Moving in and into the urban
Mbororo generations finding and creating a place
in Bamenda, Cameroon

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August 2009
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August 2009
In memory of two formidable women;
Ina Delver, who has loved life to the fullest, and
Gerti Hesseling, whose contagious enthusiasm remains a source of inspiration

- A person is only completely dead when there is no one left talking about him -
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The photographs included in this thesis were taken by me, unless stated otherwise. All photographs were taken during the fieldwork period from August 2008 to January 2009.
Acknowledgements

After one of the many meetings with a group of children in Ntambang, I tell two of the girls that I will be leaving back to my country soon. They are silent and look away, Sureya absent-mindedly rubs her leg, but then suddenly Sa’a turns towards me and says: “But... when you go, we will think about you!” The relief on her face is clear, and although her remark makes me sad in the first place, it is indeed soothing. Although we will not be having regular meetings anymore, we can still meet in our minds. This does not only count for the groups of children and youth I have been working with, but for more people in Bamenda. Madiya and her family have offered me their hospitality for which I am very grateful. Without Madiya’s openness, profound knowledge about her culture and ability to reflect upon her community, my fieldwork would not have been the same. I could not have done the fieldwork without the assistance of Rukayatu, Saidou and Ibrahim. Ahmadou from Burkina, Bappa, Saidou, Isufu, Bappa, Ibrahim and Salamatou became real friends. Amongst others, Zeinabu, Fatou, Abdou, Terence, Jara, Kenneth, Maimouna, Iliaisu and Rukaya happily shared small and bigger parts of our lives. I am grateful to the children and youth – and their parents - who wanted to meet me and Rukayatu on their free days. Thank you for patiently answering all my questions, drawing, acting, but most of all, thank you for the fun we had together!

Ernest has been an indispensable friend, never too tired to clean rooms and tears, share sparkling drinks and more. He contributed a lot to making the Langaa research centre a warm operating base, and its founders deserve merits for this promising initiative. My supervisor Mirjam de Bruijn has given me many insights throughout the entire process, and the advice of Francis Nyamnjoh was essential for my fieldwork. I have learned more from them than I could have ever imagined. In the field, Adamou, Samuel, Jill and Walter also gave me support with a scientific touch. During the preparations and the writing of the thesis, my fellow students were always there. I thank Martina, Iva, Henrietta, Annemarieke, Karl, Corine, Siri and Sophie. Special thanks go to Marieke and Anneke for the wonderful train rides, and Nixon and Maarten for the theoretical sparkles. I want to thank Ria Reis as second reader of my thesis. Mirjam de Bruijn, Jan-Bart Gewald, Rijk van Dijk, Daniela Merolla and other researchers at the ASC have showed me how much fun research in Africa is. Mirjam, without you, I would not have followed this pathway. Thank you for inspiring me and giving me the opportunity to develop myself more in this direction.
My function as student-assistant of the Theme Group Connections and Transformations of the African Studies Centre did not only result in my personal and professional development, but also provided me with the financial means for my studies. Next to this, I am grateful to Leids Universitair Fonds, Outbound Study Grant and my sister Margo for their financial contributions to this research.

I cannot omit thanking family Mbaye for loving and supporting me all the way from Senegal, wherever I go. My grandparents travel in my heart wherever I go. I also thank Dineke, Marijke and Annemiek and my anthropology friends in Utrecht, especially Koen and Tijl. Elina, thanks for coming to Cameroon for an unforgettable, joyful time. Kirsten, since the beginning, your autograph has been in my sight almost every day, yet I almost forget to thank you too for sharing your wisdom with me. Heather, I want to thank you for checking my English, but thank you so much more for being my angel friend. Roel, Linde, Margo, Tom and Wijnthe never cease to inspire and support me in any thinkable way. You mean the world to me! Roel, thank you for being with me. Words are a mediocre representation of what is inside one’s heart. All these pages filled with words are not about you, and I am responsible for all words that are written in this thesis. However, in large measure, they are there thanks to you.
1. Introduction: Being and becoming Mbororo in the city

 Barely more than a century ago, it was uncommon to see a Mbororo in the Bamenda Grassfields, moving around with his cattle and his family. Partly due to favourable circumstances for cattle rearing, more groups of Mbororo moved into the area. About fifty years ago, it was exceptional to see a Mbororo moving to the city with his family, without his cattle. Gradually, the move to the urban area became a viable option. Like many others, Mbororo have found their way to the urban areas of North West Cameroon. The Mbororo, who speak a variant of Fulfulde, the language spoken by Fulbe groups throughout West- and Central Africa, are leaving behind a lifestyle built around cattle herding and, to a lesser extent, crop cultivation. Their move into the city means a move into another way of life. They have to find their ways in the urban space, not only geographically, but also economically, socially, ideologically and otherwise. As such, they have not only moved into the city, but they also move in the city. This thesis is about how these movements are perceived, produced and reproduced in time and space. Movement seems to entail change, but this is not necessarily so. For a group for which movement has been part and parcel of their life, immobility is arguably more transformative than mobility.

 The move to the city is not always strictly a move from a mobile to a sedentary way of life. Researchers like Loftsdóttir and Boesen have given interesting insights in the ways of former nomadic pastoralist Fulbe groups to interweave their mobile mindset with their life in the city. Loftsdóttir (2004), for instance, has shown how Woodaabe migrant workers in Niger see their stay in the city as a temporary situation, necessary for rebuilding their herds in a later stage of their life. They do not seem to consider their being in the city as an interruption with their lifestyle of mobility. Boesen (2007) reflects the same idea in the case of Woodabe from Niger who do not construct houses in the urban areas where they go, but dwell in provisional places before moving on. The feeling that one’s settlement in a new environment is provisional is common for migrants throughout the world (Meurs 1998; van Dijk et al. 2001). In Bamenda, there is quite a large group of Mbororo who do not have intentions to go back to the rural area. Some of them have bought plots on which they have constructed their own houses, which reflects their intention to stay permanently. Residing in the urban space does not only influence activities, but also the mindset of children and their parents; their behaviour, ideas and aspirations. The Mbororo children who are born and raised in the city, grow up without knowing the pastoralist way of life. Although some are
sent to relatives in the countryside during school holidays, they will not fully master the practice of cattle herding. Instead, they are increasingly immersed into a globalised urban space, in which education is seen as indispensable for taking part in society.

The urban space is pre-eminently a place where the effects of globalisation are manifest, in which it is increasingly uncertain where and with whom one belongs. The social frameworks that used to give meaning to people’s life are giving way to new forms of living together. There is a high intensity of connectedness in the city, where a flow of people, goods and ideas come together and influence identification processes (see for instance Prakash 2008; Simone 2004). The new social forms that have evolved from global processes at the local level are an interesting arena for ethnographic studies (Moran 1999: 11). In this thesis I will describe the influence of these processes on the belonging of Mbororo in a Cameroonian city. The urban ways of relating and the ideologies of Mbororo are informed by the social and political context, and refer to processes of exclusion and belonging. Issues of belonging do not only play an important role in the literature about Fulbe groups, but also in the Cameroonian political context (see Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2001).

Map 1. Administrative map of Cameroon (Turner/Macmillan in Pelican 2008: 23)
The approach in this research has been aimed towards ideologies and ways of social relating in the urban, which brings about a polarised image of the Mbororo in Bamenda. With this specific focus on a group of ethnically similar newcomers who are finding a place in the urban space, the differences between ethnic groups are emphasised. Would I have solely looked at economies of the urban, for instance commercial interaction between different groups at the market, this would most probably have led to completely different results. The phenomenon of overemphasizing one’s differences with the ethnic ‘other’ has to be seen in perspective. Ethnicity only plays a defining role in particular places under particular circumstances. Mbororo identity in Bamenda is clearly in the making, continuously being created and recreated for different circumstances.

I have looked at a group of Mbororo who visibly present themselves as being Mbororo. Many of them emphasise the importance of their culture and of the religion of Islam in their life. They dress differently from the groups around them, especially Mbororo women. The majority of Mbororo residences can be found in specific quarters of town, and their social networks consist mainly of other Mbororo. However, this is not the only side of the story. There are also Mbororo who live dispersed throughout the city and who no longer attach great value to what is perceived as their cultural and religious background. They more or less ‘disappear’ as Mbororo; they do not entertain relationships with other Mbororo, intermarry with other groups and no longer relate to themselves and others as a Mbororo. The ethnic framework is no longer meaningful in their situation. As will be argued below, this does not apply to the Mbororo youth who display behaviour that is denounced by other Mbororo, because their way of relating has not changed. These youngsters still relate to their environment as Mbororo urbanites in specific, not just as urbanites. The Mbororo who have shifted away from specific Mbororo customs and practices are not only difficult to find in Bamenda, but also in this thesis. This could be seen as a shortcoming of this thesis, but in an ironical way, their absence in this thesis does justice to their position as Mbororo in Bamenda.

Central question

The position of Mbororo in Bamenda as such does not exist. In this thesis, positioning oneself in the urban space and in society at large is seen as a continuous process that is to a large extent dependent upon the micro- and macro-context in which individuals and groups find
themselves. In this case, the movements of the Mbororo into the urban landscape of Bamenda are of recent date, which reinforces the changeability of their positioning. The Mbororo are in the process of finding their place in the city. The experiences and expressions of these processes vary amongst different groups of adults, youth and children. They are being and becoming urbanites and urban Mbororo at the same time. The central question that has evolved from this is:

In which ways do several generations of migrated Mbororo find and create a place for themselves in the urban space in Bamenda, Cameroon?

There is a dialectical relationship of the urban being incorporated in people’s lives and the incorporation of people in the urban space. To find a place in the urban space is based upon the premise that the urban ‘hosts’ a place, that there is an underlying structure in which there is a space for people to occupy. To create a place entails activity of individuals or groups, is not a passive form of ‘being’ but of searching for ways of becoming, of adapting oneself to be part of several groups and structures at the same time. The places that are created by and for Mbororo exist at different levels and consist of several interrelated aspects, like the social, economical, religious, political, geographical and educational. These aspects are not confined to a geographical place and are power-related. Under different circumstances, individuals and groups attach more or less value to religious and cultural practices and ideologies that partly define their behaviour. In this thesis, I employ a perspective of agency, with which I answer to the call of Latour (2005: 11-12), who argues that this perspective is necessary ‘in situations where innovations proliferate, where group boundaries are uncertain, when the range of entities to be taken into account fluctuates’. I will try to unravel some of the relations, alliances, practices and ideologies that enable Mbororo to be and become in the city, to find a place for themselves in this increasingly interconnected world.

I will especially take into account the agency of the children and youth, and in this way contribute to discovering the ways in which migrant families make sense of the urban space and of themselves in the urban space, in Africa and beyond. This thesis will add to an understanding of the life-worlds of children and youth in general and Cameroonian Mbororo children and youth in the urban space of Bamenda in particular. For this, I will first work towards a definition of children and of youth.
Studying children and youth

In the central question, the term ‘generations’ is included. In its simplest form, the term refers to a genealogical relationship between individuals. Whyte et al. (2008: 4) describe the concept as a principle for structuring society, beyond the specific links of kinship. As such, generations become social categories, in this thesis analytically divided into children, youth and adults. But what is a child? When or where does childhood turn into youth, and where does adulthood begin? As de Boeck and Honwana (2005: 4) stress, these processes of transition are not universal, but ‘vary across and within societies and cultures over time’. It is generally agreed that the period of childhood is a period of ‘becoming’; a child is gradually developing social and physical capabilities that enable him to partake in and make sense of the larger world around him. Limiting the phases of childhood and youth to ‘becoming’, they could be considered as not-yet-social-beings, as opposed to adults. However, an approach of children and youth as not only ‘becoming’ but also as ‘being’ at the same time, enables us to take into account their own views and experiences. Seeing these phases as social categories, Thorsen (2006: 110) describes their flexibility:

Social categories are fluid and both children and their parents may shift between seeing an adolescent as a child and as a young adult, depending on the situation. The transit from one social category to another is therefore not a mono-directional process nor a wholesale shift.

The question ‘what is a child?’ is not only a conceptual question, but also involves a moral stance about what a child is supposed to be. The dominant, Western idea of children involves a notion of vulnerability, innocence and ignorance. Development institutions display and reinforce the image of children as victims, as vulnerable creatures exposed to the harsh reality that is their life (see Kleinman & Kleinman 1997: 7-8; Holland 1992: 150). In this dominant vision of childhood, children have the right to be protected and taken care of by adults, not to take care of themselves. In this ‘ideal Western image of childhood’ as it is often called, children are supposed to go to school and play in a safe environment. They are innocent and have no ‘real’ worries, because that is something for adults (Ruddick 2003: 337; Zelizer 1994: 10). According to Holland (1992: 148), the ideal concept of childhood would simply not be complete without the image of the unfortunate child. The ideal childhood is demarcated and reinforced by all opposite childhoods, for instance child labour, street life and child soldiers. Usually, it is said that these children do not have a childhood, or a ‘lost childhood’. A drastic consequence of the exclusion of these children from the category
‘children’ is that their protection is no longer taken for granted. These children are either seen as poor victims that need saving, or as dangerous creatures that need reintegration or, in the worst case, extermination (Stephens 1995; Hecht 1998). This research has a relativistic approach of childhood. An inclusive notion of the category children in which there is no prescribed childhood, seems to do more right to the daily realities of many children. However, this inclusive notion complicates the drawing of a clear distinction between the categories children and youth.

The category ‘youth’ is sometimes imagined along the same lines as the category ‘children’. Emphasis is placed on their ‘anomic and violent nature’ on the one hand and their ‘purported ignorance and innocence’ on the other hand, making them either perpetrators or victims (Honwana & de Boeck 2005: ix). Many of these studies focus on the capacity of youth for opposition, resistance, rebellion and counter-hegemony (de Boeck & Honwana 2005: 6). The phase of youth has been described as a liminal phase, caught between childhood and adulthood (Bucholtz 2002: 525). In the current study, youth is seen as a phase of increasing independence and developing sexuality, physically and mentally. Individuals want and are given more responsibilities and gradually learn ‘adult social positions’ (see Thorsen 2006: 90). As was described above, the transition from childhood to youth and from youth to adulthood is not a linear process. The categories ‘children’ and ‘youth’ do not have clear boundaries; individuals can navigate between several ‘modes of being’, dependent upon the environment in which they find themselves.

