidenced by, among other things, her willingness to participate in "unsafe sex".  

Ayishetu is 31 years old, sells cooked food, supports herself, her child and two sisters and currently has no boyfriend. In the past, however, she lived with a man whom she did not love, but "Because of what he's done for me, I agreed to him ... he was good to me (financially) and I did not want him to feel that I was ungrateful". She felt obliged to perform domestic duties and put up with sexual advances for which she felt no interest because she felt obliged to her boyfriend and needed his support. At the time of the interview Ayishetu went on to say that she would like a responsible man who would marry her, "even if it is not good he will bear most of the responsibilities, he will pay light bills and other things, no matter how bad or good your husband may be he will have to foot all those bills". In other words, a bad marriage can be accepted if the man does what he is expected to do and supports his family financially.

CONCLUSIONS

The nature of the sample selection and the small sample size make any generalizations to the larger Ghanaian population impossible. Nonetheless, I believe that the women interviewed in the study are not unique in either their financial situation and needs, nor in their perceived options to meet these needs.

Whether women engage in profitable reciprocal relationships as suggested by Burns and Mauss, some in the sample obviously do, or whether they frequently find themselves in less powerful positions relative to their partners because they place more value on exchanges taking place in the relationship (Homans 1974), the findings suggested in this paper need to be considered in designing reproductive health and family policy. Family Planning and Sexual-Health policy may promote contraceptive and condom use. However, if women weigh their options and feel that they have more to lose by insisiting on, say, condom use with a non-monogamous partner, they will not seek out these options.  

18. Sex is described as "safe" or "unsafe" in terms of whether condoms were used or not.
19. See next page.
In terms of examining marriages and unions it is important to look at the broad spectrum of relationships that women find themselves in: the cohabiting, the “married but not married” and those who are second wives in all but name. Clearly, some of these relationships can proceed for years and begin to take on the properties of a formal marriage in many aspects.

Future studies might want to examine the impact of this increase in non-formal (mpena) unions, or the increasing length of time it takes for unions to be formalized, focusing on the welfare of children especially. It is also important to understand men’s perspectives in such relationships; whether they perceive mpena relationships as interim unions until they get married, or whether they choose partners they intend to get married to. Men’s perceptions of a profitable alliance also need to be understood in order to ensure that reproductive health and family policy and services meet their own needs.

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19. In fact, some of the women in the sample were consciously not contracepting (even though they did not want children) or using condoms (though they knew their partners were not monogamous) precisely because they were afraid their boyfriends would suspect them of being unfaithful. Others were afraid their partners would interpret it as a lack of trust in them. Either way, these women took the risk of not doing what they considered to be the most practical or sensible thing to do.
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Résumé

Gains et pertes — l’enjeu des relations entre hommes et femmes: 
Expériences de quelques femmes ghanéennes

Akosua Adomako Ampofo

Cette contribution évoquera quelques uns des changements opérés ces dernières années dans les relations sexuelles des femmes au Ghana. La prémisse principale étant qu’à des degrés variés et sous des formes différentes, de nombreuses femmes, dans le secteur informel ou employées à bas salaire, ont commencé à considérer les relations sexuelles comme une stratégie de survie.

Pour replacer cette discussion dans son contexte, nous esquisserons en arrière-plan la situation économique du Ghana, en expliquant comment son économie est arrivée à un point de non-retour vers le milieu des années 1970 pour se dégrader vers la fin de la décennie, résultat d’une combinaison de facteurs internes et externes. Ces dernières années de nombreux Ghanéens, en particulier les femmes, se sont subitement trouvés sans aucune source de revenus régulière. Les femmes sont particulièrement frappées, car leur faible niveau d’instruction semble les préparer surtout à des emplois sous-payés dans l’agriculture et le secteur tertiaire. La contribution rend compte de la dégradation de la situation économique de nombreuses femmes ghanéennes dans l’agriculture et le commerce.

Dans la contribution seront présentées les histoires et les opinions de quelques femmes faisant actuellement l’objet d’une étude sur le comportement sexuel des femmes ghanéennes et leur rapports avec des hommes. Le thème des relations sexuelles sera abordé par une explicitation concernant les relations sexuelles traditionnelles.

A en juger par leurs récits, il paraît évident que leurs relations sexuelles démontrent des degrés variés de dépendance par rapport à leurs partenaires sexuels; dans bien des cas le facteur financier a été prépondérant lorsque la femme a pris la décision de commencer une relation.

Lorsqu’on étudie les mariages et les unions, il est important d’analyser en profondeur les différentes formes de relations existantes, comme par exemple la cohabitation, le mariage qui n’en est pas un, ou la condition de seconde femme, qui a toutes les caractéristiques d’une épouse mais sans porter le nom du mari. A l’avenir, on trouvera peut-être un
nombre croissant d'études portant sur l'influence de ces rapports ou liaisons informels (*mpena*) sur la vie des femmes ghanéennes et partant sur la vie des hommes.
Magic and Love on the Road to Higher Education in Cameroon

Lisbet Holtedahl

INTRODUCTION

People try to coordinate various fields of knowledge, local and global (cf. Friedman 1992), while living their everyday lives. The construction of images of formal western education¹ and of visions of what such education might mean to the individual and to society is a complex issue. In the West and in the Third World a multitude of images of formal western education can be found. Most people today either interact with people who are involved in the new formal system of knowledge or they are directly involved themselves. This article gives an example of such image-construction through the life and educational careers of two Cameroonian women, Fanta and Therese.²

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1. In this article, I talk about the processes that take place in the articulation between institutions for higher education and local communities as they are expressed in people’s lives. When I say “western” I mean the complex of institutions developed on the basis of western educational systems whether they are localized in the Third World or in the West. With “formal” I mean the institutionalized transfer of knowledge based on the work of professionals possessing special competence sanctioned by public institutions.

2. Thanks to Fanta and Thérèse for warm friendships through the years and for their courage and interest in narrating their own experiences to increase other people’s knowledge about women’s lives. I am grateful to Siri Gerrard, Mahmoudou Djingui, Harald Eidheim, Inger Altern, Marianne Gullesstad and Eva Evers Rosander for comments on an earlier draft of this article.
They were both born in the town of Ngaoundéré and are both fighting to get higher formal education. They currently experience that life is very difficult in Germany and Belgium, where they are living. Still, their families at home believe they live in great luxury in the white man's land. The two young women have not been back to Cameroon to see their families for more than two years.

In order to illuminate the cultural conditioning of Fanta's and Thérèse's educational careers, I start by giving some information about the recent transformation of Ngaoundéré society. Secondly, I describe Fanta's and Thérèse's educational careers in order to show how these young women acquire formal education. This helps us to understand the differences between the two women's careers. We find some common traits: at a certain level their fates are quite similar. For both Thérèse and Fanta there are two local fields of knowledge, so also interpretation (Altern & Holtedahl 1994) which have a special influence on their acts, their search for higher education and, finally, on their careers.

The first is the field which concerns one's control of one's position in society. Most of this knowledge would most probably be included in the western term magic in an effort to translate from the Cameroonian context to the western one, as well as in most anthropological literature. The other field of knowledge is the one which concerns male–female relationships including the criteria for the establishment of a legitimate husband and wife relationship. In most western anthropological literature the category which is used to translate this field is marriage. But today, and it is one of the arguments in this article, one could as well propose the western term love.