To move beyond the described dichotomy of seeing young people as either victims or perpetrators fits into what can be labelled as a perspective of agency, which encompasses human creativity, inventiveness and resilience. Instead of seeing children and youth as non-adults, we will consider them as active players, protagonists, in shaping their world and being shaped by their world (Prout 2005; Hecht 1998; Ennew 2003; de Bruijn 2007). Children are indeed vulnerable, but vulnerability does not equal victimhood. By employing the idea of agency and of the interrelated notion of social navigation, we can move away from the image of children as passive victims of processes that are beyond their reach (Christiansen et al. 2005; Vigh 2006; van Dijk et al. 2007). In the next chapter, I will elaborate on the paradigm of agency and the notion of social navigation, which form the framework for analysis in this thesis. By employing a child-centred anthropological approach, I have tried to grasp how Mbororo children, youth and adults in Bamenda relate to themselves, to others and to the world in which they live. The specific methods used for this purpose are discussed in the following paragraph.
Methodological reflection

Fieldwork context and research assistant

As a researcher, it is difficult to stay neutral in the polarised world in which the identity of Mbororo in the Bamenda Grassfields is formed. The questions aimed at finding out about processes of change in ideologies and behaviour, with a focus on ethnicity, have produced a specific image. Moreover, the local political context, in which two oppositional camps are formed, contributes to polarisation among Mbororo and between Mbororo and other groups. One camp is formed around the ‘Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association’ (MBOSCUA) and the other around an extremely wealthy businessman called Alhaji Baba Danpullo, to which chapter four will be devoted. This specific context, as well as the personal inclination of the interlocutors, research assistant and researcher, play a large role in the information that has been gathered in the field. Most of the fieldwork period from August 2008 to January 2009 was spent in Bamenda, especially in the quarters Old Town and Ntambang, where many Mbororo live. Visits to Sabga, Ndawara, Wum, Esu and Fonfuka enlarged my understanding of the power relations and connections of my informants beyond the urban space into the more rural areas of the Grassfields. Most of these visits were done with different key informants. On my regular visits to Sabga and one visit to Ndawara I was accompanied by my research assistant Rukayatu Fanyu.

Most of the time, Rukayatu accompanied me on walks through town, visits to and interviews with interlocutors, and during the group discussions with the children and youth. She acted as an interpreter during interviews held in Fulfulde, which is the language spoken by the Mbororo, and during interviews held in Pidgin, a Creole language spoken by most inhabitants of Bamenda and in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon. I tried to learn both languages at the same time, which did not result in a good command of either of them. This made it necessary to move around with someone who did know both languages.

Rukayatu was born in Sabga in 1981. Sabga was the first Mbororo settlement in the Bamenda Grassfields that was established in the beginning of the twentieth century, and remains an important assembly point for the Mbororo in the region. Rukayatu grew up among the Mbororo before she was sent to boarding school. Rukayatu’s parents were born in Ndu, where her father was a celebrated traditional medicine man. Before his children were born, he converted to Islam and moved to Sabga, where he was considered a rich man. Although the death of both her mother and her father in recent years have made life
consecutively more difficult, Rukayatu managed to finish her Bachelor in History at the University of Buea, and she envisages doing her Masters degree.

As Mommersteeg (1996) has described, working with a research assistant has some challenging dimensions. I felt that Rukayatu was absent-minded at times, and sometimes intervened in conversations at the wrong moment. Especially in the beginning of the fieldwork, I found it difficult to criticise and direct her behaviour. She must have found it difficult in return that, at times, I was not clear enough about my expectations. She was good in the group discussions with the children and her view of a relative outsider gave interesting insights in the ways Mbororo customs and behaviour can be considered and are being considered by other groups.

During most of the interviews I was accompanied by Rukayatu. I asked most of the questions, which were then translated by Rukayatu in Fulfulde. During the meetings with the children, I explicitly gave her the space to also ask questions directly in Fulfulde. Part of the recorded conversations were translated and transcribed by Rukayatu and me together. The majority has been done by Ibrahim Sali and the last part of it has been done by Saidou Saidou. In the quotes that are given throughout the thesis, Rukayatu’s and my texts are written in italics for more clarity. In some cases, I assessed the information that was given to me as sensitive information, which is why I changed the names of some of my informants.

The selection and data collection process

We worked mainly in two quarters, Old Town and Ntambang, where we had informal and formal conversations and interviews with adults, older youth, youth and children, and group meetings with Mbororo children and youth. These accounts are complemented with conversations with adults and youngsters of other groups. In Old Town, we selected the adult and older youth informants by walking through the quarter and entering into houses, and by meeting new informants through the people that we met, also described as the snowball method. Because my research assistant Rukayatu and I are both female, the adult female domain was relatively easy to access and we did more in-depth interviews with adult women than with adult men. Therefore, the female perspective is dominant in the data about the group of adult informants.

Some of the richer Mbororo construct a house in Ntambang, situated outside the city centre, where an important part of the research has been done. These Mbororo who have chosen to move to a predominantly Mbororo quarter seem to attach value to live close to
other Mbororo, apart from other groups. This makes these informants a specific group, as not all Mbororo make this choice. One of them is Madiya, whom I met through the connections of my supervisor Mirjam de Bruijn. Madiya has moved to Ntambang with her husband and three of their daughters. I lived with her family in the month of October 2008, and she became one of my key informants. I got an inside view of her family life and we had countless conversations about Mbororo present and past life, about cattle, marriage and death, about MBOSCUDA and Danpullo and many other topics. In an in-depth interview towards the end of my stay, we discussed her life history.

Madiya has played a great role in the selection process of the children and youth for the group meetings, which has resulted in the participation of her youngest brother and her son in the meetings of the group of youth in Old Town, and her two daughters and two of their cousins in the meetings of the group of children in Ntambang. This has not only provided me with a lot of knowledge about the individual life paths and the intergenerational relations between several members of this family, but it also gave me an insight into generational differences in general. As we will see, one aspect that makes this family is exceptional is the fact that Madiya is an active business woman. Apart from that, the activities of the different family members and the relationships they have are comparable with other Mbororo families around them.

The children and youth were selected to partake in the meetings on the basis of their age. The result of the selection was the creation of two groups of ten-year old children, one in Old Town and one in Ntambang, and two groups of youth between the age of fourteen and twenty-two in Old Town and in Ntambang. Except for the oldest three, all of these informants were living with their parents or caretakers. In these groups, there was more or less a gender balance, although there were somewhat more girls than boys (see appendix II for a description of these informants). Apart from having sessions with these groups, about which I will speak below, an existing group of older youth in Old Town was also studied. They are in the age range of twenty to the early thirties and they live independent of their parents or caretakers. The large majority are not caretakers themselves. Partially because we were in the same age range, some of them became my friends, like the young mother Salamatou with whom I always spoke French. We shared our thoughts and experiences and many of her excellent meals. In the data about this group of youngsters, the male perspective is more present, as I could speak English with some educated young men with whom I established good relations. One of these educated young men was Isufu, who was about to get married and who was looking for a job in town. Together with Isufu, I travelled to his...
parents’ compound in Esu and met his family members. He helped me to find a room in Old Town where I resided during the last month of my fieldwork period. The room was part of a compound where two newly wed Mbororo couples resided, as well as a Hausa couple with two children. Isufu had close relations with one of the couples, Iliasu and Rukaya, and he visited us almost every day.

The youngsters in Old Town can be roughly divided into the ones who are recently married, of whom the young wives stay in the house and the husbands work, and the unmarried people, who others say are prostitutes and thieves. The distinction is not a fixed one; in practice these groups are not delineated entities to which certain individuals belong. Individuals move in and out of different social fields. They have family members, friends and acquaintances with whom they interact with different intensities, who belong to different social groups at different times in their lives. To get access to the group of unmarried Mbororo who live independent of their caretakers turned out to be more difficult for me than to reach the other groups that are discussed above.

Access to youngsters displaying deviant behaviour

Within the Mbororo community in Bamenda, it was especially difficult for me to get connected to the people who display behaviour that is considered ‘wrong’ by others. My inclination to focus on deviant behaviour was informed by its possible effect of revealing Mbororo social rules. The social reaction of people to this kind of behaviour provides an insight into the existing social rules of a group (Becker 1963). The group of young Mbororo who display deviant behaviour is very visible in Old Town. During the day, many of them can be found in one specific restaurant, although there are other restaurants and places they also visit. In the evening, they gather around the same spot at the corner of the street, where they chat and meet others. Sometimes, boys invite some girls to drink and they enter into an off-licence (Pidgin for ‘drinking spot’) to have some beer or a sweet alcoholic beverage. Their visibility does not automatically lead to an increased accessibility, although it does leave space for observations. However, for observing on the streets and in the off-licences in the evening, one has to be well-prepared, which counts even more so for a young female researcher like me. One of the problems encountered was that the young men approached me with the same objectives as they approached the women they had invited:
“So where were you born?” “I love you”. “Where did you attend school?” “I love you, come with me for enjoyment.” In a bar with loud music and drunk people, doing a serious interview is impossible, especially if the informant himself is drunk.¹

Trust between the girls and the researcher was difficult to achieve. I had intruded in their terrain, and they were clearly thinking ‘what does she want from us?’. In another restaurant, Rukayatu and I ordered a meal and meanwhile, we discussed our personal experiences with dancing in the nightclub and meeting men. The two girls who served the food were obviously interested and drawn into our discussion. Still, it remained difficult to talk about behaviour that is perceived as immoral with them and other Mbororo youngsters who display this kind of behaviour. Generally, people do not have a desire to wash their dirty linen in public. In this case, it is accentuated by some Mbororo values like pulaaku or the feeling of shame, which also involves circumventing controversial subjects. However, if it is made apparent that certain behaviour is not judged as wrong and immoral, but it is shared, trust can grow between the informants and the researcher.

With these groups, I mainly did participant observations; I spent time hanging around the junction at the main street in Old Town and in the restaurant where they gather, and in some off-licences. I had many informal conversations with them, but regrettably no in-depth interviews.

Sessions with children and youth: Cattle and crayons, teenagers and theatre

For this research I have used on the one hand qualitative methods that are common in anthropology, and on the other hand more participatory methods that are generally used in childhood studies and development studies. The anthropological methods include informal conversations, in-depth interviews and participant observation, which have been discussed above. By organising sessions with specific Mbororo children and youth in Old Town and Ntambang, I have actively created a certain research setting next to doing participant observations of situations in children’s daily life and having informal conversations with them. The group sessions were preferred to in-depth interviews for several reasons which have also been described by Nieuwenhuizen (2003). Interviews are demanding because they ask a long concentration span, and a researcher who is posing question after question can appear to be intimidating for a child. A group meeting circumvents these problems, because children are in a group among themselves. Group meetings can be a lot more informative

¹ Notes about an off-licence in Nkwen, 28 January 2009.
than individual interviews, because children add comments and correct each other when information is given. Getting together with a group of four to eight children works best, because children who are somewhat shy can hide behind others and there is enough attention for each individual child.

Together with my research assistant Rukayatu, we held sessions with four groups of young Mbororo in two different quarters of town; two groups of children from 10 to 12 years and two groups of youth from 15 to 22 years old. In Ntambang we met in a room of Madiya’s compound on Saturdays, and in Old Town, we met in the compound and Koranic school of Zeinabu on Sunday mornings and in Madiya’s tailoring workshop on Sunday afternoons. Central themes were family, friends, behaviour, values, religion, school and ethnicity. Throughout the six months fieldwork period, there have been six to seven meetings with the four groups, some more intensive than others. For a detailed description of the meetings, see appendix II. An example of a theatre play about drinking youth is included in appendix III. The languages that were used were Fulfulde, English and Pidgin, and sessions were recorded with a voice recorder.

In this group setting, a mixture of participatory methods was used, including focus group discussions, drawing, playing theatre, taking photographs and recording conversations. For all these methods, assignments that I had established beforehand served as guidance. These assignments can be found in appendix II. My main inspiration for the methods is based on ideas and methods used by Hecht (1998), van der Brug (2007), de Bruijn (2007), Ennew (2003), Nieuwenhuijs (1997, 2001) and Nieuwenhuizen (2003). In this research, the data produced through the methods were not an aim in itself. I did not thoroughly analyse the images and texts that were produced, they were rather used as a starting point. The drawings and photographs themselves were not the most important outcomes, but the discussions that evolved from them. The idea behind this is that with the aid of an image, children can tell a lot about their life-world (see also Ennew 2003). It is good to do this in a group, because children and youth do not only explain what the image shows, but also get involved in conversations about it, which is a good source of information.

The sessions were held on a blanket that was especially made for this research (see photograph 1), except for the ones with the youth in Old Town, which was due to space constraint. The blanket is based on a play developed by Nieuwenhuizen (2003) for a research with street children in India, called ‘voyage of discovery’. I did not use her ideas from the play, as it has interventionist aspects that did not match my research perspectives, but I did
use her idea of the blanket. Four soft, check-shaped forms and one round form can be stuck to the blanket with Velcro, below which objects can be hidden.

The blanket is blue and the forms have different mellow colours. The colours and the soft fabric appeal to the visual and motor senses of children in a child-friendly way. The blanket was used as focal point, meant for regulating the attention of the children and creating the right conditions for contact. Hiding and uncovering objects proved to be a fun activity.

The use of these methods has provided an insight into the lives of these children and youth. Of course, creating a setting like this has its methodological limitations, which will be explored more in-depth in an academic article (Keja fc.). However, the information that was produced in this part of the fieldwork showed resemblance with observations I made and with the accounts of adults and older youth in interviews. Examples of this were the marriages that were acted by the groups of youths and the chores that were acted by the children’s groups. The data that have been acquired in the ways that have been discussed above will be analysed in the chapters that follow, contributing to answering the central question of this thesis.

**Thesis outline**

In order to be able to answer the question in which ways Mbororo generations find and make a place for themselves in the city, several aspects of this have been worked out in
different chapters. After this introduction, a theoretical chapter will follow in which I will set forth the framework for exploring the subject of this thesis. The theoretical framework will be embedded in the structure-agency debate, in which structure and agency are no longer seen as oppositional but as mutually interdependent and reinforcing, in the increasingly interconnected globalised world. From there, I will work towards an elaboration of important concepts such as migration, identity and ethnicity, resulting in a discussion of Fulbe identity. Chapter three and four form part of the local context, in which the history of the Grassfields and of Bamenda are expounded in the former and the political constellations around MBOSCUDA and Alhaji Baba Danpullo influencing the Mbororo in finding their way in the city in the latter chapter.