3. See also Rudie 1985 and 1994, and Grønhaug 1978 for the theoretical approach that I apply in this article.
4. Keesing says “magic” represents human attempts to manipulate chains of cause and effect between events that to us are unrelated, in ways that to us are irrational. “Magic, like prayer, works in the eye of the believer because the system of belief contains an explanation for both success and failure.” (Keesing 1985)
5. “Marriage” as a concept and “marriage” as a field of knowledge have mostly been used in contexts where a husband–wife relationship was obligatory for women and men to acquire legitimate status as adults in society. Since the transformation processes that we are dealing with here among other things implies a total change in the role of marriage and that this runs parallel to an increasing importance of “love” as a basis for male–female relationships, I choose the word “love” as a name for this field of knowledge. See Holtedahl 1993 for further documentation of the transformation and Barth 1987 for the choice of concept in the process of translation.
Finally, I discuss the careers in the light of contextual factors which influence their life careers as Cameroonian women who pursue higher education. The examination of the impact of western education and how formal education and knowledge are changing the perceptions and concrete lives of the two young women should reveal to us images of western education that are constructed by Thérèse and Fanta and their families. It also represents an interesting approach to the study of the transformation of Cameroonian women’s identities today. As is evident, Fanta’s and Thérèse’s acquisition of higher education implies conflicts with as well as disconnection from the local traditional networks. This includes women’s networks, in which their identities are anchored. The young women experience many dilemmas as they struggle to convert their search for higher education to a social position which allows new legitimate identities and the creation of alternative networks.

NGAOUNDÉRÉ TOWN—RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE

The local principles of stratification as well as ideas about womanhood and manhood in Ngaoundéré are changing. This change can be viewed as part of the current redefinition of values attributed to various resources. Different kinds of knowledge that people have can be offered on the new market of knowledge (Holtedahl 1993). Certainly people’s own experience of trying to convert their old and new competence on this market will have a feedback effect on their strategies and careers. So will the current redefinitions of the access rules to this market which people meet.

Ngaoundéré7 is today the centre of the Province of Adamaoua in the northern part of the Republic of Cameroon. By the end of the last century the dominant ethnic group in Adamaoua, the Mboum population, and other agricultural groups such as the Ndii and the Gbayà8 who were

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6. The material is based on fieldwork in Ngaoundéré, which I have been undertaking regularly since 1982. See Holtedahl 1993 for a more thorough description of the urban society of Ngaoundéré in the eighties and for a presentation of my analytical approach. See also Fardon 1985 for theoretical considerations about knowledge and power.
7. Ngaoundéré town has around 60,000 inhabitants.
8. For the Mboum population see Faraut 1981 and Mohammadou 1981, for the Gbayà see Burnham 1980 a.
animists, had slowly been subjected to the hegemony of the expanding Muslim Fulani (Mohammadou 1981; Azarya 1978). A strongly hierarchical society was created, where control over other people's access to the knowledge of Islam was necessary for being at the apex of society (Hino 1993). Apart from the formal, written religious knowledge transmitted in the Arabic texts of the Koran and other scriptures controlled by the Fulani through their religious specialists, the educational systems and cultural reproduction of all the groups were based on oral transmission.

From the beginning of our century, Ngaoundéré town has experienced progressive Islamization and Christianization coloured by various traits of syncretism. The German and French colonizations were followed by Protestant and Catholic missionary activities. The social stratification processes before and after independence have been strongly influenced by the introduction of a formal western system of education. Some of the formerly subordinate groups, the Gbay and the Ndii, who had the lowest position under Fulani hegemony, were the first to acquire this form of knowledge because their poverty made them the target groups of the missions (Geschière 1986 and Burnham 1980a). Male Christians, who were also the first to acquire higher education, quickly got access to the new power positions in the bureaucracy of the young state. In this transformation process, the former power resources of the Muslim elite: religious knowledge, economic resources and political control, have been weakened, as has the access they have to influential positions (Azarya 1978; Burnham 1980b; Holy 1991).

It is important to note that, whereas formal western education 10 to 15 years ago resulted in well paid jobs, today more and more young people with formal western education do not get jobs (Geschière and Koenings 1993). Very few Christian women from Ngaoundéré have acquired higher education: that is to say, formal education above the primary level. The number of Muslim women with higher education can still be counted on the fingers of one hand.

In Muslim as well as in Christian contexts, people make extensive use of the knowledge that Westerners and anthropologists usually designate

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9. Other important change-agents were the railway in 1970 and the air connection in the eighties. See also Geschiere 1982 for a description of the consequences for the Maka people in South Eastern Cameroon of the development of the "évolués", i.e. the new elite which possesses the new formal knowledge.
by the term magic, in other words, supernatural knowledge. As we shall see, magic constitutes a field of knowledge which strongly articulates with the developing images of western knowledge. Saafi, bindi, lekki, siiri, deeraaku, kaaramaaku\(^{11}\) are Fulani words for several of these techniques and kinds of competence. They are used by people in their interpretation and handling of events and relationships. Other people's success, accidents, jealousy etc., are thus often interpreted as signs of somebody's use of these various fields of knowledge. In sum, magic is, then, the field of knowledge which concerns one's social position and well-being. Another field of knowledge of great importance is the one which concerns male–female relationships and knowledge.

Marriage is related to parents' choice, love is considered an individual matter. As we shall see, it is while negotiating the legitimacy of higher education that parents and children refer to these emergent differences in perceptions of the criteria for the establishment of marriage. Magic and love are two different fields of local knowledge which are exploited in people's current interpretation of local events and social relationships. They are continuously being transformed by people when they meet new opportunities like western education. The current challenge is to coordinate these global and local fields of knowledge. Formal education transforms people's notions, but not necessarily in ways one is tempted to believe.

10. I note this reservation to the concept of supernatural to indicate that it is an emic category. As will be discussed later, when one compares the processes of coordination of two systems of knowledge, i.e. the western educational system and the local system of reproduction of knowledge at the level of individuals, the concept of "supernatural" must be seen as entirely emic and in the anthropological translation one cursu would have to find a concept related to notions about "cause–effect" sequences. I also want to make reference to Barth 1987, where he says that "this analysis of OK has thus radically changed my own ideas of what can be the object of a cosmology, and the way our concept may serve to mediate between reality and self as much as between objective constructs." In the analysis of the articulations of systems of knowledge that I am presenting here, I will say that my ideas about what is natural have been changed.

11. Saafi conjurer, indicates the use of "powers" to transform materials, change places; bindi is the liquid made out of ink washed off from a wooden tablet on which selected "strong" verses from the Koran have been written. To have an effect, it must be consumed at specific moments following the instructions of the mallum'en who prepared it; lekki means medicine and indicates all kinds of mixtures of ingredients which have positive or negative effects on oneself or other people; siiri, deeraaku and kaaramaaku are various forms of sorcery which hurt people. See also Bocquené 1986 and Gluckman 1966.
THE ISLAMIC SETTING: FANTA

Fanta is born in a traditional Muslim Fulani family. Her father is a member of the court at the palace of the Lamido, the Sultan of Adamaoua Province. He is the personal religious advisor to the Sultan.

I was sent to the Koranic school at four years. I loved to study; and at 8 years I had already finished the first step of koranic teaching ("yottini" in Fulani). By that time we were already many children in the house. In addition to my mother, my father had three other wives.

By the time I finished the koran, several of my brothers went to the primary school. I also wanted to go to school. But I had to fight for it. One day, when my father came back from Mecca, he suddenly said he accepted it. He had seen that Muslim people in Saudi Arabia accepted that their girls go to school. At that time only one or two Muslim girls in our town went to school. One of them was my friend. I very much enjoyed going to school, and everything worked out well until I reached the age of marriage.

One day my father came and told my mother that I was going to marry a rich man from another town. From that day everything changed in my life; in the life of my mother and of my sister and brother. I did not want to marry that man. I did not like him. My father insisted that my mother convince me; it is a mother’s responsibility. The man did not seem to bother about my opinion.

My mother and I started to do what we could to work against that marriage. We addressed a clever marabout regularly in order to have the “future” husband forget about the marriage. This did not seem to work out. He continued to come and plan the concrete details with my father. Then we had another marabout work directly on my father so that he should change his mind. But he did not. Instead the marabout’s eight year old son died because my father’s magic was stronger.

My mother was forced to prepare for the marriage. All the food was prepared, the gifts collected, etc. I went away to hide when the “husband” arrived with his family. They waited for me, but I did not show up. The man had to go home with his family.

This event was a great dishonour to my father. But as I knew the Koran, I also knew that he could not force me to marry against my will—and that if he did—he himself would be punished. From that time I could not speak to my father for many years. Whatever candidate I might eventually accept who presented himself to my father for marriage, would be told by my father that he could not accept this.