The fifth, sixth and seventh chapter provide ethnographic descriptions of the Mbororo in Bamenda. In the fifth chapter, emphasis is being placed on the economical activities in the city. This is because the financial factor has often played an important role in the decision to leave the rural areas. The reason to move to an urban area and why the Mbororo are in the city influences the ways in which they feel in the city, whether they feel at home or see their situation as a temporary solution. These factors form the basis for their behaviour in the city. This behaviour will be discussed in chapter six, in which I include a judgement of others of certain deviant behaviour. Studying behaviour that is perceived as deviant and the general views on this behaviour give insight in the prevailing social rules. In the seventh chapter, the underlying ideologies that produce and reproduce these norms are studied, in which education is at the centre stage. Education is divided into formal education, religious conveyance in the Koranic school, at home and in the mosque, and the home environment in which children are raised.

From these chapters, it will become clear how different generations of Mbororo deal with their life in the city and which ideas form the basis of their behaviour in the city. In the conclusions I will examine how the city has become engrained in the lives of different generations of Mbororo and how they have become part of the city, relating back to the theory. After the references, some appendices are included. In Appendix I, a list is included of the interviews, conversations, meetings and other data that are referred to in the thesis. Appendix II aims at giving a deeper insight in the sessions with the children. Appendix III is a transcription of a theatre play of the youth, in which many interesting aspects were revealed. The theatre plays give an insight in the choices that are suggested by the youth that young and older Mbororo can make in problematic situations, which is a form agency, as we will see in the following chapter.
2. Agency, identity and interconnectedness

In an increasingly interconnected world, it becomes increasingly difficult to determine people’s positions, as these are flexible, ever-changing and context dependent. To be able to answer the central question about people creating a place in the urban area, several aspects need to be unravelled. This and interrelated questions will be considered through the lens of agency. In this chapter, we will use an itinerary to set out the theoretical framework of the thesis, starting with the disciplinary background of the project, followed by an elaboration on agency. An agency perspective provides a theoretical entrance into the complex ways in which the Mbororo interact with their urban environment. These complex ways are guided by internal and external processes forming the context, of which globalisation, urbanisation and migration are especially relevant. In this context, the concepts of identity, ethnicity and belonging, which are interlinked with these processes, offer a way to approach the central question of this thesis.

This chapter provides a framework for considering the Mbororo in several ways throughout the thesis; they are actors in a globalised world, they are migrants, they are urbanites ‘in the making’, they are members of families and of generational groups, and they can also be approached as a Fulbe group. When asked to which group they belong, most Mbororo in Bamenda also stress their common ancestry with other Fulbe groups. Therefore, I have chosen to end the chapter with a consideration of Fulbe identity and of a discussion of *pulaaku*, which is sometimes thought to guide Fulbe social action, a concept also used by Mbororo in and around Bamenda. As we will see in chapter seven, not only adults, but also their children in Bamenda judge each other’s social action in which *pulaaku* plays a role. In this chapter and throughout this thesis, the views of children and youth are highly valued. We will start the discussion of the theory about structure, social actors and agency by spending some attention on the development of the view of children as social actors in ethnographic research.

**Ethnographic research of children**

Children and youth make up at least half of the population of African cities. Therefore, it is remarkable that their perceptions and experiences are underrepresented in qualitative research. During several decades, ethnographical research has been conducted with children.
However, ideas of children and youth about their own life have received little attention until recently. Hecht (1998: 75-76) divides the anthropological study of children in two currents, the first one being linked to behavioural psychology, considering children as a *tabula rasa* on which culture is written by adults. The main idea is to study the socialisation process of children and youth, who learn to reproduce the social structure of adults. The second current has existed for some time, but has received little attention. In this current, in which I also want to place myself, children and youth are seen as social actors who have a certain autonomy and agency.

Two of the first anthropologists to employ the view that children and youth are social actors are Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, members of the ‘culture and personality school’ that flourished in the United States in the 1930s. Although they studied the children and youth to understand more of the social structure of the society and not to understand the children and youth themselves, they did treat their young informants in the same manner as their adult informants (Hecht 1998: 76). One of the first researchers whose aim was to give children and youth a voice in his research by focusing on their own ideas was Hardman (1973), inspired by Opie and Opie (1959, cited in Hecht 1998). Since the 1970s, this current that considers children and youth as competent actors in their own life, raises its voice (James 2001: 250). According to Prout (2005: 1), it was not until the 1980s that social scientists who openly opposed the idea that children and youth, as opposed to adults, are ‘not-yet-social-beings’, gained foothold. Prout argues that the field of childhood studies is having troubles to go beyond these ideas and move towards new insights. The repetition of statements like ‘children are social actors’ is telling for him, ‘as if these were still novel insights that have not already won wide agreement’ (Ibid.: 2). The recognition that young people are able to make decisions and reflect on their own life is reflected in the perspective of agency, which might be of help in order to be able to go beyond these statements.

**Towards a perspective of agency**

The debate about structure and agency has emanated from debates in anthropology and sociology about theories of structuralism and structural functionalism in the 1980s. The structuration theory of Giddens (1984) was one of the influential answers to the deterministic structuralism of his predecessors. In this theory, structure and agency are equally important in shaping social reality. Actors operate within the structure and are limited by it, but at the
same time they reproduce it, which Giddens (1987: 60) has called the ‘duality of structure’. Among other important theorists who have contributed to a workable notion of agency in the social sciences are Archer (2003), Latour (2005), Long (1992, 2001) and Ortner (2006). The actor-approach, advocated by Long (1992), builds on the ideas of Giddens and offers a conceptual and methodological framework to understand differences between and within societies. This framework is especially focused on how, under specific circumstances, several cultural phenomena are created, perpetuated or changed in peoples’ daily lives.

According to Giddens (1984: 25), structures have at the same time a limiting and stimulating effect on social behaviour. Social structures make social action possible, and at the same time social action creates those very structures. The composition of structures cannot be understood without the acknowledgement of the agency of social actors (Long 1992: 24). The concepts ‘social actor’ and ‘agency’ are not confined to the individual. They comprise all collections of people that can make decisions and act upon them. Human societies, or social systems, would not exist without human acting. But actors do not create social systems; they reproduce and change them (Giddens 1984: 171). Social actors never exist independent of social structures. The activities of social actors are embedded and foundational elements of structured qualities of institutions that extend themselves in time and space (Giddens 1987: 11). The actions of social actors are embedded in structures, because these structures enter into the life-worlds of these actors and form part of the resources and limitations that underlie their strategies. These structured qualities of institutions are co-created by actors as a reaction to others and by their own agency, which seems to indicate that structure is created by collective agency (van Dijk et al. 2007: 11-12).

In a discussion of the ideas of Giddens (1984) and Long (1992), Duivenvoorde (2006) argues that the ways in which social behaviour and individual choices are formed are best studied in the context of macro-phenomena, like processes of globalisation. The attention should then not only be focused on structures and institutions, but also on strategies, options and agency of individuals and groups. The individual is considered an agent who is able to produce, reproduce and negotiate social practices and the meaning that he himself attaches to these practices. The individual is capable of social experiences and create ways to act and to give meaning to his behaviour. This has brought us to produce an answer to the question ‘what is agency?’. Long (1992: 26) has described Giddens’ definition of agency as knowlegdeability/capability. Building upon the ideas of Archer (2003) and Ortner (2006), van Dijk et al. (2007: 9) go somewhat further in stating that agency is not just acting, but it is reflexive, purposeful acting, directed towards a changing of the predicament, structure or
condition that has been perceived in the first instance. Agency refers to the ability of individuals or groups to negotiate about their perceived social and physical space. People try to solve problems, learn to react to the social events around them, reflect critically on their own acting, observe how others react to their own behaviour and take into account several uncertainties.

Van Dijk et al. (2007: 11-12) have also explored the boundaries of agency; people do not under all circumstances have the chance and ability to express and give forms to their own wishes and fantasies. They are limited by the structures that form part of their social world, limits that are also created by other people’s agency. As agency can be seen as a process of negotiation between structures and actors, it ‘generates a reflexive and negotiating moment between the two’ (van Dijk et al. 2007: 6). This process of negotiation comprises a struggle about aims, meanings and actions, and as such, it is entangled with power relations and social hierarchies (Long 2002; van Dijk et al. 2007). If we identify places of social incoherence and cultural differences, we can get an insight in the ways in which differences in social interests, cultural interpretations, knowledge and power are negotiated. According to Long (2002), by doing this we can discover how products of social acting are socially and culturally constructed.

These processes can be understood by analysing the life-worlds and the daily actions of actors. All actors operate with a complexity of concepts, convictions and attachments; therefore, their life-worlds are always provisional, partial and contextual (Arce & Long 1992: 212-213). The concept of ‘social navigation’, coined by Vigh (2006), can be helpful in describing social action in a shifting context. Social navigation describes the way in which people direct their lives; the ways in which they approach the changes within their social environment and employ strategies to make the most of these changes (Vigh 2006: 8). In this way, attention can be given to the complexity and dynamics of relations between different life-worlds, like the life-worlds of several generations. As Duivenvoorde (2005) points out, here, we clearly see the value of Long’s theory for researching the actions and ideas of children and youth; the agency perspective reveals how people’s reactions to and in a continuously changing world are being created and strive for dominance. An ethnographic approach with an agency perspective seems suitable to reveal the ways in which people experience and act upon the world. Fitting in an agency perspective, the concept of social navigation enables us to ‘encompass the ways in which agents act not only in relation to each other, or in relations to larger social forces, but in relation to the complex interaction between
agents, terrain and events, thereby making it possible to encompass social flux and instability’ (Vigh 2006: 14).

As has been shown in the first paragraph of this chapter, the notion of agency and the accompanying actor-approach have been embraced by child-centred social researchers for describing children in the social world. Accounts of children as passive, future social beings that are steered by their parents and larger society can have undesirable effects for the protection of these children, which has also been described in the introduction. With an agency perspective, children can be approached not only as poor, ignorant victims of the structures around them, but as human beings who are able to act upon their circumstances, however limited their agency may be. Similarly, in the field of African Studies the notion of agency has been welcomed as a way to make sense of societies (see also de Boeck & Honwana 2005; van Dijk et al. 2007). Policies, development models and macro-institutions often approach Africans as mere victims of the harsh structural circumstances in which they live. In the field of African Studies, this approach does not offer a satisfactory framework for describing the strategies with which Africans make the best of their lives, in and despite of the difficult structural circumstances. The notion of agency, in which a certain freedom of action is attributed to all individuals, offers a solution. As mentioned by van Dijk et al. (2007: 1), it offers a possibility for assessing people’s inventiveness, creativity and reflexivity. By employing a perspective of agency, a picture can be constructed of the cultural options that are available for African children and youth at the local, national and international level, and the interrelations between these levels can be investigated.

In order to do justice to the differences between the life-worlds of Mbororo migrant children, youngsters and parents in Bamenda, I have chosen the perspective of agency. This perspective offers a useful way of making sense of the social world, especially in the present era of globalisation. People are increasingly interconnected, which has made possible and enlarged exchange in economic and ideological areas, and also movement of people. The interaction between changing structures and the agency of different actors is a dynamic area of study. The agency perspective is also suitable for studying the situation in Bamenda, in which different generations of Mbororo migrants deal with their lives in the city in different ways. Before we examine the subject of migration to urban areas, we will first look into processes of globalisation, that are part of the larger context in which people negotiate their social and physical spaces.
Globalisation and identification processes

The world is increasingly interconnected, and a growing interaction of people, ideas and goods takes place, also described as the process of globalisation. As many have already indicated, globalisation is not a new process, but a phenomenon that goes back at least to the fourteenth century. However, the speed and the intensity with which different layers of societies have been changing since the last decades are of a totally new order (van Binsbergen et al. 2004). Friedman (cited in van Binsbergen et al. 2004: 24) describes this period as the ‘second phase’ or as turbo-charged globalisation, that is largely due to rapid technological innovations in the area of communication. Radio, television, phones and the internet have changed the lives of millions of people, even in the most isolated areas (Rapport 2000: 73). Appadurai (1990: 193, cited in Rapport 2000: 91) describes this process as follows:

The loosening of bonds between people, wealth and territory, whereby money, commodities and persons now endlessly chase one another round the world, also impacts upon the imaginative resources of lived, local experiences, on localism as such.

Globalisation has evolved as a complex and often contradictory process that is characterised by both homogenisation and heterogenisation, centralisation and localisation (see for instance Appadurai 1996). Events that happen at a global level have an influence on local situations and are given a local interpretation. This phenomenon is sometimes called glocalisation (van Binsbergen et al. 2004: 16). The concept links the seemingly paradoxical concepts ‘global’ and ‘local’ and expresses the way in which globalisation locally takes shape. On the local level, a hybrid mix arises of the existing with the new. According to Friedman (cited in van Binsbergen et al. 2004: 16) successful glocalisation entails: ‘To be able to assimilate aspects of globalisation into your country and culture in a way that adds to your growth and diversity, without overwhelming it’, which links back to agency.

Van Binsbergen et al. (2004: 19) describe two related processes that form the core of globalisation. The first process consists of local individuals and communities being increasingly interconnected with worldwide networks of communication, information and circulation. These networks are power-related. In the second process the power is being concentrated in local, regional, national, continental and intercontinental centres. There are less than a handful of centres that strive to be a superpower, of which the United States can be mentioned as the clearest example. This process has not been favourable for everyone, on
the contrary. It appears that the benefits of present-day globalisation are accumulated by a relatively small fraction of the world’s population, while poverty and social exclusion continue to increase (McGrew 2000: 347). For some, it seems that globalisation has only enabled them to have more detailed dreams about a world they cannot reach, as described by Ferguson (1999) in ‘Expectations of modernity’.

Burton (2003) argues that the increasing globalisation has enlarged the space of manoeuvre for young people, and changes them in social actors in a global arena. Under influence of globalisation, individuals arguably have more possibility of choice. A flipside to the increasing possibilities are the increasing uncertainties. While in the past, societies provided individuals and groups with more or less clearly defined roles, nowadays, they have to find their own ways of navigating through society. Traditional ways to define the world become meaningless and new social forms emerge, but at the same time there is a tendency to cling on to the familiar and exclude all that is exotic or unknown (see Geschiere 2009). In the process of becoming, youths’ individual choices for ways of relating to their environment play an increasingly important role. The colonial and postcolonial frameworks no longer make sense to large groups of African youth, who ‘remake their composite identity and lived world and redeploy long-standing local moralities in the intersection with more global forces in new and often surprising ways’ (de Boeck & Honwana 2005: 11).

Globalisation processes are especially intense in areas where many people, ideas and commodities come together. One of the phenomena that is simultaneously a consequence and a source of globalisation is the phenomenon that large groups of people move to the urban areas, which brings along changes at many different levels. Conducting actor-oriented social research in the urban space is an urgent and exciting enterprise. Urbanisation is in full blast and as yet, there are no clear answers where these processes will lead to in the long run. It is especially interesting to study these phenomena in the urban space. At the same time, attention should also be given to the people who stay in or move to the rural areas for whatever reasons. Some social scientists have studied these often forgotten people, like for instance Bryceson (1996), de Bruijn and van Dijk (2003) and Tacoli (2001). In this thesis, I concentrate on the people who have moved to the urban space, mostly from rural areas. In the next paragraph, I will define the concepts of the urban space and of migration, and discuss some of the aspects that are related to these concepts.
It seems difficult to understand African societies without taking into account the mobility of its inhabitants (de Bruijn et al. 2001). De Bruijn et al. (ibid.) prefer the more inclusive concept of ‘mobility’ instead of migration, and they argue that migration can be seen as a specific form of mobility, that does not cover all existing forms of movement. Mobility has been a reaction to certain circumstances and a basis for millions of Africans to make a livelihood. Next to rural-urban migration, there is widespread rural-rural migration on the African continent, as well as urban-urban and urban-rural migration. Several criteria for identifying someone as a migrant are described by van Dijk et al. (2001), like the duration of one’s stay, whether one moves out of free choice, and people’s characteristics in relation to their motivation. As will be described in more detail below, most migrants do not move with the idea that their stay will be a definite one (2001: 12). After which period does someone become a migrant, when is it clear that someone practices seasonal or circular migration? What to think of a divorced woman who stays with her sister for two months, moves to her parents’ compound for some months and returns to her sister’s compound for two weeks before moving to another sister’s compound for some time? To understand this mobility, it is helpful to look into people’s motivations for moving and for accepting prolonged visits of relatives. Do they feel they have a choice? In some cases, like in situations of violent conflict, many people feel forced to move in order to stay alive. The degree of choice or freewill can be debated, but in many cases, mobility can be seen as a response to structural circumstances and therefore as a form of agency.

Although there are many forms of mobility as we have seen, rural-urban migration has extensively been studied because of its massive and transformative character. It is projected that by 2020, more than sixty percent of the inhabitants of West Africa live in urban areas (Club du Sahel 1994). The Population Division of the United Nations (2007) estimates that by 2020, half of the population of West and Central Africa will be living in urban areas. The estimate for Cameroon is sixty-five percent. The Bamenda Grassfields, where the current study has been carried out, has traditionally been more populated than other parts of the country, which will be discussed in the next chapter. This study is focused on the Mbororo population in the Bamenda Grassfields who have moved to the urban space. Most of them did not move directly from their village of birth to the city, but took different itineraries before settling in the city. Many of them, especially the young people, regard their stay as a temporary one. Without losing out of sight all the different forms of mobility, I will approach
the Mbororo in Bamenda as a migrant group in an urban area. In the next paragraph, I will discuss several issues influencing migrant families in the process of finding a place. For now, I will turn to a description of the concept of the ‘urban space’. In the field of urban studies, the city is no longer seen as a place in which society and politics take shape, but, instead, as a spatial form of social life and power relations. Whereas the concept of ‘the city’ no longer seems to be a useful conceptual point of departure, ‘the urban space’ does more right to the increasingly complex forms of coexistence and cohabitation (Prakash 2008: 2). In past accounts of the African urban space, its inhabitants are mostly portrayed as ‘reluctant participants in urbanisation with no real desire to come to or to be in the city in the first place [...] their important influences continuing to be rooted in rural ways of life’ (Simone 2004: 215). In line with the agency perspective, Simone argues that urbanites are far more flexible than previously thought, and different social arrangements and temporalities are at the same time negotiated, reinforced and undermined. As Prakash (2008: 1) describes:

As globalisation increasingly extends urban forms across the world and integrates the existing cities into vast urbanised systems of communication, transnational flows of finance, commodities, labour, images, and ideas, the idea of the city as an organism, defined by an internally coherent civic life and structured by clear relationships to the region, nation and wider world, appears obsolete.

Linked to this is the argument of Trager (1996: 10) that the urban and rural are not separate social fields. Individual connections usually go well beyond the perceived boundaries of the rural and urban. In the last decades, in which many people have moved to urban areas, the increasing interconnectedness has blurred the concept of space even more. The television shoots images of places all over the world into people’s living rooms, and the mobile phone has enabled people to do business without actually moving and to keep in touch with far away relatives and friends. Arguably, someone in Bamenda who calls with his father who stands on a hilltop close to the Nigerian border and with his brother in the United States can feel he is closer to his father and brother than to the person selling credit to him. Cyberspace remains a space that cannot be entered by all, but its existence indicates the excessive growth of possibilities of interaction.

The meaning of ‘locality’ has changed through these increased movements and interconnections. The ‘local’ is not just a specific place, but is also dispersed across space. One of the reasons for this is that people who are on the move do not only take material belongings with them, but also immaterial images, feelings and connections (Trager 1996:
19). Not only the structural circumstances in which migrants find themselves, but also the psychological aspects of their movement influence the ways in which they experience and act upon their lives. These circumstances are not experienced and acted upon in the same way by individuals of different generations. The experiences of several generations of migrants will be discussed in the next paragraph, to underline that children have other ways of relating to the social world than their parents. As this is part of the central argument in this thesis, several aspects in which migrant children and their parents act and think differently will be considered below.

**Migrant families in a multigenerational perspective**

The study of adaptation of migrants to a new environment has been given quite some attention in the European context (see for instance Roosens 1998; von Benda-Beckman & Verkuyten 1995; Meurs & Gailly 1998). From these studies appears that the way in which newcomers are perceived by a community depends on the existing social, political, cultural, economical, religious and geographical context. The description of migrants in the European context is largely a static description of people making the move from one place to another place. They have moved from one fixed place of residence to another. For groups in which movement is part of their way of life, like Fulbe groups, mobility is a way to deal with environmental and political insecurity (de Bruijn & van Dijk 1995). It has been argued that the Mbororo gradually became less mobile before they moved to the city, starting from the period when they entered into the Grassfields and began to cultivate crops alongside cattle rearing (Pelican 2008). Their move to the city can be seen as one more step in the process of sedentarisation that started some decennia ago. Some members of families will still move on to another city for employment or marriage, but the majority will not go back to a life with cattle. These Mbororo families who have a past of mobility can be regarded as migrants in the city, where first and second generations face different issues during the process of finding new ways of belonging. It is sometimes argued that the Mbororo in Bamenda are marginalised and do not have the same opportunities as the Grassfielder groups around them (Duni et al. 2005). This ‘ethnic’ argument is sometimes employed as a political tool, on which I will elaborate in the next paragraph.

Instead of considering migrants as individuals, I will consider migrant families here, because the experiences of migration are not only lived at the individual level, but also at the inter-relational level, which is a key aspect in this study. Migrant parents have their roots in
a different locality from which they have ‘brought along’ a set of cultural customs and values. Unlike their children they usually have a strong basis in their locality of origin, geographically and mentally (Meurs 1998). In many cases, parents take their children to their places of origin, where a part of the extended family usually still resides. The children do develop a bond with these places and people, but they do not ‘belong’ there in the same way as their parents do. They do not develop the same connection with the locality of origin as their parents, which can lead to tensions between these children and their parents.

Another field of tension can be the education of children. Education is often considered as a main ingredient for migrants to establish themselves in society and at the labour market. It is often equated with upward social mobility, bringing opportunities for a better life. It is also a way to ‘fit in’, a place where children can connect with other children and create a place for themselves (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 1999; de Valk & Crul 2008; Verhoef & Morelli 2007: 37). Parents can be ambivalent towards school; on the one hand, they want their children to perform well in school, but on the other hand they know that their children are exposed to influences of the ‘new’ community (Meurs 1998: 98). This can also be seen among Mbororo families in Bamenda, where children are taught Christian songs in school and Islamic practices at home, to which I will return in chapter seven.

To be exposed to outside influences does not only mean to learn new ways, but also to let loose of old ways. The sensation that something gets lost in migration is shared among many migrant families (Meurs 1998). Some families appear to deal much better with migration than other families. According to Meurs (Ibid.), the way in which parents deal with this feeling of loss is crucial in their adaptation to the new circumstances. For the first generation of migrants, the feeling of temporality of their stay may be comforting them in the new place. For children, however, the acceptance of their parents of the new locality as a definite one makes it easier to feel at home, to enter into relations with people, objects and places (Phalet 1998). If parents can feel the interwoven-ness of cultural practices of their locality of origin and in the new society in which they find themselves, and appreciate cultural practices of several societal structures, this can lead to the creation of a safe basis of attachment for their children. The flexibility of migrant children to move in different cultural settings can be an advantage for them in creating a place for themselves in society.

However, dissimilarities between the values of their parents and the values of the larger community can create serious problems for migrant children (see also Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 1999). Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1999: 208) state:
As immigrant youth begin to attempt to navigate the complex, often contradictory waters of ‘home’ and ‘host’ culture, socially constructed hierarchies of authority are often disrupted. The parental voice may be silenced. Gender scripts often need to be rewritten. Family conflicts often result as immigrants deal with the stresses of uprooting and resettling in the new land.

According to Meurs (1998), this is especially the case when parents do not leave space for their children to question ‘original’ cultural values of their parents’ communities. This can result from parents’ inability to accept their new situation and deal with the feeling of loss. Meurs (Ibid.) describes that this leaves children with two options; either fully accommodate to their parents’ cultural system, or destroy it. When children reject the cultural system that their parents cling onto and they do not find a place for themselves in the ‘new’ cultural system, they bear the risk that they enter into a void. For a minority of children with severe identity conflicts, this can eventually lead to deviant behaviour like prostitution, criminality or addiction (Ibid.: 99). With the exception of this last phrase, the term identity has not been used in this paragraph. However, finding a place for oneself, developing connections, moving in different cultural settings and developing a bond with people and places, are all linked to the concepts of identity and belonging. These concepts will be discussed below, in order to lay a basis for considering the being and the becoming of the Mbororo in the city. So far, I have approached the Mbororo as urban migrants, but as I already mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, they can also be considered as an ethnic group. In the last part of this chapter, I will approach the Mbororo as an ethnic group, starting by elaborating on the concepts of identity and belonging.

Identity, ethnicity and belonging

In the discipline of cultural anthropology, the study of identity and ethnicity has a long history. After all, studying ‘the other’ is fundamental to the discipline. Instead of scrutinizing the anthropologist and the other, I will set out some concepts that form part of the framework for this thesis. Especially during the 1990s, there was a focus on the interplay between ethnicity and identity (see for instance Amselle 1990; Banks 1996; Eriksen 1993). First of all, identity is contextual and created in the encounter with others. These others can be family, society, ethnic others, colleagues and so forth. Thus identity is internally shaped and at the same time created in the process of how one is perceived by outsiders. Members of
a group distinguish themselves from ‘the other’ and are regarded in a certain way by the other. Obviously, one can be a parent, colleague, Christian and bus passenger at the same time, which can be a neutral quality but can also lead to internal or external conflict. Although identity is both chosen and determined, it is not a straightforward ‘coat’ one can put on, although a fixed image of identity can serve a political purpose. Therefore, the term identification is sometimes preferred because it implies a dynamic and shifting quality (Eriksen 1998: 23), and it implies agency. Identity and identification are closely connected with belonging. According to Bouman (2003: 20), ‘belonging is crucial to identity, but identity in turn is necessary for the reading of collectivities, for the identification of individuals as well as groups’. The concept of belonging is preferred by Probyn (1996) and Fortier (2000) to the concept of identity; because they feel belonging captures better the dynamic nature of being and becoming, which is in turn related to agency of individuals and groups. Actors create the circumstances for themselves to belong, like Probyn (1996: 19) states:

To capture more accurately the desires for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places or modes of attachment and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong and wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than positing identity as a stable state.

In the discussion of the notion of agency at the beginning of this chapter, the desire to belong and to become are made (im)possible by the structures that form part of people’s social worlds (van Dijk et al. 2007: 11-12). Ethnic identity can be part of people’s social worlds and give a feeling of belonging. Turning to the concept of ethnicity and ethnic identity, the fluidity of these concepts has to be emphasised again. The boundaries of ethnic groups are vague, and the delineation is usually only a conceptual one, enabling scientists to describe the social world. Like most descriptions of the concept of identity, the majority of discussions of ethnicity start with stating what the concept is not. Ethnicity is not equal to culture and it is different from a mere form of political organisation or social group, although it can partly overlap with these issues. Ethnicity is almost always linked to cultural differences and a feeling of common descent and history (Barth 1969; Eriksen 1993; Verkuyten 2005). According to Barth (1969), ethnicity only becomes important at the moment that a group starts to define itself in relation to an ‘other’. He argues that ethnic identity is formed only in the process of defining and maintaining ethnic boundaries. Thus, ethnic identity does not
exist as such, but becomes a distinguishing aspect when there is political, economic or other competition with other groups.

Eriksen (1998: 25) mentions that ethnicity is no longer seen as an innate quality of a group, but as an aspect of a relationship (original italics). As such, ethnicity can be seen as a construct, in which cultural customs are fabricated and manipulated. An issue raised by Verkuyten (2005: 77) is that a common history does not have to be ‘real’ to be true, and diminishing cultural differences with other ethnic groups do not necessarily imply a rapprochement with such groups. These processes have been described by Anderson (1983) as ‘imagined communities’ and by Hobsbawn and Ranger (1983) as ‘invention of tradition’ (cf. van Londen & de Ruijter 1999: 70). However, the fluidity of ethnic identity does not always imply an intentional construction by its members or by outsiders. This becomes especially visible in the context of migration, in which ethnic identities and boundaries are usually more shaped by the context than intentionally reconstructed.

In the discussion of ethnic identity, the influence of social scientists cannot be neglected. Cohen (1994) has argued that colonial practices and later social scientists have sometimes contributed to the creation of ethnic groups that did not exist as such before. The coming into being of these ethnic groups is a literal expression of the assertion that identity is partly formed by outsiders. The fact that social scientists are part and parcel of the construction of reality is something to be taken into account, especially in the field of study of ethnic identity. A sensitive description of insider perspectives on individual and group identities is essential, taking into account the political interests of different actors. Elites can easily use the findings of social research for their own political ends (Grinker & Steiner 2000: 2-8). As we will see later, this can also be applied to the Fulbe and their elites.