My mother suffered a lot as she was considered responsible for my father’s dishonour. He told her that she had not given me the right education. She was constantly fearing that he would divorce her; she would not know how to be able to leave her children. 12 Her own family lives far away. This was my

12. The Muslim marriage rules give all rights to children at divorce to the father.
father's revenge.

After some years I finished high school. The situation at home was awful. My mother had grown gradually more nervous; her co-wives showed less and less respect towards her. At the same time they got gradually more and more jealous about my having succeeded at school. My mother was now perceiving my potential future possibility of earning money, i.e. get higher education, as the only possibility to get away from a terrible situation. If I earned money, she could ask for divorce and I would take care of her.

My mother constantly told me about how the co-wives spent their money to use magic against my success at school; how they used magic to make her sick. I tried to convince her that they did not and that they did not understand what formal education was all about. Neither did she. But it did not help. She was constantly sick. I had to take her to the hospital again and again, but they did not manage to help her. After my refusal of the marriage, my father refused to pay the expenses at the hospital.

The situation developed, I could not even mention my problems to my mother without her getting even more sick. I had to get an opportunity to further my studies. My mother's cattle had been reduced because of all the expenses for hospitals, medicine and counter-magic against the jealous co-wives.

I went through a difficult period. But I finally got a scholarship to go to Belgium to study. By that time I was in love with a man somewhat older than me. He was working as a teacher at a college. We decided to marry. He said he would accept that I complete my studies abroad first. But when I came back after the first year at university, he insisted that I marry and stay in Cameroon. So I realized he did not love me. How can a man say he loves a woman and still not accept that she does what she wants?

Then I lost my scholarship. My mother says it is because of the magic used by the co-wives. But I am sure it is because my scholarship has been given to the son of one of the Ministers. This is how scholarships are distributed in Cameroon.

My mother sold some of the cattle that I owned so that I could continue to study. Whenever I came back on holidays I also sold some cows. In Belgium I worked as a housemaid in order to make ends meet. I could never talk to my father. He would never give me a penny. He would never accept to help me. My mother started selling off her cattle. Now we are both very poor; we have no cattle left.

For a period I have been living in Belgium with a man I am in love with. But I did not even try to have my father accept him as my husband. For the time being I have left my friend, since he will not accept a "monogamous" relationship. He doesn't love me enough either. Everyday is a struggle. But since I believe in God, I do not lose my courage. I know the prayers I
need to get along. In addition, my mother still gets some help from a
marabout at home.13

The Image of Higher Education in Fanta’s Narration

From the background of the urban social context of Ngaoundéré and
from Fanta’s narration we see that magic and love are local fields of
knowledge which are very central in Fanta’s perspectives when consider-
ing her past, present and future life. The image of formal education that
is found in Fanta’s narration seems to be “moulded” by these perspec-
tives, or incorporated into them. Magic and love strongly influence the
construction of the image of western education.

Fanta’s road to formal education is being built in a recent 1980 Mus-
lim cultural context. There are several reasons why Fanta entered higher
education. Evidently, she was interested in going to school like her
brothers. Since there is a cultural barrier to Muslim girls’ higher educa-
tion (i.e. the importance of early marriage), the fact that she managed to
continue her education needs an explanation.

Other explanations might be found in the special difficulties between
the matrices of the household. There is rather fierce competition and
jealousy between the co-wives.14 The potential magical outcome of her
new experience seemed to threaten the other mothers in the household,
whose daughters did not go to school. These reactions reinforced her
willingness to continue. Through her experience at primary school Fanta
herself also gradually developed images about the magical effect of her
future diplomas on her own social position. She also developed an image
of a future for herself which was different from her mother’s, who is
always suffering from great tensions between the co-wives and dissatis-
faction in relation to her husband. This image combined with autonomy,
love and monogamous loyalty in new ways. So, her father’s choice of
husband and time for marriage did not suit her at all. Her opposition to
her father’s decisions also pushed her into the road to higher education.
Normally, only marriage decided by the father could lead to a proper
adult status for a woman. However, further education, after all, sanc-

13. This narrative and the one which follows are “edited” (by me) versions of the
way in which the young women have described their lives. I have known the
families for ten years.
14. See Cohen 1961; Smith 1955; Holtedahl 1993; Bovin and Holtedahl 1975, for
further information on the relationship between co-wives in urban Hausa,
Fulani and Kanuri settings in Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon.
tioned by the father, was tried out as a means to postpone marriage while keeping the necessary social respect.

When she opposed her father, it was interpreted by her mother and mother’s co-wives as if her education represented a new and strong magic. Fanta’s mother, who saw herself as suffering from the mercilessness of polygamy, fed the image of a new opportunity for herself as well: if Fanta’s education could give her a socially legitimate position independent of marriage and a husband’s economic support, then Fanta would be able to support her mother in the future.

Fanta and her mother, however, had to succeed in a very delicate balancing of strategies in order to avoid being expelled by the father. At what costs? The father knew how to sanction the dishonour he suffered. His refusal to accept other marriages or provide economic support etc., enhanced the necessity for Fanta to further her studies. However, most recently, he accepted schooling in Europe, and this certainly gave social legitimacy to a new social status “unmarried, Muslim, schoolgirl above the age of 14”.

An important differentiation was developing in Fanta’s and her mother’s respective image of formal education: whereas the mother saw the co-wives’ use of magic as a serious threat to Fanta’s success, Fanta perceived of the “new magic”, higher education, as being so strong as not to be able to be threatened at all by the local magic. But Fanta and her mother both perceived of the necessity of continuing to collaborate in the use of traditional, local magic to assure a successful future for Fanta—at least for as long a time as it took to get the final diplomas. Diplomas in hand, with or without a loving, monogamous husband, with or without a salaried job at home, having a legitimate social position, would enable her to take care of her mother who would then be able to leave her husband.

Fanta was so embedded in these family relations and conflicts, that to her, formal education was incorporated into her management of knowledge as an equivalent of other kinds of (local) magic, but as a stronger one. She said herself that she was not at all interested in the new knowledge, i.e. mathematics, as such. She was interested in its potential effect vis-à-vis her relatives and other members of the local society of Ngaoundéré, on their use of local knowledge, their magic. So even though she knew that the possibilities for a person with higher education to get a job have been radically reduced, there were other important reasons to continue studying aside from an improved future income.
THE CHRISTIAN SETTING: THÉRÈSE

Thérèse is born in an agricultural village close to Ngaoundéré. Her family is Gbaya and her father has worked his whole life in close connection with the Protestant Mission as a catechist.

My father was very serious about my school education. I was sent to school and told that I had to work. My father even gave me money when I had good results at school. He was very authoritarian and I was beaten if I did not take school work serious. He had got his own formal education because he had been a Christian and strongly involved in the Norwegian Protestant Mission from the early years. In this way, he was assured of a regular income. He has worked as a catechist in several villages, so we moved around when I was a child. But when I was ten we moved to Ngaoundéré. When, after a couple of years my father was asked to go to Meiganga by the Mission, I had to stay behind at the Protestant college and sleep in the dormitory.

Ever since I was a child I have felt in conflict with the world. Already at primary school level I was accused of sorcery because I was successful at school. I did not have many friends. And I was interested in Christianism. From the Bible I learned that it is bad to use evil powers. My father being a successful "entrepreneur" who in addition to working for a modest salary managed to initiate new and successful strategies for the production of vegetables which he sold, was accused by people in the village of using magic. In the Gbaya society there are many kinds of sorcery and magic.

At college I fell in love with a young boy. Even though it was prohibited we stayed together as lovers. I loved him very very much. I continued to work hard at school where I had only one close friend: a girl from Bertoua. But whereas I was not trying to hide that I had a lover, she was hiding that she had one. My own parents were very angry and by that time I was in great opposition to them and the Mission. The Mission considers lover-relationships among schoolchildren as a serious sin.