Van Londen and de Ruijter (1999: 75) stress the point that primordial or essentialist idiom is commonplace among political elites, in their striving for ethnic empowerment. This becomes especially relevant in pluralistic societies, in which many different groups exist. In Africa, the majority of societies are pluralistic, in which the colonial history and ongoing mobility of groups have played a large role (see Abbink & van Dokkum 2008). A modus vivendi is constantly being developed and reshaped, influenced by larger processes and political interests. Clashes between different groups often arise from unequal access to resources like land, labour or political power. In this, ethnicity does not necessarily have to be the main dividing agent; among others class, religion, age, gender can be equally decisive in this. However, there are all too many cases in which the presence of different ethnic groups in the same area has proven problematic, sometimes resulting in conflict.
Ethnicity is often deployed as a powerful tool, inciting one group of people against another group (Abbink & van Dokkum 2008). In pluralistic societies, questions of exclusion and belonging play a central role. Fed by frustrations about the lack of access to resources and political and economical restrictions, these situations can escalate rapidly. Migrant groups that have long been settled and have partly been assimilated can suddenly be declared ‘stranger’ and be the target of exclusion or discrimination (see also Abbink et al. 2008: 4). In some cases, like in Cameroon, ideologies of autochthony that include and exclude people are also prevalent. The ones who ‘belong’ claim political power on this ground, marginalizing the apparent ‘strangers’ who do not belong (Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2001; Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003; Konings 2008a).

One of the bodies that can be seen as emphasizing ethnic differences is social science itself. The study of the Fulbe as an ethnic group is an example of this (for a critical approach, see Breedveld & de Bruijn 1996; de Bruijn & van Dijk 1995, 1997). The aim of this thesis is not to underline the sameness of the Mbororo with other Fulbe groups, nor to display differences. However, as I do acknowledge that the Mbororo are part of the Fulbe, I will start with giving a short description of Fulbe identity and connect to existing literature about this group before narrowing it down to Mbororo identity.

**Fulbe identity**

Fulbe groups can be found in the entire Sahel area, from Senegal to as far as Sudan. Today, their number is estimated to be about 10 to 13 million people. As de Bruijn (2000: 16) indicates, the Fulbe are almost always perceived as an immigrant group, also if they have lived in an area for a long time. The perpetuating image of them as strangers reflects their way of living as a mobile group. Most authors share the idea that a common Fulbe identity exists, based on the Fulfulde language and often the religion of Islam, and originally being a pastoral, cattle-herding people (Diallo 1986; CERCP 1998). However, authors also agree that there are great differences between Fulbe groups (Azarya et al. 1999; de Bruijn & van Dijk 1997; Diallo & Schlee 2000). There is no such thing as ‘a Fulbe society’; each area has its specific history, its uses and particularities. Breedveld and de Bruijn (1996) argue that we should not lose out of sight the whole range of these diverse Fulbe groups. They argue that the diversity of the terminology used by the Fulbe in Central Mali to define their identity indicates a much more complex ethnic fabric than described in earlier studies.
Fulbe ethnic identity has always been a much debated issue. According to Breedveld and de Bruijn (1996) the ‘quest for Fulbe identity’ by many scholars can be traced back to the colonial context. In nineteenth century Europe, the discourse about race was the dominant framework for categorizing people on a scale of development, placing white man on top and black man at the bottom. The pastoralist Fulbe were situated outside of the black African context. Namely, groups that practiced cattle breeding could not be purely African, because breeding cattle was considered too advanced for an African people. In accordance to this, Western intellectuals tried to ‘de-Africanise’ all cattle raising people in Africa (Ibid.: 793). In this way, a special image of the Fulbe has been created. Even up to the present, the idea that the Fulbe are not genetically linked to African peoples is constantly coming back in the literature (see for instance CERCP 1998; Ezeomah 1987). Some educated Fulbe employ their status as a special group for political ends, and they address the state on behalf of the Fulbe group. An example is the successful application of the development organisation MBOSCUDA for considering the Mbororo as an ‘indigenous people’ (Pelican 2008). As many others, Fulbe use their ethnic identity to serve their political interests (Diallo et al. 2000: 237).

As discussed in the previous section, Fulbe identity is not only formed internally, but also by the way in which they are perceived by others. In the encounter and interaction with other groups, their identity is reinforced and altered, which partly explains the diversity of Fulbe groups. They take over aspects of surrounding groups, which makes them less different of their neighbours than has often been assumed (Amselle 1997). The interactions of the Fulbe with others are important to describe, as the Fulbe do not live in isolation of the rest of the world. Frantz (1981: 106) has captured this as follows:

[Interactions between Fulbe and non-Fulbe] have invariably been symbiotic, complementary, competitive and conflictive. Yet the frequency and strength of these types of relationships have differed over both space and time, as well as the substantive area of life concerned, e.g. production or exchange, government or religion.

Many accounts have described how pastoralist, cattle herding Fulbe live together with sedentarised farmers, either in a neutral or peaceful way or in conflict about land. Examples are given of symbiotic relations, like a farmer receiving the manure from the cattle as a fertiliser in exchange for allowing cattle of the Fulbe to graze on his fields. Important in relations with other groups are traditionally the women, selling milk to their sedentarised neighbouring people or in the marketplace (Dafinger & Pelican 2002; de Bruijn & van Dijk, 1997; Frantz 1981). On the other hand, changes like the rising population density, droughts
and political decisions have led to more tension between pastoralist Fulbe and sedentarised farmers, and many cases of land conflict have been described (Dafinger & Pelican 2002; de Bruijn & van Dijk 2003; Burnham 1996; Njeuma & Awosom 1988).

Islam is an aspect that was acquired through interaction, and has become an important identity marker for both sedentarised and pastoral Fulbe. It is believed that Islam was introduced by Arab traders via the trading routes that connected remote places with each other (Cruise O’Brien 1971: 19). As reasons for conversion, Frantz (1981) also mentions the sedentarisation of pastoralist Fulbe and the increased interaction with Hausa and ‘town’ Fulbe. Azarya (1996: 4) describes that most Fulbe took an active part in the jihads, for which they received a privileged position in the newly formed states. Dissimilar to this, there were smaller groups of Fulbe who did not have a big role in the processes of state-formation and the jihads, or even opposed the Fulbe who undertook a jihad. Azarya (Ibid.) says about the latter: ‘These groups continued to live in the margin, or completely beyond those states, in smaller, decentralised units, as in the past. These groups of marginalised Fulbe came to be called Mbororo in some areas and their differentiation from the rest of their kinsmen grew steadily.’ Throughout the decades that followed, these Fulbe groups that were called Mbororo developed as a distinct group from the sedentarised town Fulbe in present-day Cameroon, Nigeria and the Central African Republic. Mbororo identity was, and still is, strongly related to a mobile way of living and herding cattle (Burnham 1996). Towards the end of the colonial period, many Mbororo left their nomadic lives behind and settled due to political and economical reasons. Leaving behind a nomadic lifestyle does not only mean to stop moving. Cultural ways of relating to one’s environment are also subject to change and become less obvious. These cultural ways of relating can be linked to a discussion of the concept pulaaku, which constantly comes back in descriptions of Fulbe identity.

The over-emphasis on pulaaku

Pulaaku is usually explained as being the ‘moral code’ forming the marker of Fulbe identity. Pulaaku as moral code is used in the majority of publications that describe the main characteristics of the Fulbe. The ‘code’ is said to include resignation, intelligence, bravery and, above all, reservation or retention, and is proposed as one of the core elements of Fulbe society (Azarya et al. 1999). Pulaaku is sometimes shortly translated as ‘the way of being a Pullo’ (singular of Fulbe), ‘Fulbe-ness’ or ‘Fulbe culture’ (Bierschenk 1992; Dupire 1970). Some add that it is a ‘rigid code’ (Vereecke 1993) or an ‘obligatory code of conduct’ (Zubko
1993). De Bruijn and van Dijk (1995: 199-201) argue that the concept *pulaaku* should not be seen as a fixed entity. Similarly, Bierschenk (1992), Boesen (1999) and Breedveld and de Bruijn (1996) warn against a rigid, one-dimensional definition of *pulaaku* that does not leave space for regional and individual differences. Some authors have rejected the importance of the term *pulaaku* for the Fulbe group they researched (such as Adriansen 2003: 17), others have rejected the definition of *pulaaku* as moral code (such as Breedveld & de Bruijn 1996). The latter have found that Fulbe groups in Central Mali define *pulaaku* only as ‘community of Fulbe’ or ‘society of Fulbe’. They underline that these groups do have a moral code of conduct, of which three core elements are *ndimu* (noble), *yaage* (shame, retention) and *juulde* (pray, pity), but that this is not referred to by the term *pulaaku* (Ibid.: 791). What is emphasised by de Bruijn and van Dijk (1995) is that the heterogeneity of the Fulbe is overlooked when searching too much for a common Fulbe identity. Referring to Botte and Schmitz (1994, cited in de Bruijn & van Dijk 1995: 201) they suggest it might be:

... more fruitful to examine all the differences between Fulbe groups all over West Africa, and between social groups within Fulbe society, as they have developed recently and as they had already existed for a long time, than to search for their common identity.

Following this line of thought, let us consider some publications about Mbororo groups in Cameroon. Burnham’s description of *pulaaku* is often mentioned; he sees *pulaaku* as ‘an ideology of racial and cultural distinctiveness and superiority that ranks the Fulbe above all other ethnic groups’, playing a role in the process of ‘Fulbeisation’ in Northern Cameroon (1996: 106). Davis (1995) and Duni et al. (2005) who describe the Mbororo in the Bamenda Grassfields, have also taken over the meaning of ‘moral code of conduct’ for *pulaaku*. Ndudi Umaru, a Mbororo in Northern Cameroon, has described the importance of *pulaaku* as moral code in his life and in the life cycle of the Mbororo groups he is familiar with (Bocquené 2001). Pelican (2006), who has done research with Mbororo groups in the Bamenda Grassfields, emphasises that *pulaaku* is a relative, contextual, and dynamic concept despite her informants’ attitudes to ‘essentialise’ it. While keeping in mind that *pulaaku* is not as static as some make it appear, Pelican (2006: 199) describes the use of the concept in Cameroon as denoting ‘a complex of social values - such as modesty, self-control, common sense, courage - that are supposed to guide public interaction between Fulbe’. This converges with the idea of the ‘moral code’ that is described above.

What I have found in Bamenda is that *pulaaku* is not the only term Mbororo in Bamenda use when talking about their behavioural values or ‘moral code’. They commonly use *hakkilo*
(common-sense or intelligence), munyal (patience or modesty) and semenidum (restraint or shame) in conversations about someone’s behaviour. Next to these terms, the Arabic term barka is sometimes mentioned, which can be translated as being a good person and reflects the Islamic inclination of the Mbororo. When asked to explain about pulaku, the most common description is: “someone offers you food, you are hungry and you want to eat, but you refuse it”. When asked whether pulaku is only about food, people explain it is broader. Refusing food serves as an example of wanting something and not showing it, corresponding to the modesty and self-control described by Pelican (2006: 1999). Amongst others, Regis (2003: 21-39) underlines the importance of being in control of one’s feelings. To eat without holding back can be seen as to surrender oneself to the feeling of hunger, which can be seen as a weakness. The public display of weakness will lead to a feeling of shame, which is – at least theoretically – to be avoided in all circumstances. In conversations about pulaku with informants of diverse ages, several verbs were used in combination with the term pulaku; to have, to do and to make. Mbororo in the Bamenda Grassfields who are ‘making pulaku’ are also described by Davis (1995) and Pelican (2006).

Although the Mbororo in Bamenda are familiar with the term pulaku and indicate that it is typical to them when asked about it, they do not seem to consider the term pulaku as an overarching umbrella for the other terms mentioned above. However, the definitions given to me do not necessarily exclude other definitions. The fact that people do not use the term on a daily basis does not mean it does not bear any importance. It has become clear that defining pulaku as the moral code that defines Fulbe identity does not do justice to the formation of Fulbe identities throughout different places and times. In chapter seven, I will return to a local description of ideas that different Mbororo generations in Bamenda have about pulaku. The extent to which pulaku is seen as part of Mbororo identity in Bamenda is defined by the value that individual Mbororo attach to pulaku. However, at the same time, the value that individual Mbororo attach to pulaku is prescribed by the importance that is attributed to pulaku by the larger Mbororo community in the Bamenda Grassfields. This brings us back to the debate of structure and agency, which with we started this chapter.

Conclusions: Striking out upon new paths

As more Mbororo settle in the city and have increasing interaction with non-Fulbe in their personal and professional life, it becomes increasingly common for individuals to position themselves on other grounds, striking out upon new paths. This counts especially for the
younger generations, of whom many were born in the city and do not have vivid memories of a life with cattle. For the older generations, this can be valued as an undesirable ‘breach with the past’, but their children can also be seen as ‘cultural brokers’ who facilitate the integration of their parents in the sedentarised city life. As we have seen in the section on migrant families, in this process there are large individual differences of coping with the new situation, varying from family to family. This is not specific for Fulbe, but is part of the process of settlement in a new place.

In this thesis, the processes of adaptation and transformation of the Mbororo in Bamenda are discussed, in which the use and importance of identity markers like *pulaaku*, Islam and cattle play a role. As has been discussed, the concept of *pulaaku* is being used in different ways by different groups. *Pulaaku*, sometimes all too easily considered to be at the heart of the identity of several millions of Fulbe in Africa, should be carefully considered at the local level. It remains to be seen in which directions Fulbe identities will change over time. Especially in this era of increasing interconnectedness, it becomes all the more important for people to emphasise their identity as being distinct from others.

As will be discussed in the following chapter, Cameroonian politics emphasise ethnic differences feeding into a discourse of exclusion and belonging. Although groups might not differ so much from each other, political influences direct people into different categories, in which they possibly grow into opposing positions. Simultaneously, or perhaps because of the existence of these divisive factors, it becomes more important to stress one’s sameness with others, who can be the same or different others than in the past. Moreover, it can be increasingly difficult to distinguish from others, as it is no longer obvious who the ‘others’ are. In the last decades the scale and intensity of interaction have increased rapidly due to globalisation processes. It could be argued that these processes have ‘multiplied’ the non-Fulbe with whom the Fulbe can interact, as well as their possibilities of interaction, for instance through the internet. This scaling-up does not only bring more insecurity as to whom to relate to, but also new opportunities for sharing ideas and experiences with different people and finding a common ground. After all, Fulbe people are not only different from other Cameroonians, Africans or world citizens, they are also the same.
3. Moving into Bamenda: a short social and political history

From around 1919 onwards, several groups of Mbororo moved into the Bamenda Grassfields with their herds. Principally coming from Nigeria and Northern Cameroon, they settled with the support of the British colonial administration, for which cattle taxes were a good source of income. The arrival of these substantial numbers of pastoralist Mbororo led to tensions between them and the agricultural ‘native’ or ‘autochthonous’ Grassfielders (Njeuma & Awasom 1988). Nowadays, approximately 100,000 Mbororo are living in the Bamenda Grassfields, making up five to ten percent of the population (One World Foundation 2007; Survival International 2007). Since their arrival up to the present, the Mbororo in and around the city of Bamenda are labelled as relative strangers by the Grassfielders. The ‘native farmer’ versus ‘alien pastoralist’ dichotomy no longer holds in the cities and even in the countryside there are Grassfielders with cattle and Mbororo cultivating land, but the feeling that the Mbororo are different remains on both sides (Pelican 2006).

In this chapter, I will provide an oversight of the social and political situation of the Bamenda Grassfields in a historical perspective. First, I will depict the constellations of different groups in the Bamenda Grassfields to get an insight in the relations that existed in the area before the Mbororo arrived. Secondly, the arrival of Mbororo groups will be discussed, illustrated with the example of Ardo Jaja, the father of Isufu, one of my key informants. I will then turn to a description of the creation of the city of Bamenda and the formation of the quarters Old Town and Ntambang, the two quarters in which the greater part of the fieldwork took place. Finally I will shortly discuss the national political context, because it has an influence on relations in Bamenda. This will be continued in the following chapter, in which the focus will not be on national politics, but on the local power relations. The existing relations in the Bamenda Grassfields have been shaped by the history of the area, in which different groups of people exerted their power at different moments, to which we will now turn.

Short history of the different groups in the Grassfields

When the Mbororo moved into the Bamenda Grassfields in the twentieth century, they met different groups of people. Amongst others, detailed historical descriptions are given by Ardener et al. (1960), Chilver (1961), Warnier (1985) and in contributions to Fowler and
Zeitlin (1996). Kaberry (1952) made a distinction into five ethnic groups; the Tikar, the Widekum, the Mbembe, the Bali and the Aghem. Society was partly organised in *Fondoms* (kingdoms), some more powerful than others. In the centre of the Grassfields, there were four powerful Fondoms; Bafut, Bali, Mankon and Nkwen. The differences between these Fondoms are described by Warnier (1985). The Bali reportedly arrived in the Grassfields around 1855-1860, the Mankon some three centuries before them. By the time of the German arrival, the Fondom of Nkwen was already on the decline; half of the Nkwen population had moved to establish a new Fondom called Mendankwe (Ibid.: 207). In the beginning of the twentieth century, Mankon, Nkwen and Mendankwe would be merged together into the present-day city of Bamenda. In the larger region there were also powerful Fondoms like Kom and Nso’. Next to the ones mentioned, there were at least a dozen larger and smaller Fondoms. The larger Fondoms were more hierarchically organised, with the *Fon* (king) and his notables on top, while the smaller Fondoms were more egalitarian (Warnier 1985: 182-206). The palace of powerful Fondoms included a large women’s section, where all the wives and children of the Fon resided. Warnier describes that these centres of power existed by the grace of a strong hierarchy in which notables had the ability to mobilise women and young men for the production of crops and goods. The most powerful centres were connected to other centres with which they exchanged goods and people, in long-distance trade as well as with nearby Fondoms. The peripheries, on the contrary, were more egalitarian, political power was more dispersed and they were connected mostly through the centres (Ibid.: 297).

The Fondoms in the Bamenda Grassfields were not territorial units, until the colonial administrators gave them geographical boundaries. They were political constellations; their power was depending upon the amount of people who were controlled by the Fon. This converges with Guyer’s concept of wealth-in-people. Guyer (1995: 84) states that ‘wealth embodied in rights in people lies close to the centre of African economic and social history over the past five hundred years: in the slave trades on the one hand and in political and kinship history on the other’. The area of the Bamenda Grassfields is historically an area in which slave raids were common. From the end of the eighteenth century into the nineteenth century, Tchamba warriors entered into the Grassfields where they captured slaves, massacred others and looted their villages. From 1850 onwards, Fulbe groups undertook similar slave raids in the Grassfields. The Bamoun also undertook slave raids, in which they submitted entire villages to their power. A non-violent way was the selling of a family member or a village thief as a slave, which was mostly done in secret. The people captured
as slaves were ‘internally’ traded or entered into the networks of long-distance trade (See for an extensive description Warnier 1985: 127-139).

![Map 2. Bamenda and surroundings (in Bradt Guide Cameroon 2008: 156)](image)

Not only slaves were traded, but also ivory, kola nuts, food crops and other items. In the nineteenth century, several European powers competed for the last unoccupied and unexplored territories in the interior parts of the African continent and sent expeditions to explore and consolidate trading positions. One of the first European expeditions into the Bamenda Grassfields was led by the German explorer Eugen Zintgraff in 1889. In the first decennium of the twentieth century, the Germans had occupied some strategic military positions in order to consolidate their rule. The Germans had established a plantation economy at the coast, for which many workers had to be recruited. The Grassfields served as a basin of the workforce of the plantations; especially women and young unmarried men were fetched to go to the coast. Historically, women and young men have been the main workforce in the Fondoms of the Grassfields. Thus, according to Konings (2008a), although there was an increase in scale, hierarchies remained more or less unchallenged. When the
Germans were defeated in the First World War, the German colonial possessions in Africa were divided between the French and the British forces, who would establish control under the League of Nations’ mandate system. The Bamenda Grassfields became under British control. The Mbororo are said to have been encouraged to move from more Northern and Western areas to the Grassfields by the British colonial adminstration, for which the cattle taxes were a good source of income (Njeuma & Awasom 1988).

As has been touched upon in the previous chapter, the Mbororo and the larger Fulbe group generally adhere to Islam. The majority of the groups living in the Grassfields adhere to both local religions and Christianity, the latter having been introduced by European missionaries (see Kaberry 1952: 79; Mbuy 1994). The Mbororo were not the first Muslims who entered into the area to stay; Hausa traders had come and settled before them. The present-day denominator ‘Hausa’ includes groups of descendants of Hausa traders, sedentary ‘town’ Fulbe from Nigeria and Northern Cameroon and local Grassfields converts (Pelican 2008: 542). Although I am aware of the complexities of the different groups living in the Bamenda Grassfields, I will refer to these different groups either as Hausa, Grassfielders or Mbororo. I am aware of the fact that, for instance, someone from Mankon can feel he belongs to a different group than someone from Wum or Ndop.2 In an attempt to do justice to these differences, I will include background information about the people I describe whenever it is possible. However, as the subject of this thesis is the Mbororo population, I will sometimes inevitably lump individuals together into the categories Hausa and Grassfielders.

**Mbororo moving into the Grassfields**

Until the period of British rule, no large groups of Mbororo had moved into the Grassfields. The British ‘pacification’ of the Sokoto area in 1903 had resulted in the movement of several Fulbe groups towards better pastures in the direction of the Jos Plateau, Bauchi, Southern Adamawa and Muri (Ezeomah 1983: 3). From there, some moved on to the Bamenda Grassfields. Some Mbororo groups that came into the Grassfields only stayed for a few years, and moved eastwards to the east-central Adamawa Plateau and the Central African Republic (Franz 1981: 102). The first group of Mbororo settled in Sabga, about 20 kilometres northeast of Bamenda, persuaded by presence of a salt spring and the abundance of grass. Mbororo

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2 For descriptions of these differences please refer to the authors mentioned in this paragraph; Ardener et al. (1960), Chilver (1961), Fowler and Zeitlin (1996), Kaberry (1952), Mbuy (1994), Pelican (2008) and Warnier (1985).
lineage groups are headed by a leader called Ardo. Like in the Northern region, the chief of Sabga is called Lamido, who is sometimes considered as being of higher status than an Ardo (see Loftsdóttir 2001: 4; Burnham 1996). Up to today, the settlement is influential in the Mbororo community in the Grassfields (Pelican 2008). Many families in Bamenda, especially in the quarter Ntambang that will be discussed below, have kinship ties with families in Sabga.

The groups of Mbororo that moved into the Grassfields can roughly be divided into two different groups. In the literature, these two groups are called Jafun and Aku (Burnham 1996; Pelican 2008). The majority of the Mbororo in Sabga are Jafun. It is commonly accepted that the Jafun have come to the Grassfields from the Adamawa plateau in the first decades of the twentieth century. The Aku started to arrive between the 1940s and 1950s, mainly from the Jos plateau in Nigeria and settled towards the northern borders of the North West Region (Pelican 2008). For some, like for Isufu, their physical appearance reveals their descent; some Aku are somewhat lighter in complexion and more slender than some Jafun. The most apparent difference is their cattle; generally, the Mbororo have red cattle, while the Aku have white cattle (Burnham 1996: 30; Njeuma & Awasom 1988; Pelican 2008). Jafun and Aku are etic or outsider denominations of these groups; my Jafun informants referred to themselves as Mbororo and the people who were called Aku by others preferred to talk about themselves as Fulbe instead of Mbororo or Aku. Some of them felt that Aku was somewhat of a derogatory term, but they were not seriously bothered by it. Some of my Aku informants did feel they were different from the (Jafun) Mbororo, which is the reason that I have chosen to refer to them as Aku in this thesis, although many of them refer to themselves as Fulbe. The denominator Mbororo in this thesis includes the Jafun and the Aku if no other explicit reference is made. The term Fulbe is an inclusive overarching category in which the Jafun and Aku Mbororo groups also fit. As has been said above, the Aku moved into Cameroon in the middle of the twentieth century, of whom many came directly from Nigeria. Isufu’s father, Ardo Jaja (see photograph 2) has come with one of these movements. His elite status is not shared by all Aku, but apart from his wealth, his trajectory and that of some of his children can be seen as exemplary:

Ardo Jaja came to Esu about fifty years ago. He is presently the Ardo (Fulbe chief) in Esu. He was born in 1933, in a village on the Jos Plateau, Nigeria, in the lineage of the Sisilbe. In 1958, he decided to leave the Jos Plateau. As a reason he gives that there was not enough grass for his cattle there. Many family members who, according to him, preferred farming, stayed in Nigeria, in Bauchi and Kaduna state. His family was one of about hundred families who left
Jos with their cattle, looking for a better place. He trekked with three wives, two children and their cattle from Jos through Makoli, Boko and Kashimbila to Esu in three months time. The day after they arrived in Esu, his third wife gave birth to her first child. When one of his three wives passed away, he married two new wives. Presently, he has two wives remaining. He has procreated twenty sons and twenty daughters, of whom four girls have passed away. His thirty-six children have given him about two hundred grandchildren. According to one of his sons, Ardo Jaja was one of the first Mbororo in the area who has sent all his children to school. One of his sons who got his masters degree has travelled to the United States, another is working at a ministry in Yaoundé. Some others are involved in the cattle trade and cattle rearing, yet others try their luck in the city. Isufu rents a room in the quarter Old Town in Bamenda, from where he has tried to find employment.3

The Mbororo who settled in the Grassfields with their cattle were most of the time welcomed by Fons, ‘as long as they paid tribute and acknowledged their hosts’ territorial and political primacy’ (Pelican 2008: 544). The Grassfielders, who provided in their subsistence mainly by farming, were not always as welcoming as their leaders. From time to time, the destruction of crops by the cattle of the Mbororo has led to tension and conflicts between the Mbororo and the Grassfielders. The colonial administration tried to impose rules and regulations considering grazing and farming areas, but these were not always successfully administered or implemented (Chilver 1988; Njeuma & Awasom 1988). The population pressure, the putting into crop production of grazing land and other local politics made it less viable for

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3 Interview with Ardo Jaja, 27 December 2008.
Mbororo to herd their cattle. With their transition to a more sedentary life, the Mbororo started to combine cattle rearing with small-scale subsistence agriculture. After Cameroon’s independence in 1960, the government was more geared towards settlement of the Mbororo, who were given official permission to cultivate crops next to their homesteads in 1962 (Frantz 1981: 102-103). It was after independence that the Mbororo were given Cameroonian citizenship, and after a constitutional change in 1972 they were officially recognised as stakeholders in pastoral matters (Boutrais 1995/6: 182-185). The second half of the twentieth century is described by Pelican (2008: 545) as follows:

Many Mbororo aimed at improving their living conditions by investing in consumer goods and Islamic education. […] While their family sizes continuously increased, the rate of herd growth stagnated due to the effects of overgrazing. In addition, farmer-herder conflicts became exacerbated, both as a result of farmer’s expansion into grazing zones and the Mbororo’s negligence in the adequate control of their cattle herds.

These and other factors made it attractive to take up a life in the city for Mbororo and Grassfielders alike. They moved to Bamenda, Douala, Yaoundé and other big cities abroad, for a longer or shorter period. Nowadays, Mbororo families can be found in different quarters of Bamenda. Founded by the Hausa, the quarter Old Town in the centre of Bamenda is a viable place for Mbororo to start life in the city. It is the quarter with the biggest Muslim population, and has two of the three large mosques of Bamenda. In this quarter, a part of the fieldwork for this project took place. A description of Old Town will precede a short historical description of Bamenda; as we will see, the formation of the quarter can be considered as the starting point of the city.

**Old Town, the centre of the colonial creation Bamenda**

The junction on Savannah Street near the police station, generally called the *carrefour*, is one of the hot spots of Old Town. Motorcycle drivers gather at the junction to wait for customers to transport and there are ‘call boxes’ where customers can make a phone call or buy credit for their phone (see photograph 3). Women sell fruit and candies in their stalls, some sell sugar canes from a bucket standing on the pavement. A young man sitting under an umbrella sells cigarettes and candies that are displayed on a wooden showcase. Next to a small store owned by a Mbororo who sells bread, matchboxes, soap and other things, men sell small pieces of grilled meat called ‘soya’. Across the road there are butchers cutting meat
in smaller pieces, and there are sewing workshops where they also sell clothes from Dubai. There are off-licenses where people can drink corn beer, others where there is palm wine and yet others with beer and soft drinks. The small ‘restaurants’ are made up of some benches and tables, usually secluded from the street with a curtain or rag. Men make tea with spaghetti-tuna-omelettes on the spot, women usually sell food they have prepared at home before coming to their selling spots.