After a while I got pregnant. But I continued to work hard at school. My friend all of a sudden got very unfriendly to me and accused me of sorcery. I said that I did not practice it. It was even written on the board at school one day that I was a sorcerer. My friend used all her time to go to the various specialists in order to protect herself against the evil she thought I caused. She did not get the time to do her school work. I continued to improve my results.

Then things suddenly went really wrong: I was fetched by the missionaries. My friend also. They asked us about what they had heard. We had long discussions. I refused to have anything to do with the evil which my friend saw.

15. The Gbaya people, who amount to 500,000, live in the Central African Republic and on the eastern part of the Adamaua plateau in Cameroon. They were originally animistic, but today most Gbaya are Christians, while a minority is Muslim.
She got weaker and weaker. After a while I was thrown out of school. The missionaries said that I used the evil forces.

After a month, everybody found out that my friend was also pregnant. The missionaries realized that I had not used the evil forces. I had my child and I got another one while my lover continued at school. But he did not pass his high school exam.

Our parents were depressed. My father said that I could always have found another man, but that I would never again get the opportunity to get a higher education.

We got married. We both got small jobs at the Mission library. We did not earn much. I was disappointed that my husband did not succeed at school. I was disappointed in my job. I asked the Mission for a scholarship to further my education. After a long time and many fights with the Mission, they offered a scholarship to my husband. I was supposed to follow him on his study trip to Germany with the children.

But it did not develop like that. The day we were going to leave and the house was let out, the missionaries said that there was not enough money for me to follow.

I got very very angry. I was the one to ask for the scholarship. I was the one who had good marks at school. He was jealous. But he got it. Then I had to wait and eventually only got the opportunity to go to Germany to cook for him while he was studying. When he left I insisted on a divorce.

Now Thérèse is studying at the university in Germany. She finally left her children behind with her parents with whom she gradually had got on better terms and decided to try to manage all on her own to get access to the university. She has suffered a lot. To survive and get the necessary courses to get access to the university, she had to work for two years as a housemaid.

Little by little she passed the various access tests for the university and she now studies and works very hard to make ends meet.

Thérèse misses her children. She thinks that God will help her. She feels that she has been exploited by love since her openness about her sexual relationship caused so much troubles. Her husband got all the possibilities, she none. She now thinks that sexual life threatens independence. She seriously feels that because she fell in love and accepted her physical sexual feelings, she was exploited by her surroundings.

Now she wants to complete her studies. She also reads the Bible where she finds all the encouragement she needs as she says. "Nothing and nobody can exploit me anymore. Love does not relate to physical relationships or to gender", she says. She would never use magic or sorcery to protect herself. She “knows” that God’s words will guide her in life and that her suffering has a meaning to God.
The Image of Education in Thérèse's Narration

Thérèse is considered to be a privileged young woman who, like Fanta, controls a new kind of magic. Since she started going to school she has experienced classmates' and neighbours' interpretation of her success as caused by local magic. These accusations made Thérèse feel lonely and in conflict with the world, but the accusations seemed to confirm that she has got hold of some strong magic. She believed in the effect of the new knowledge, Christianism, as well as higher education on her future social position. As in the case with her father, she saw the reluctance of those who withheld the knowledge she wanted as an expression of oppression. When the missionaries—as Thérèse saw it—accused Thérèse of using magic to hurt her best friend and told her to leave school, Thérèse interpreted this as a confirmation of her being too clever in their eyes. However, what might have been involved in the missionaries' interpretation of Thérèse's situation at school and of her relationship to the other girl, was her lack of shame for having a lover. This must have been seen by the Protestant school teachers as the opposite of the image of the Protestant woman that they try to promote. She showed an image of a woman feeling free to make love, to acquire formal education and to use these to her advantage.

As we have seen, Thérèse first obeyed "the orders" from the teachers and then from the husband. But when she did not get the scholarship she wanted, she chose to oppose the mission as well as her husband. As Fanta saw the new legitimacy in the status of an educated woman confirmed by her father, Thérèse found that the status as a highly educated woman was legitimized by the missionaries. They only thought that she did not merit the higher education.

Once she took the decision, she did not perceive of any other possible road to a legitimate social position but by furthering her higher education, even if this meant leaving her children in the care of her mother and being without them for a long period of time. As is the case with Fanta, she entered the road of no return. She could not possibly come back without a diploma. Where her surroundings had interpreted her excellence at school as the result of her father's use of local magic, she herself has gradually developed an image of formal education as the one and only "magic" which assured independence and social position. In the process, Thérèse has also gradually become more religious and pious: "Human beings may well interpret the Bible in the wrong way. They
may be sinful, but God is ever-present”. This is her perspective. Her religiousness would also give future legitimacy in the Christian milieu to which she related, she thought. She aimed at an independence of emotional dependence on men and sexual desires, at being at peace with God, and she wanted to nurture the world.

TRANSFORMATIONS OF LOCAL FIELDS OF KNOWLEDGE: MAGIC AND LOVE

Fanta and Thérèse were both subjected to magical activities managed by their closest friends and relatives. The sudden changes caused by modern education; the potential social differentiation which it might lead to; the potential hierarchical relations; the potential loss for those who did not get the new knowledge; everything seemed to be shaped in the mould of magic. They were delving into their respective religious worlds and even became more fervent than the people in their local social contexts. They saw their religious belief, together with their acquisition of higher education, i.e. diplomas, as a means of potential control over their own life conditions, locally. For Fanta and Thérèse, formal education in this context became just a new element in the local field of magical knowledge, a new magic. Local ideas of love and marriage were also transformed. To Fanta and Thérèse “love” was not only in conflict with parents’ or other authorities’ politics; since men, as they saw it, preferred control over women to “love” of women, they constructed an image of love as representing a barrier to the acquisition of the new magic, western knowledge. Western knowledge was the only means of obtaining an alternative social position to that of being a subordinate wife in the local urban society.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I hope to have shown the necessity of differentiating formal western education on the one hand and the various images of formal education which are constructed and articulated in different cultural contexts on the other; if one wants to understand the current transformation processes that formal western education induces in young states. It is easy to believe that the introduction of a western kind of competence will quickly lead to a western kind of society in which the same concepts will be given the same interpretations, in the West as in the third world:
democracy, freedom, love, etc. (Copans 1993; Kabou 1992). The radical change in the careers that we have witnessed do not confirm this theory. The local cultural traditions are actively incorporated in the transformation process so as to create new social forms, different from western societies.

The new social forms which we have found so far in our analysis are the entirely new female careers, new female status and the transformed female identities. To go back to the question of women's organizational forms, these will have to be grasped at the interface of women's identities and women's networks. Fanta's and Thérèse's careers reveal how new acts, competence and knowledge are categorized in local women's networks. We have seen how the two mothers so to say push their daughters into the new experience because they believe it will make them able to avoid the sufferings they have experienced. In this way, higher education is seen by local women as a means to reduce men's control and as a weapon against polygamy (Van Santen 1993). We have also seen how the young women's acquisition of formal education generates conflicts between co-wives in a Muslim household and between school-mates in a Protestant school. Fanta's and Thérèse's acquisition of a new and unknown kind of competence and knowledge seems to give some women a feeling of loss of control. Through their search for higher education Thérèse and Fanta are seen by local women to spoil the stability and equality between co-wives and girl friends. At an analytical level what happens is that Fanta and Thérèse break the tacit rules for management of local female identity, for behaviour in women's networks as well as in the local society in general.

In the Christian as well as in the Muslim family the young girls' search for higher education also implies a radical change in the mother-daughter relationship. In the Muslim family the daughter shouldered new kinds of responsibilities towards her mother and promised to take care of her in her old age. In the Christian family it was the other way around. The mother took new responsibilities: she had two new school children to care for while she instead could have expected to get progressively more and more assistance from her daughter (Holte+dahl 1993; Parkin & Nyamwaya 1987). In a way, the new educational career can be said to draw the young women out of the wider local women's community. As they are both living abroad, we can only guess what will be the difficulties for Fanta and Thérèse in establishing an alternative women's network when they come home; for the time being an identity dilemma
and a kind of loneliness has emerged. It is against this background that Fanta and Thérèse are going to try to find out what kinds of social position to which their new magic, higher western education, will give them access.