Old Town is nowadays inhabited by Hausa, Grassfielders from surrounding areas like Oku, Meta and Awing, and Mbororo. It is considered a ‘rough’ quarter; young Mbororo and Hausa men are said to move around with knives, not afraid of using them (see also van den Berg 1993; Fokwang 2008). Recently, it was rumoured that a girl was assaulted and robbed of her phone in the bushes near a small stream in the quarter. In other parts of the city, people often say that Old Town is an unsafe quarter. However, in Old Town people are of opinion that the quarter of Ntarinkon is full of thieves, and in Ntarinkon the same is said for the quarter of Small Mankon. Rumours about assaults are popular and circulate throughout the city. However, Old Town is more often than other quarters the focus of these negative stories. Van den Berg (1993: 31) writes about Old Town being ‘stigmatised as a breeding place for crime’. In his dissertation about youth associations in Old Town, Fokwang (2008) also mentions the negative image that exists about youth in Old Town, which corresponds to my findings. It is generally said that prostitutes and thieves can be found in Old Town, although people agree that most prostitution takes place around the Nkwen park and
market. In 1986, Tomikawa described the existence of girls living alone in rented rooms in Old Town who were considered prostitutes (1986: 281). The Mbororo girls who live alone in rented rooms nowadays are similarly considered prostitutes. This says as much about the girls as about prevalent ideas in the society about the inappropriateness of unmarried women living on their own.

The city of Bamenda started with the creation of Old Town, nowadays a quarter of Mankon, the biggest of the three municipalities of Bamenda. The town is a colonial creation on the territory of three peoples; Mankon, Nkwen and Mendankwe (van den Berg 1993: 11), of which Mankon is the biggest in land and in population. The city started to grow when the Germans set up a military station in the territory of Mendankwe in 1902. It is reported that some of the mobile Hausa traders from Nigeria settled around the same time close to the German station (Nkwi & Warnier 1982). The settlement of these groups attracted more people. When the Germans were forced out of Cameroon as a result of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, the British occupied the station and sent the Hausa away. The Hausa went down into the valley and settled below the cliffs in Mankon territory, which became the core of modern Bamenda. Their leader, the Sarki, was given the land that had been administrated by the Fon of Mankon by the British crown in 1922. This new settlement was known as Hausa village or Abakwa, meaning marketplace in Hausa. The settlement of the Hausa traders in Bamenda invited other people to settle near to them for more efficient business. There was a flourishing market that attracted many people from all corners. Gradually, the town expanded due to the settlement of people from Bali, Meta, Wum, Oku, Kom and other chiefdoms from the Grassfields (van den Berg 1993: 13-31; Tomikawa 1986: 288-291).

Bamenda was the only city in the North West until the 1970s, and it is still the fastest growing and largest city in the region (Gwan 1982, cited in van den Berg 1993: 11). Today, estimates of the population of Bamenda vary between 280,000 and 500,000, which is not only due to a lack of reliable data but also to different interpretations of the town’s borders. The centre of Bamenda is densely populated and ever-expanding. New compounds are industriously constructed everywhere alongside the exit roads, making it unclear where the city ends. Stretches of forested or cultivated land seem to indicate that the border of the urban area is near, but after a bend in the road or at a junction large clusters of compounds turn up. Although the vast area on which compounds are constructed within a radius of 15 kilometres around Bamenda can hardly be called urban, it is neither rural. The borders

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4 This is challenged by a group of Hausa in Old Town who claim that this has historically been Mendankwe territory and the Fon of Mankon has incorporated the quarter only recently into Mankon. They strive for the recognition of a fourth municipality, Abakwa, so the Hausa interests will be better represented in local politics.
between the two are completely blurred in this area; even in the centre of Bamenda, people cultivate crops on small or bigger plots. One of the offshoots of Bamenda is a cluster of compounds on a hill at almost ten kilometres outside of the city centre, called ‘Ntambang’, inhabited by Mbororo.

**Ntambang**

“What would you say, is Ntambang a quarter or a village?” Madiya looks at me while we are walking downhill on the unpaved road leading to the main road to Bamenda. I answer I am not sure, and she continues with a smile: “Me too I honestly do not know. It is not really part of the city, but it is also not a real village. But what is it, if it is neither?”

In Ntambang, overlooking the undulating area, one can see the centre of Bamenda in the distance. From the city centre, most Mbororo take a shared taxi to the junction and either take a fifteen-minute walk or take a motorcycle that serves as taxi uphill to Ntambang. The settlement is of a relatively young age. About half a century ago, a Mbororo man came to the area with his family and his cattle. The Fon of Nkwen agreed to allocate land to him where he could graze his cattle and settle with his family. When the man passed away, his four sons had built their compounds in the area, as well as a mallam (a Koranic teacher) who was invited by the man to teach his children.

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5 Conversation with Madiya, 10 October 2008.
The sons, who are still living in Ntambang, decided they would invite other Mbororo to buy a plot and construct their houses on the land. The first newcomer started building his compound in 1991. Nowadays, Ntambang consists of forty-two compounds, of which forty are owned and inhabited by Mbororo. There is one compound of a Christian Grassfielder and one of a Hausa woman married to a converted Muslim Grassfielder. Behind a line of eucalyptus trees that delineates the Ntambang area, some compounds of Grassfielders can be distinguished. Their living spaces are clearly separated, but some Grassfielders and Mbororo in the area do interact with each other on a daily basis.

Ntambang is quite a popular quarter among Mbororo, and some of my informants in Old Town expressed their wish to build a compound in Ntambang one day. The Mbororo who live in Ntambang are a specific group of Mbororo. The remark of a young Mbororo man who does not live there is telling: “Oh Ntambang, it is business people who stay there”. Many Mbororo men in Bamenda have become bus drivers for inter-city bus agencies, others have gone into the cattle business or found other work or a combination of odd jobs. Due to these and other developments, a Mbororo middle class has come into existence, of whom a great part has settled in Ntambang. A young man living in Ntambang gives as reasons for the popularity of his quarter: the diminishing of cattle and the wish to share ideas related to this, the ‘pressure of non-Mbororo’, and ‘they always like to invite their brothers’.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, population pressure has sometimes resulted in conflicts about land between different groups of people. An example of a conflict between Mbororo graziers and a wealthy business man called Alhaji Baba Danpullo will be elaborated upon in the next chapter, because one of the results of this conflict is the unification of Mbororo, which can be noted in Ntambang. The development association MBOSCUDA contributes a lot to this unification, and in Ntambang there is a lot of support for MBOSCUDA, to which we will come back in the next chapter. MBOSCUDA’s support is quite present in the quarter; for instance, they have constructed a shop and a community centre, where meetings can be held. Among others, female adult literacy classes are given in the community centre each Sunday. The efforts of one of the employees of MBOSCUDA who lives in Ntambang have been of great help to the quarter in getting connected to the electricity and water networks. Ntambang can be seen as a conglomeration of like-minded Mbororo, who have a clear idea about what it means to be a Mbororo, in which cattle, Islam and education have a clear position.

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6 Conversation with Usmanu, 22 January 2009.
7 Conversation with Ibrahim, 22 September 2008.
Before turning to an empirical description of Mbororo life in Bamenda, the political context needs to be considered. The subject of the next chapter is the impact of local politics on the Mbororo community, which cannot be understood without describing the impact of national politics on the Bamenda Grassfields and vice versa, which will form the last section of this chapter.

The Bamenda Grassfields in the national political system

Since independence, the Bamenda Grassfields have been one of the sources of political dissidence, not in the least because its capital Bamenda is the seat of the main opposition party. When the Francophone part of present-day Cameroon achieved independence from France, the population in the Anglophone South West and North West regions chose in a referendum to join the Francophone part instead of Nigeria. Present-day Cameroon therefore consists of eight Francophone regions and two Anglophone regions. The Anglophones have felt excluded by the Francophone political elite, which has sometimes been referred to as ‘the Anglophone problem’. Some Anglophones call for separation, but most want a just political system in which the interests of the Anglophone minority are properly and equitably served. According to Konings and Nyamnjoh (2003: 2), ‘Anglophone Cameroon is at the forefront of ethno-regional protests and demands for the re-arrangement of state-power’.

The first president who came to power after independence was the Northerner Ahmadou Ahijo, who ruled until 1982 when he allowed his Prime Minister Paul Biya to succeed him. Some three years after he took office, Biya abolished the multi-party system. Growing discontent with the political and economical situation in the country resulted in demonstrations and riots throughout the country in the early 1990s. As the main opposition party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF), has its base in Bamenda, there were particularly fierce protests in this city. Among other forms of protest, the ‘Operation Ghost Town’, in which the infrastructure of the cities was greatly disrupted, contributed to the return of multi-party democracy in 1992. It is widely believed that the ruling party of Paul Biya, the CPDM, manipulated the results of the elections in 1996, in which SDF otherwise would have won. Because the SDF, led by John Fru Ndi, is based in the capital of the Anglophone North West Region, the party has sometimes been accused of only wanting to serve Anglophone interests. However, in the build-up to the elections of 1996, the SDF was popular in large parts of the country. Recently, the SDF has been having internal problems and, like the
ruling CPDM, its leaders have been accused of embezzlement and misappropriation of funding (see Konings 2008b; Manyong 2008). In anticipation of the elections in 2011, president Biya has indicated several times that he does not intend to cede power. Large factions of the Cameroonian population have lost the confidence that their vote matters. However, as the widespread protests of February 2008 marked, the dissatisfaction of the population has not disappeared and can sometimes erupt.

In February 2008, the targets of the protesters were mainly representations of state power, but the dissatisfaction of the population can in other cases be directed towards other ethnic groups. This is fuelled by the government, who has an interest in dividing the Cameroonian population in order to stay in power (see Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2001; Konings 2008b). The politics of ethnic segregation, already emphasised by the French colonial administration, has continued after independence (Burnham 1975). Ethnic divisions are encouraged by the political elite, because ‘strangers’, like the Bamileke in Yaoundé or Grassfielders in the South West, are generally imagined to vote for the opposition (Geschiere & Gugler 1998; Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2001). Notions of autochthony and belonging have become powerful in Cameroonian everyday life. Konings (2008b) shows how the political elite have managed to successfully feed feelings of ethnic and of regional divisions. The two Anglophone regions have quite successfully been divided by a discourse of belonging, blaming the ‘strangers’ for problems. In the same way, alliances between Anglophone and Francophone groups have been fuelled with mistrust. People fearing they have become a minority in their own area are sensitive for a political discourse about ethnicity, in which the ‘stranger’ is directed towards a marginal position. As Geschiere and Nyamnjoh (2001: 16) and Geschiere (2009) have emphasised, this is not only the case in Cameroon or Africa, but also in larger parts of the world. They link the affirmation of cultural differences and belonging to the increasing intensity of global flows. As discussed in the previous chapter, the feeling of loss that counts for migrants might be extended to local populations in this era of increasing interconnectedness. Where people are opening up and creating new alliances, there are also people who withdraw into their own community. National and local political elites can opt for an inclusive discourse to secure a society in which people peacefully live together, or for a discourse of exclusion and autochthony, which usually serves their own interests more than that of the population.

So far, it seems clear that Cameroonian leaders are not in power to serve the interests of their population, illustrated by statements of president Biya that he will remain in power after 2011, no matter how. Cameroon can be considered a neo-patrimonial state, in which
leaders maintain authority through personal patronage and not through law or ideology. The main aim of these leaders is to acquire more wealth and enhance their status, resulting in the public interest being more and more replaced by their own interest (Bratton & van de Walle 1994: 458). An integral feature of the Cameroonian state is corruption, including bribery, extortion, misappropriation of public resources and the exploitation of socio-political networks, which Bayart (1993) has called ‘politics of the belly’. As is argued by GERDDES (1999: 31) corruption in Cameroon ‘has become a way of life, a social act that has become so much a part of them [Cameroonian] that they perform it spontaneously’. According to Pelican (2006: 403), this kind of corruption, embedded in the legal framework, provides alternatives to official administrative and legal procedures. It greatly undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of legal procedures. Wealthy persons dispose of enough financial and political power to take these alternative routes. In the following chapter, we will take a closer look at the wealthy businessman Alhaji Baba Danpullo, who is renowned for taking unconventional routes to increase his wealth.

Conclusions

In this chapter, the historical roots of the persisting feelings of difference between the Mbororo and other groups have been described. It has become clear that these people belong to groups that are different in the way they sustain themselves, their livelihood, their religion, their housing, their eating patterns and their dressing, to name a few important ones. Where the previous chapter has been dealing with Fulbe ethnic identity, this chapter has linked up with this in describing the interaction of different groups, and the embedding of a specific group of Fulbe – the Mbororo – into the Grassfields society. I have given a description of the history of several groups in the Grassfields area, characterised by the existence of Fondoms and serving as a resource of slaves and later as workforce for the German-led plantation economy. I have chosen to not only focus on the trajectory of the Mbororo into the Grassfields, in order to emphasise that they came into an area in which relationships between different social and ethnic groups already existed.

The creation of the city of Bamenda has been discussed and the quarters in which the largest part of the fieldwork for this project took place have been introduced; Old Town and Ntambang. Lastly, Bamenda and the Grassfields have been put in the larger perspective of the Cameroonian political system. Inclusion and exclusion exist at different levels; the Mbororo are sometimes regarded as strangers by Grassfielders, the Grassfields population is
regarded as being ‘different’ in national politics. The national political context has provided a context in which certain parties have been able to become powerful at the local level, which influences Mbororo relations. Giving a wider perspective on inclusion and exclusion in the Grassfields and in Cameroon, this chapter has formed the basis for the analysis of the local forces playing a role in the lives of Mbororo in Bamenda, which is the subject of the next chapter.
4. Relating to local powers: MBOSCUDA and Danpullo

Everyone says Alhaji is bad, he is the devil himself. For me, Alhaji Baba is the fifth most important person in my life, after God, my parents, brothers and sisters. […] God will not show light to the people who say bad things about Alhaji Baba, God will punish people who hate Alhaji Baba.⁸

From the tone of her voice, most of the time it seems as if Fatou is angry; she talks with a very loud voice. When talking about the perceived wrongdoings of Alhaji Baba Danpullo, she truly gets angry. Fatou is a thirty-two year old widow with a daughter and a son. She lives with her daughter in Ntambang, and she claims her neighbours dislike her a lot because she is on Danpullo’s side and they are on MBOSCUDA’s side. Whether her statements are true or not, since Fatou is so outspoken, it is worth analysing what she has said with respect to this situation, which I will do later in this chapter. This chapter deals with two internationally acting forces that have come into being at the local level.