Bibliography


Résumé:

Magie et amour sur la route vers l'enseignement supérieur au Cameroun

Lisbeth Holtedahl

Dans le nord du Cameroun, comme ailleurs en Afrique, l'enseignement occidental a été jugé de manière très différente, pour être finalement accepté et adopté par divers groupes, plus ou moins à contre-coeur. La façon dont ce «nouveau savoir» influence la vie, la carrière et la position sociale des femmes a déjà été l'objet d'un article. Dans celui-ci, je souhaite centrer l'intérêt sur la façon dont les jeunes femmes accèdent à ce «nouveau savoir».

La découverte de l'effort fourni par les femmes pour acquérir ce «nouveau savoir» pourrait éclairer les contraintes spécifiques qu'elles rencontrent. On peut aussi en tirer des informations importantes sur la façon dont leur place dans la société détermine leur actuelle transformation d'identité.

Nous allons rencontrer deux jeunes femmes qui luttent pour accéder à un enseignement supérieur. L'une est chrétienne, l'autre musulmane et toutes deux ont à affronter la jalousie, la magie et l'agressivité des hommes qui se sentent menacés. Les expériences subjectives de la Chrétienne et de la Musulmane sont cependant différentes, et elles ne suivent pas obligatoirement les mêmes chemins. L'une des deux réussira-t-elle, ou peut-être les deux?
Evolution de l'espace habitable et transformation des identités féminines chez les Fulɓe du Nord-Cameroun

Mahmoudou Djingui

L'objectif de ce travail est d'analyser la transformation des identités féminines chez les Fulɓe du Nord-Cameroun à partir des différentes modifications de leur espace habitable à travers le temps. Les Fulɓe avaient connu au cours de leur histoire des événements qui avaient profondément bouleversé leur style de vie. En effet, du nomadisme à la sédentarité totale; de la vie dans la brousse avec peu de contact avec les autres groupes ethniques, à la vie urbaine caractérisée par un brassage de plusieurs ethnies qui s'influencent mutuellement. Les Fulɓe avaient été amenés chaque fois à réajuster leur vision du monde, leur mode de vie, leurs rapports entre eux et avec leur environnement, pour pouvoir s'adapter à leur milieu social sans cesse changeant. Propriétaires du bétail, ne vivant que par et pour ce dernier, certains s'étaient sédentarisés, se soumettant


Les Fulɓe sont également connus sous les noms de Fulani, de Peul, de Pular ou de Toucouleur.
par là même aux chefs des groupes ethniques autochtones de la région où ils se trouvaient. Plus tard, sous l’impulsion de la guerre sainte initiée par Ousman bii Fooduwé, ces derniers devinrent des citadins aristocrates dévoués à plusieurs autres activités qui leur étaient jusqu’alors inconnues, telles que le commerce, l’agriculture, la politique et la religion (Holtedahl 1993; Walker 1980).

Ces phases de profondes mutations étaient accompagnées d’une transformation radicale de l’organisation de l’espace habitable. De l’abri non protégé, facilement démontable, ils s’étaient retrouvés avec une structure d’habitation complexe, fortifiée, compartimentée. Ainsi, les Fulbe sont partis de l’espace habitable non limité, réunissant tout le groupe en une famille à un espace restreint, regroupant seulement les membres de la famille élargie, discriminant les individus selon leur âge et leur appartenance sexuelle. A présent, certains d’entre eux ont adopté un espace beaucoup plus réduit, caractérisé par un bâtiment (villa) où seule la famille restreinte vit ensemble. Théoriquement, cette nouvelle organisation offre aux habitants une plus grande communication entre eux, une interaction plus intime (en réduisant la distance entre les individus), et une vie de ménage plus indépendante par rapport à l’autorité parentale.

Avec la transformation de l’habitat, c’est la vie sociale de la femme qui est profondément touchée. En effet, chez les Fulbe, que ce soit pendant leur vie de pasteurs nomades ou de sédentaires islamisés plus ou moins influencés par l’Occident, l’habitation est par excellence le domaine de la femme. C’est là qu’elle trouve les moyens socialement admis pour négocier sa position, son identité. C’est toujours là que le contact avec les hommes qui lui sont accessibles est accepté. L’habitation est pour la femme à la fois une scène, où se déroule la majeure partie de sa vie sociale, et un lieu de travail.

Les changements intervenus dans l’organisation de l’espace habitable ont eu un impact considérable dans les relations et les rôles de ces femmes. En passant de la vie de nomade où la frontière spatiale entre les hommes et les femmes est fictive, par exemple, à la vie de femmes musulmanes sédentaires recluses dans le gynécée d’où elles ne sortent que sur autorisation des hommes, les femmes Fulbe ont été amenées à reconsidérer leur image de soi et de leur société, et à rajuster et/ou à élaborer de nouvelles stratégies pour s’adapter à leurs nouvelles conditions de vie, et s’affirmer en tant que femmes responsables dans leur groupe.
Mon ambition est de saisir, à partir d’une description précise de l’organisation de l’espace habitable à différentes étapes de la vie des Fulbe, cette transformation des idées de soi des femmes et de leurs stratégies en vue de s’affirmer et de se promouvoir économiquement, socialement et moralement. Pour mener ce travail, je commencerai par présenter certaines généralités nécessaires pour comprendre les Fulbe afin de prendre conscience de l’importance particulière du combat des femmes dans cette société. À ce niveau, je ferai un bref examen de ce qui constitue pour les Fulbe le fondement de leur personnalité. Ensuite, je continuerai le travail en procédant à un examen minutieux des transformations de l’espace habitable à différentes phases de leur histoire. Enfin, j’étudierai les transformations des rôles, des activités et des formes de relations des femmes pendant ces périodes de profondes mutations de l’espace habitable des Fulbe.

CARACTÉRISTIQUES GÉNÉRALES DES FULBE

Les Fulbe se définissent eux-mêmes par leurs traits physiques (peau claire, corps svelte, nez aquilin, etc.) et par leur condition d’hommes libres. Pour eux, un Fulbe est avant tout un dimo, un homme de condition libre. Ces caractéristiques sont si importantes pour l’affirmation et la confirmation de leur identité qu’il n’est pas étonnant d’entendre une femme les rappeler en ces termes à son mari qui a un comportement qu’elle juge hautain à son égard: «Laaram boddum, laaru laral banndu am, a tawaay mi kordo sakkonta njawaa-mi ban nii» («Regarde-moi bien, regarde ma peau, tu ne m’as pas trouvée de condition servile pour me mépriser de la sorte»). Le mari également n’hésitera pas à avoir recours à ces caractéristiques pour calmer sa femme. Hommes et femmes sont égaux de par leur condition. Il existe une notion, pulaaku (formé de la racine full qu’on retrouve dans Fulbe) ou dans fulfulde (la langue des Fulbe), qui constitue la base de leur comportement, et que les Fulbe considèrent comme spécifique à leur groupe. La classe nominale ku — désigne un état. Pulaaku signifie donc «l’état des Fulbe», ou pour être plus précis, «les qualités appropriées aux Fulbe». Ces qualités forment un idéal caractérisé par la maîtrise de soi, de ses émotions, de ses besoins, et surtout par un sens élevé de la liberté individuelle.

2. Pendant la jihad organisée par les Fulbe, ceux-ci se considéraient comme étant de condition libre par rapport aux autres peuples non-musulmans qui pouvaient, s’ils refusaient de s’islamiser, être conquis et asservis.
Le *pulaaku* se manifeste chez l'individu lorsque celui-ci se trouve en public. Pour un *Fulbe*, la présence d'un seul individu suffit pour qu'il se considère en public. Mieux, le simple fait de se croire éventuellement observé par une autre personne suffit pour qu'il agit comme s'il était réellement en public. Ce dernier point signifie que chez l'homme *Fulbe*, le souci de manifester sa liberté, sa maîtrise de soi, ses émotions et ses besoins est constamment présent dans son esprit.

Deux autres notions, *sementeende* (honte, pudeur, retenue) et *munyal* (patience), sont étroitement liées celle de *pulaaku*. Elles permettent à l'individu de se conformer aux normes sociales, aux exigences de la société, sans risque d'ébranler son assurance, sa cohérence interne établie selon les principes de la *pulaaku*. La soumission à l'autorité maritale, par exemple, découle du rapport de *sementeende* qui existe entre les époux. La femme se soumet à son mari, non pas par crainte ou par obéissance aveugle des normes, mais en vertu du sentiment de *sementeende*. L'acte de soumission, bien que toujours contraignant, semble être plus volontaire. Dans ce cas, la réalisation de l'acte n'est pas en contradiction avec l'idéal de la *pulaaku*. La *munyal* permet justement à l'individu d'accepter philosophiquement de se soumettre à cette situation dévalorisante par rapport à cet idéal.

Si le *pulaaku* est une vertu qui demande à l'individu de faire preuve de « maîtrise de soi et de capacité à dominer ses besoins et ses émotions », le *sementeende* au contraire est une « émotion par laquelle il faut se laisser dominer » (Riesman 1974). Le *sementeende* est donc une émotion qui tempère l'extrémité du *pulaaku* afin de maintenir l'équilibre social. Sa force réside dans le regard de l'autre. En effet, le souci d'éviter les critiques et les commérages de l'autre constitue l'une des préoccupations majeures des *Fulbe*. C'est par rapport au regard de l'autre, à son jugement, que l'individu essaie de se situer et de se valoriser. L'autre tient lieu de loi sociale. Ainsi, l'homme, à la recherche perpétuelle de l'approbation de l'autre, est tenu à renoncer à lui-même pour adopter une attitude reconnue et acceptée par l'autre comme valorisante. La reconnaissance de soi passe donc par la reconnaissance et l'acceptation de soi par l'autre (Mahmoudou 1993).

Enfin, il convient de signaler deux éléments qui caractérisent les *Fulbe*: d'abord leur parfaite connaissance et leur attachement particulier aux bœufs, ce qui donne à penser qu'au cours de leur histoire ils n'ont connu d'autre activité que l'élevage du bétail; ensuite, le fort ancrage de
l'Islam dans les moeurs des Fulbe sédentaires, ce qui fait que, pour eux, Pullo et musulman apparaissent comme synonymes (Lacroix 1965:18).

TRANSFORMATION DE L'ESPACE HABITABLE

Avant leur sédentarisation, les Fulbe avaient un type d'habitat qui reflétait dans bien des cas leur style de vie. Très mobile, se déplaçant régulièrement selon les saisons et le pâturage, leur camp, ouvert et sans aucune protection, consistait en une structure très simple, ne comprenant que le strict nécessaire et entièrement démontable. Leur espace était symétriquement divisé en espace masculin et espace féminin (Dupire 1970). À l'avant du camp se trouvait le corral et le feu du troupeau. C'est là que se déroulaient les activités masculines. À l'arrière, c'était l'espace féminin. C'est dans cet espace qu’on retrouvait les cases, car chez les pasteurs nomades les cases appartiennent aux femmes qui d’ailleurs les construisent (ibid. 1970; Walker 1980). Les deux espaces n’étaient pas séparés, et les cases étaient exposées au regard des passants. Chaque femme pouvait, du seuil de sa case, regarder ce que faisaient ses voisins ou bien observer les hommes dans leurs occupations.


Ce désir de mettre les habitants du saare hors du regard des autres s’applique plus particulièrement aux femmes. L’organisation du saare se caractérise en effet par la réclusion totale des femmes, dont le contact avec l’extérieur est autant que possible réduit. Pour réaliser cet isolement des habitants, l’espace habitable est délimité par quatre murs ou enclos en palissade, de forme généralement rectangulaire. L’intérieur est divisé en trois quartiers dont le passage de l’un à l’autre est lié au statut de l’individu. On ne peut accéder à un autre quartier que le sien sans une raison socialement acceptable. On pénètre dans le saare par une seule entrée, jawleeru yolnde, dont les ouvertures sont disposées de telle sorte
que les passants ne puissent pas voir l'intérieur de la maison. Ce jawleeru est le plus souvent le lieu de repos du chef de famille, le salon de réception ou la salle à manger. Le jawleeru yolnde donne sur une avant-cour. C'est le quartier des garçons de plus de 10 ans. Ce coin est aussi réservé aux étrangers hommes, les femmes étant reçues dans les quartiers des femmes. Le quartier des garçons est séparé du reste de la maison par un mur ou une palissade doté d'un autre jawleeru généralement appelé cakaaru. Le cakaaru s'ouvre sur une petite cour. Cette cour est utilisée par les femmes comme lieu de pilage de mil. En face de cette cour se trouvent le quartier du chef de famille et celui des femmes. Le fond du saare (à l'opposé du jawleeru yolnde) est donc réservé aux femmes. Selon les moyens du chef de famille et le nombre de ses épouses, le quartier des femmes est subdivisé en plusieurs sous-quartiers délimités ou non par des murs. Chaque femme disposera ainsi d'un quartier où elle vivra avec ses enfants. Par contre, toutes les femmes partagent la même cuisine. Chaque femme peut aménager dans son quartier un petit coin-cuisine. Si la mère du chef de famille habite dans le même saare, elle aura son coin à part. L'existence de cloisons entre les quartiers marque l'interdiction d'accéder à un autre quartier que le sien sans raison socialement acceptable.

La délimitation des quartiers par les murs ou palissades n'est possible que lorsque le chef de famille dispose des moyens nécessaires. Dans le cas où il n'existe pas de cloisons, des lignes fictives délimitent le domaine d'accès de chaque catégorie d'individus. La disposition des cases se fait de telle sorte que les femmes ne soient pas exposées.

TRANSFORMATION DE LA SOCIÉTÉ FULBE ET DU STATUT DES FEMMES

Avec la sédentarisation et l'islamisation, l'organisation sociale des Fulbe s'est profondément transformée. Les nouveaux horizons qui leur sont offerts ont transformé les relations qui existaient entre eux, et les rapports qu'ils entretenaient avec leur environnement. Après le jihad, ils ont créé dans les régions conquises plusieurs lamidats. La concentration des individus, jadis évitée à cause du pâturage, est souhaitée et encouragée. Le prestige du lamidat en dépend en partie. L'Islam étant devenu la reli-

3. Lamidat est l'ensemble du territoire dépendant de l'autorité d'un roi. Ce mot a été créé par les Français à partir du mot fulfulde laamiido qui signifie roi.

L’agriculture est devenue également l’une des principales activités de la population. Mais sa pratique varie selon les groupes. Les aristocrates font travailler leurs serviteurs ou des salariés. Les Moodibbe et les Mallum’en y envoient leurs disciples. Tous deux produisent pour leur propre consommation. Les autres, c’est à dire les Fulbe, ayant vu leur cheptel détruit par la maladie et n’ayant pas d’autre source de revenu, se consacrent entièrement à l’activité agricole. Parmi ces derniers, certains peuvent seulement produire ce qui est nécessaire pour leur consommation personnelle, d’autres pour faire du commerce. Enfin, une minorité se lance dans l’exploitation bovine, transformant ainsi tout le rapport d’intimité que les Fulbe entretenaient avec le bétail en un rapport purement commercial. Cependant, l’exploitation laitière, qui était la base du revenu des Fulbe et la principale activité économique des femmes, est reléguée au second plan et considérée comme l’activité des moins fortunés.

Toutes ces sources de revenu nouvellement ancrées dans les habitudes des Fulbe, ont contribué à stratifier leur société. Désormais, on y trouve la haute classe constituée par les aristocrates, les Moodibbe et les riches commerçants, et la classe des plébéiens. Les personnes issues de la haute classe font travailler leurs serviteurs, leurs disciples ou des salariés dans le domaine de l’élevage et de l’agriculture. Ils peuvent ainsi s’intéresser à

4. Sujets ayant un niveau d’instruction islamique très élevé.
5. Imam, en arabe.
autres activités. Leurs femmes sont également retirées des activités écono-
nomiques.

Avec la complicité des religieux, qui ne cessent de vilipender les hom-
mes qui profitent de l’effort physique de leur femme, d’autres critères de
jugement sont apparus. Désormais, ce ne sont plus la qualité et le nom-
bre de têtes de bétail qui font le prestige d’un individu, mais la capacité
d’exclure sa femme de toute activité productrice en subvenant à tous ses
besoins pour qu’elle n’éprouve pas le désir de sortir (Walker 1980). Ce
retrait des femmes de la production économique varie selon qu’on se
trouve en zone rurale ou urbaine.

En zone rurale, la vie des Fulbe est moins éloignée de celle de leur
passé. Les besoins de l’individu sont limités au stricte nécessaire, rédui-
sant ainsi la course effrénée vers l’accumulation. La production est de ce
fait destinée surtout à la consommation familiale. L’exploitation laitière
trouve encore sa place dans cette économie de subsistance. D’autre part,
l’application des principes islamiques est limitée surtout aux cinq piliers
de l’Islam. La réclusion des femmes est ainsi moins forte. Le bétail étant
tà l’intérieur du saare, les femmes peuvent continuer leurs activités écono-
miques nécessaires à la survie familiale, à savoir l’exploitation laitière.
Enfin, chez les groupes ayant adopté l’agriculture, les champs cultivables
sont situés près du village. Leurs femmes sont ainsi autorisées à y apor-
ter leur contribution. La culture du mil, du sorgho et du maïs est réservée
aux hommes, et les femmes s’occupent de celle de l’arachide, des feuilles
de sauce, des haricots, etc. Une nouvelle répartition des tâches en ce qui
concerne l’alimentation familiale s’est ainsi imposée dans les habitudes
des Fulbe: les hommes se chargent de procurer le mil et la viande, et les
femmes tout ce qui concerne la sauce. Si la participation des femmes à la
survie familiale reste toujours en vigueur, leur mobilité s’est considéra-
blement limitée. Les femmes mariées ne peuvent pas se rendre au marché
pour acheter quoique ce soit, ou pour vendre les produits laitiers ou agri-
coles. Cette tâche revient aux très jeunes filles, aux femmes divorcées
(dans le but de leur permettre d’entrer en contact avec les hommes pour
un éventuel mariage), et aux femmes âgées.

Avec l’urbanisation, le problème est tout à fait autre. La nouvelle
idéologie, qui fait de celui qui réussit la réclusion la plus totale de sa
femme un homme prestigieux et respectable, est bien respectée. L’éloi-
gnement du bétail (qui avait contribué à la disparition de l’exploitation
laitière des activités économiques) et des champs cultivables a favorisé le
retrait total des femmes des activités productrices. Le principe religieux
qui interdit aux hommes de vivre du travail de leurs femmes trouvait un champ d’application favorable. Même dans les familles les plus démuni
ces, les femmes sont moins sollicitées dans la constitution du capital familial. Les femmes qui malgré tout trouvent le moyen de se livrer à des activités économiques gardent pour leur utilisation personnelle le fruit de leur production. Pourtant, les femmes qui travaillent hors du saare, comme fonctionnaires ou salariées, ont tout juste le droit d’engager une nurse pour l’enfant et une cuisinière.

LES FEMMES FACE À LEUR NOUVELLE SITUATION

Exclues du circuit monétaire, confinées dans le gynécée, réduites à l’état parasitaire, les femmes ont été obligées de recourir à d’autres stratégies pour s’imposer dans la société en tant que personnes respectables et responsables. Pour ce faire, elles vont user de plus de diplomatie (persua
dation), de leur féminité, de leur savoir culinaire et de leur statut de fem
mes mariées. L’autorité, elles vont d’abord chercher à l’acquérir auprès de leur famille maritale et auprès de leurs amies.

Auprès de la famille uxorale et auprès des amies, le statut du mari est un atout considérable pour la conquête du pouvoir et du prestige. La femme d’un homme riche ou influent est assurée d’acquérir le respect de ses parents et amies et de se faire écouter. Ainsi, les femmes, profitant de leur temps libre, se consacrent à une sorte de rencontres mondaines où elles s’ingénient à étaler les titres de leur mari ou, par leur habilement et leurs bijoux, à exhiber la richesse de celui-ci. Le fait d’avoir un mari capable de subvenir à leurs besoins a également fini par prendre une signification particulière pour ces femmes. J’ai rencontré des femmes salariées célibataires capables de s’offrir tout le luxe qu’elles désirent mais qui, le jour de la fête de Ramadan ou de Tabaski, se sentent très frustrées: il leur manque un mari qui leur offrirait, à cette occasion, le traditionnel cadeau de fête.

L’existence d’un gynécée est également un atout que ces femmes vont utiliser à bon escient. Déjà dans leur quartier, elles sont les maîtresses absolues. Tous ceux qui y vivent dépendent directement de leur autorité. Par leur présence continuelle dans le saare, elles vont chercher à étendre leur autorité sur toute la maison. Le mari étant moins présent dans la maison, il détient moins d’informations que la femme sur ce qui s’y passe. Cette dernière est au courant de tout. Cela lui permet le plus souvent d’influencer la décision du mari. Toujours par sa présence dans le
gynécée et du fait de l'organisation spatiale du saare qui donne à la femme l'entièrre responsabilité de l'éducation de ses enfants, celle-ci va se consacrer entièrement à ces derniers. L'enfant, nous le savons, joue un rôle très important dans l'intégration de la femme dans la famille maritale. De plus, la femme va chercher à faire de ses enfants des alliés inaliénables. Par ces enfants, elle peut espérer diriger un groupe plus large (la famille créée par son fils, par exemple) et même intervenir indirectement dans le milieu des hommes. Il existe des hommes entièrement soumis à leur mère et qui font et défont leur mariage selon le bon vouloir de celle-ci. Dans une enquête que j'ai menée à Deembo en 1983, la plupart des hommes affirment répudier leur femme lorsque celle-ci ne s'entend pas avec leur mère, alors qu'ils préfèrent discuter avec leur père ou bien quitter la maison paternelle en cas de mésentente entre celui-ci et leur femme.

Pour mieux assurer leur pouvoir sur la famille maritale, les femmes vont passer du savoir traditionnel, essentiellement lié à l'exploitation laitière et utile à toute la famille, à un savoir qui est surtout axé sur l'aisance du mari. Le but est d'attirer celui-ci, de le « mettre de (leur) côté et d'avoir raison de (leur) belle-mère, d'acquérir informellement le pouvoir que les institutions (nouvellement adoptées) leur denient » (Camilleri 1973:22). Ici, la femme va prendre conscience de l'importance de sa beauté et de son corps, de ses connaissances culinaires, de sa capacité à comprendre le désir du mari et d'entretenir la maison. La féminité, qui jadis était négligée parce que les femmes étaient continuement en route pour le marché, devient ainsi pour elles un atout déterminant dans la conquête du pouvoir.

Avec la crise économique qui sévit au Cameroun, les femmes retrouvent progressivement leur rôle d'antan dans l'entretien de la famille. Les maris, rencontrant des difficultés économiques, démissionnent progressivement de leur responsabilité qui consiste à subvenir aux besoins de la famille. Actuellement, plusieurs maris limitent leur contribution au strict nécessaire: repas du midi et du soir. Les femmes n'ont qu'à se débrouiller pour le reste (petit déjeuner, savon pour la lessive et la toilette, etc.). Dans certaines familles, ce sont les femmes qui se chargent de la scolarité de leurs enfants. Malgré cela, les femmes restent toujours enfermées dans le gynécée. Pour parvenir à réunir l'argent nécessaire pour faire face à leurs nouvelles responsabilités, elles sont amenées à faire du commerce.

7. Deembo est un village situé au Nord-Cameroun, plus précisément dans le département de la Bénoué.
par l'intermédiaire de leurs enfants ou d'un «boy» qu'elles rémunèrent à la fin de chaque mois. Cette participation féminine, contrairement au passé, n'est pas reconnue à sa juste valeur. Les maris font semblant de ne pas l'apprécier, mais de s'être résignés face à l'entêtement de leur femme. Cela leur permet de conjurer les critiques des autres membres de la société. Quant aux femmes, elles n'ont pas pour le moment pris conscience de l'importance réelle de leur participation économique dans la vie familiale. Pour elles, leur acte n'a qu'un seul but: occuper leurs enfants, afin que ceux-ci ne sombrent pas dans la délinquance. En cas de délinquance ou grossesse hors mariage, ce sont les mères qui sont les premières accusées. Elles veillent donc à l'instruction de leurs enfants le temps nécessaire pour voir ceux-ci en mesure de se prendre en charge. Ceci est encore plus vrai pour les filles dont les études sont à la charge de la mère jusqu'à ce qu'elles trouvent un mari. Dès qu'une occasion se présente, les mères se battent pour interrompre les études de leur fille afin de l'envoyer en mariage. Ceci ne manque pas de créer quelques frottements entre les mères et leurs filles car ces dernières, une fois en contact avec l'école et le milieu masculin, développent d'autres conceptions de la vie idéale et de la manière de la vivre pleinement, et de ce fait refusent de se marier avec un homme qui n'est pas de leur choix.

CONCLUSION

L'espace habitable des Fulbe a connu au cours de leur histoire un mouvement restrictif. Passant d'une étendue vaste et concrètement non limitée, cet espace a été circonscrit et compartimenté. Ce mouvement a profondément modifié la situation et le rôle des femmes dans la société. Deux aspects de leur vie ont été particulièrement marqués: le degré de mobilité et de participation à la constitution du capital familial. Très mobiles au début, passant la plupart de leur temps à fréquenter les marchés voisins de leur campement, elles ont été renvoyées à l'intérieur d'une concession emmurée d'où elles ne sortent que sur autorisation et dans des conditions particulières. Quant à leur participation économique à la vie de la famille, elles sont parties d'une situation de productivité active où elles détenaient d'ailleurs les finances de la famille, pour se retrouver dans une situation de productivité dont le rendement est destiné à leur besoin personnel. Cependant, contrairement à leur mobilité, qui reste jusqu'à présent réduite, la participation économique des femmes à la survie familiale connaît actuellement, grâce à la crise économique, une reprise
certaine; reprise qui est vécue par les femmes, comme nous l'avons dit, avec une certaine culpabilité.

Bibliographie


Abstract:

The Evolution of Living Space and the Transformation of Female Identities among the Fulani of Northern Cameroon

Mahmoudou Djingui

During their history, the Fulbe have experienced a transformation of their habitable space that has become in a way much more restrictive. From a protective shelter, this space has finally become a complex habitation structure, fortified and divided. This modification leads to a transformation of women’s roles in society, in their matrimonial home, and also to the reconsideration of their self-image. Two aspects of women’s lives have been particularly marked: the degree of their mobility and of their participation in the constitution of the family capital. In times past women spent most of their time going to the market place, to villages in the neighbourhood of their encampment, to sell milk. With the money they earned selling milk, they met the needs of food and clothing for the family. Presently, they have been sent to the gynaecum, in a immured habitation they can only leave if authorized and under particular conditions. Their financial contribution is almost reduced to nothing.

Facing this situation, women have been induced to readjust and elaborate new strategies in order to adapt themselves to their new life conditions and to assert their status as responsible women. In this new situation, women will become aware of the importance of their beauty, of their body, of their culinary knowledge, of their capacity for understanding their husband’s desires, and of house-caring. Femininity, previously neglected because women were all the time on the road to market places, becomes now for them a determining asset in the struggle for power. With the economic crisis which has occasioned the abdication of several men from their roles, women have again found their economic participation in family life. Some women play a role that is, if not superior, at least comparable to that of their husbands. However the value of this resumption of activity is not rightly recognized and women seem to live it with a certain sentiment of culpability.
About the Contributors

Hussaina Abdullah holds a PhD in Sociology and Social Anthropology from the University of Hull, England. She is a Nigerian researcher currently based in Uppsala, Sweden. Her research interests are religion, politics and gender relations in contemporary Africa. Among her publications is “Activism and Wifeism: The Nigerian Women’s Movement” (1995) in A. Basu (ed.), The Challenge of Local Feminisms: Women’s Movement Globally.

Akosua Adomako Ampofo is a Research Fellow at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon. She is currently working on her doctoral dissertation in the Department of Sociology, Vanderbilt University, on gender inequalities in Ghana. Her publications include “Women and AIDS in Ghana: I Control My Body (or Do I?)” (1995) in P. Makwina-Adebusoye and A. Jensen (eds), Women’s Position and Demographic Change in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Gunilla Andræ is Senior Lecturer in Human Geography at Stockholm University, Sweden. Her subjects include urbanisation, industrialisation and regional development in Ghana, wheat and underdevelopment in Nigeria and workers’ organisations in the textile industry in Nigeria. As a consultant to Sida–SAREC she has been responsible for their programme for capacity building in gender research.

Mahmoudou Djingui is trained in social psychology and is a Doctoral Candidate in Social Anthropology at the University of Tromsø, Norway. He is a co-founder of the journal Bindi e Jande and has cooperated with Lisbet Holtedahl in the production of several documentary films in Cameroon. Some of his publications concern questions of gender and marriage.
Ulrika Bamidele Erlandsson is employed at The Catholic Pedagogic Board in Stockholm, Sweden, and holds a degree of Master of Divinity from the University of Uppsala. She was raised in Nigeria, Benin and Malawi. She has specialised in Mission Studies and has done field work in Jos, Nigeria. She is the author of “Regnbågen” (“The Rainbow”, An Introduction to the Catholic Faith), (1993).

Lisbet Holtedahl is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Tromsø, Norway. Her major research topics are urbanization, gender, religion, ethnicity and visual anthropology. She has published extensively on Cameroon, Niger and northern Norway and has produced several documentary films, including The Sultan’s Burden, with Jon Jerstad.

Jasmine Abel Jessen is originally Vietnamese. She is a midwife, who has her doctorate in Anthropology from France and has been working in development aid programmes for a series of years in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. The combination of old and new techniques and cultural practices related to childbirth is her special concern. In video films she has documented traditions and beliefs in Mali and Niger.

Penda Mbow is Senior Lecturer at the Department of History, the University Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, Senegal. A medievalist by training, she is especially interested in the history of Muslim societies. She has published various articles on the history of Islam and on women and Islam. Her latest publication is called “Femmes, Violence, Religion” in Revue IAD (1996).

Anastasie Idole Mekounde is a Doctoral Candidate of Sociology at the University of Yaounde, Cameroon, and a participant of the Norwegian-Cameroonian research programme Anthros in Ngaoundéré. She is currently writing her dissertation on the lives of the Adamawa M’Boum women.

Eva Evers Rosander is Senior Research Fellow at the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, Sweden. A Social Anthropologist by training, she has done field work in Morocco and Senegal. Her main focus is on women, Islam and development. She is the author of Women in a Borderland: Managing Muslim Identity where Morocco Meets Spain (1991).

Esther Shebi is a member of the congregation of Our Lady of Fatima Sisters in Jos, Nigeria. She has studied Sociology at the University of Jos and is presently a Graduate Student in Ireland.
Prudence Woodford-Berger is a Doctoral Candidate and University Lecturer at the Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University, Development Studies Unit. She has published several articles based on research in Western Ghana and her doctoral dissertation treats links between gender, kinship, identity and production in Western Ghana.

Ndèye Coumba Fall Diop is a Senegalese Rural Sociologist trained in France. She works with development aid related programmes and applied research programmes in Senegal. Specializing on women and small scale income generating activities she has been engaged in development programmes in Mbacké, in the coastal region close to Dakar and in Casamance.
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