One of these forces is Alhaji Baba Danpullo, who is among the richest men in the North West Region, owning thousands of cattle and Cameroon’s largest tea estates, and business enterprises in Cameroon and South Africa. He has been able to accumulate wealth in legal and illegal ways, sometimes supported by state institutions. Danpullo is on the one hand judged as a destructive force, but on the other hand he is praised for bringing economic development and being the biggest employer in the North West Region. Hickey (Ibid.) brings the opposition to disruptive activities of Danpullo in connection with the foundation of the second force that will be described in this chapter, the ‘Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association’ (MBOSCUDA). The association was founded in 1992 to ‘protect the rights and cultural identity of the Mbororo’. MBOSCUDA (2008) aims to empower the Mbororo to achieve development on their terms and to secure their rights. As Pelican (2008) has argued, the national politics of autochthony and belonging that was discussed in the previous chapter, has created the space for MBOSCUDA to come into being. These local expressions of power are of influence to the Mbororo in their daily lives. In this chapter, we will look into the ways in which this influence is experienced and expressed by individual Mbororo, because it provides an insight into the larger, more structural issues with which common Mbororo in the Bamenda Grassfields have to deal.

⁸ Interview with Fatou, 20 December 2008.
I will start with describing the activities of MBOSCUDA, as well as some internal problems and connections with common people. Then I will describe the activities of Danpullo and the development organisation ‘Société de Développement d’Élevage et du Commerce’ (SODELCO), in which I will return to Fatou. Then we will turn to describing the relations of individuals with Danpullo and with MBOSCUDA, from which will appear that individuals can choose in which ways they interact with these powers that are bigger than them. I will first make a note on the uneasy relations of scientists with this controversial subject, in which I will also say something about my own position.

A note on allegiance

In the office of MBOSCUDA in Old Town, the following quote of the Brazilian educationalist Paolo Freire is stuck on the wall:

Washing one’s hand off the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.

As we will see below, MBOSCUDA and Danpullo are both far from powerless. The question who is powerless might not be answered in this chapter, but the political interests of this discourse of ‘developing the powerless Mbororo’ shall be made clear. As has been discussed in the methodology section, it is difficult to stay neutral in the polarised arenas of the world in which the Mbororo in the Bamenda Grassfields live. Especially in the following case where one party is accused of severe wrongdoings, it is tempting to side with the opposing party. Reading scientific publications about Alhaji Baba Danpullo and MBOSCUDA, one easily gets the impression that Danpullo generally has a negative influence on the Mbororo community in the Bamenda Grassfields. Listening to stories about him from the – very accessible and open – educated Mbororo in Bamenda, usually brings about a similar negative image. In this polarised environment, social scientists have become active players in the field, willingly or unwillingly. MBOSCUDA’s program coordinator in Old Town explains me that MBOSCUDA has benefited a lot from the knowledge and support of social scientists, especially of Davis. I do not have the intention to prescribe what is right and wrong, nor do I claim to be more objective than any other person. As indicated by Georges and Jones (1980), the only thing social scientists can do is to be aware of their own basic assumptions and make them insightful to others. The majority of my informants, especially in Ntambang, have links with MBOSCUDA and therefore I necessarily have a more comprehensive image
of the perceived wrongdoings of Danpullo than of his perceived merits. This is complemented with several insightful conversations I had with people who have close ties with Danpullo, and several visits to Danpullo and his tea estate. I have tried to avoid taking sides in this situation in which it is not evident which individuals and groups present and represent the powerless in Freire’s quote. Moreover, the powerless are not as univocal as often claimed.

**The Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association**

MBOSCUDA is not against people. They don’t do some thing to people for the benefit of their property. Like - for example - the scholarship we had is not only for poor people - is for everybody willing to be educated. MBOSCUDA likes her culture. They are fighting to develop the Mbororo’s people even the illiterate ones.\(^9\)

The most active branch of the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA) is the one in the North West Region, with its regional headquarters in Old Town, Bamenda. It should be noted that whenever I mention MBOSCUDA, the emphasis lays on its branch in this region. Beside a hut, the logo of MBOSCUDA comprises a cow, a symbol to show that Fulbe identity can be retained in town (see also Oppong 2002). MBOSCUDA has four core programmes in the Bamenda Grassfields: first, women empowerment and adult literacy, secondly the accommodation of micro-credits, thirdly agro-pastoral development and access to justice, and fourthly capacity building. Women benefit from adult literacy classes, they can also apply for financial support for the education of their children – especially girls – and MBOSCUDA fights against early marriage. The program ‘access to justice for pastoral people’ gives legal assistance to Mbororo, among others those who have suffered human rights abuses of Alhaji Baba Danpullo (MBOSCUDA staff members, 22-08 and 20-09 2008). As Pelican (2008) describes, the founders of MBOSCUDA can be seen as an elite consisting mostly of educated Mbororo who were experiencing life in an urban environment. They found unification in MBOSCUDA and developed an idea about what it entails to be a Mbororo. This specific group of Mbororo hooks up to international discourses like the human rights discourse and the indigenous people’s discourse.

The ‘politisation’ of this group can be seen as part of the modernisation process of the Mbororo. One of MBOSCUDA’s founding members passionately expresses his ideas about integration of the Mbororo in the city:

The Mbororo are at a crossroads and they do not know what to do. When they go to town, they see there are atrocities, but inside their bush, they only stay behind their cattle. Prostitution was taboo amongst the Mbororo in the past. Girls used to cover their heads, but the veil is now giving way to the skirt. […] Intermarriage is gradually coming in, but it will be catastrophic. A woman who marries a haabe [non-Mbororo] will take over his religion and culture. For a man who marries a haabe, well, women are more influential than men in the education of their children, so then also the culture will get lost.10

Some minutes later he shares with me his wish to turn his glass table into an aquarium with some colourful fish, artificial flowers and a pump inside. This does not seem to rhyme with the preservation of the agro-pastoral culture which is encouraged by MBOSCUDA, although he explains that he is unrecognizable when he enters into the hills. Although he has embraced a new way of living, he still remains a ‘real’ Mbororo who knows how to deal with his cattle. In this case, he makes a claim on Mbororo-ness largely on the basis of his knowledge of cattle herding, although he does not live beside his cattle anymore.

Many Mbororo, especially the inhabitants of Ntambang who also live without cattle, are supporters of MBOSCUDA. They say MBOSCUDA helps the Mbororo to develop, which is a good thing, and they give the example of the adult literacy classes for women and the payment of school fees for their children. Some, however, do not assess MBOSCUDA only positively. A 19-year old Mbororo man describes that there is “too much politics going on in MBOSCUDA”.11 As is often the case, especially in the Cameroonian context, ‘politics’ is commonly associated with corruption and embezzlement of money. The most persisting rumours are that MBOSCUDA staff members have misused funding to their own benefits; they have built nice houses and take good care of themselves. Often mentioned are the various trips to Europe and the United States of the staff members to attend another training or workshop. These trips might be considered necessary by the staff members and their foreign donors, but they are not always perceived as such (see also Hickey 2002).

The organisation has been supported by international development institutions and human rights organisations that have sustained and reinforced some of MBOSCUDA’s

10 Interview with a founder of MBOSCUDA, 24 January 2009.
11 Conversation with a young man, 30 November 2008.
ideas. MBOSCUDA knows the channels through which contact and support for their case can be obtained; the internet is not unimportant in this respect. Some people say MBOSCUDA was created by the embassy of the United States. MBOSCUDA was founded by forty Mbororo, but it is interesting that a myth like this is created around MBOSCUDA’s connections. These stories indicate the interconnectedness of MBOSCUDA and the (political) power that is attributed to the organisation. The staff members are aware of the political message they spread and their discourse is in tune with dominant development discourses. In one of their brochures and on their website (2008), MBOSCUDA states:

We believe that the Mbororo people’s nomadic and pastoralist way of life, pulaaku code of behaviour and emotional attachment to cattle for hundreds of years, today, make them victim of a lifestyle and culture, as well as refugees of context wherever they have settled. This has been further complicated by illiteracy, ignorance, lack of foresight and cooperation.

The above quote taken from MBOSCUDA’s website, in which some elements are depicted as being intrinsic to the Mbororo, comprises a static description of Mbororo ethnicity which does not leave much space for negotiation. The elements are described as having a negative influence on people’s lives, which will influence the ways in which individual Mbororo consider and construct their own identity. The presentation of the Mbororo as victims and refugees has had clear advantages for MBOSCUDA. According to MBOSCUDA and its partners, there is a risk that youth go astray; boys falling prey to crime and girls to prostitution. MBOSCUDA and its international partners are successful in making use of this image of suffering Mbororo, while the people who are closely connected to MBOSCUDA do not seem to be the ones who are suffering. In this way, MBOSCUDA neglects the agency of specific Mbororo, which is a missed opportunity. On the other hand, it confirms how a part of the Mbororo has been able to deploy so clearly their own agency that other people believe they speak for all Mbororo.

As mentioned above, MBOSCUDA’s influence is clearly visible in Ntambang. The community hall with adjoining store is built and furnished by MBOSCUDA, in which MBOSCUDA meetings are sometimes held and every Sunday literacy classes for adult women take place. Electricity and running water were brought to Ntambang by a prominent MBOSCUDA staff member who is now residing in the United States, and owns a large compound with a much-admired yard in Ntambang. His wife is also a MBOSCUDA staff

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member, a neighbouring cousin is a MBOSCUDA driver, another cousin in Ntambang is a volunteer, writing reports for MBOSCUDA, and there is a female facilitator who heads the literacy classes in the quarter. The late general secretary of MBOSCUDA also built his compound in Ntambang, where Fatou still lives with her daughter. Fatou, who was cited in the opening quote of the chapter, is the only person in the quarter openly distancing herself from MBOSCUDA. When her husband passed away, the team of MBOSCUDA was present; they spoke highly of him and promised her financial support. To her account, she has never received any support. Fatou then decided to turn to Danpullo, which is the more striking because of her late husband’s link to MBOSCUDA. Before delving deeper into Fatou’s and other people’s affiliation with Danpullo, Danpullo’s background will be discussed.

Danpullo’s activities

*Alhaji Baba:* Everybody is free. You are free, they cannot disturb you. You cannot disturb enjoyment to anybody. (... pause...) You understand no? *Man:* Uh huh (nodding).

*Alhaji Baba:* I don’t want anybody to disturb you, I don’t want you to disturb anybody. Anybody has free rights, freedom to speak, freedom to live, freedom to watch, have you understood? So what they try to do, they wanted to bring war. If you see that is what they want to do, let me know earlier, then I go to the SDO [Senior Divisional Officer], DO [Divisional Officer], and we are going to organise gendarmes. And don’t disturb anybody.

*Man:* No Alhaji, we don’t disturb Alhaji.

*Alhaji Baba:* Don’t disturb anybody. Don’t disturb anybody and nobody has the right to disturb you. So that’s how it is.13

The image of Danpullo as a destructive force is widespread, but a different image comes up during a visit to him in Ndawara. When one of his visitors presents a conflict he has with his neighbours, Danpullo speaks a language of peace. Not only in this case, but also on other occasions, he seems to encourage unification and peace in order to bring development. Still Danpullo leaves no doubt that he is in charge, speaking with an authoritative tone and interrupting his interlocutors. The easiness with which he promises to ‘organise’ gendarmes displays his familiarity with legal conflicts. Danpullo puts into plain words that he is easy-going and generous to people, but if someone betrays his confidence, the person is finished.14 Many people receive his generous support; people receive large sums of money, back-up of

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13 Conversation of Danpullo with a guest, 11 January 2009.
14 Conversation with Danpullo, 11 January 2009.
gendarmes, and some women are offered the most beautiful clothing and jewellery. Danpullo is often presented as a man with two faces; to the outside world, he shows an image of himself as peace loving benefactor, but to his workers and to the people who come into resistance to his power, he can be a cruel tyrant. In the areas where his plans are met with opposition, he imposes his way either by offering bribes, calling in gendarmes or threatening with enlisting the gendarmes (see de Bruijn 2008; Davis 1995; Hickey 2002; Konings 2008a; Manyong 2008: 159-171; Pelican 2008).

Alhaji Baba Danpullo was born around 1947 from the marriage between Ahmadou Danpullo and his fourth wife Ngoin Felai. Baba was the first of his mother’s nine children. His father was a Hausa-Fulani cattle grazier from Kano in Northern Nigeria who came to the North West Region in the first half of the twentieth century and decided to settle around Kom. The Fon of Kom allocated land to him and to show his appreciation, he gave Ngoin Felai for marriage, a Kom woman who lived in the Fon’s palace. Because Danpullo’s herd of cattle had grown substantially, the Fon later allocated a large piece of land at Ndawara to him, where the family settled next to some Mbororo families. Alhaji Baba Danpullo did not only learn the cattle trade, he also learned to drive a truck. After having driven for a Nigerian businessman for some time, he started his own transport business and opened a bread factory. He started many enterprises and became a successful businessman (Manyong 2008: 158-161).

Photograph 5. Danpullo’s ranch in Ndawara
In 2002, Danpullo bought the tea estates of the until then state-owned Cameroon Development Cooperation (CDC), after years of pressure on the Cameroonian government of the International Monetary Fund to privatise state-owned companies. Danpullo bought Tole in the South West, Ndu in the North West and Djutitsa in the West Region for a bargain of 1.5 billion FCFA (Konings 2008a). In the 1990s, Alhaji Baba Danpullo decided to establish another tea estate in Ndawara around his pompous castle. His tea estate in Ndawara is the biggest of the four tea estates and also includes a modern tea factory. He tells me that he is the largest employer of the North West Region, and the third largest in Cameroon. His estate in Ndawara contains all sorts of facilities and accommodation; next to the castle and the tea factory, he has built a hotel, hospital, school, houses for his employees, a mosque and some small shops. People even say there is a prison on his land. There are stables for his many horses, and around his castle one can admire his ostriches, peacocks and some well-fed bulls (see photograph 5).

Most of Danpullo’s cattle are now grazing at ranches in Esu, Wum and Fundong, where clashes have taken place with the local population because of the destruction of crops by his cattle. Groups of women in Esu and Wum have demonstrated against this, but it remains unclear whether this has led to a durable change of the situation (NDZEM-USU 2008; Samba & Ayeah 2005). Although other people have also been affected by Danpullo’s activities, the Mbororo have proven more successful than others in portraying their story of suffering at the hands of Danpullo, with MBOSCUDA at the forefront. The wrongdoings against the Mbororo by Danpullo are well-documented by MBOSCUDA, several scientists and other partners. According to Hickey (2002: 848), Danpullo started in 1986 to forcibly evict farmers and Mbororo off their land, and used their cattle to establish a personal ranch. Danpullo has been accused of the seizure of grazing lands and livestock, the destruction of houses, and arrests and tortures of persons who refused to yield to his powers (Davis 1995; Hickey 2002; One World Foundation 2007; Pelican 2008).

One of his tactics was to ask a Mbororo herdsman whether his cattle could graze on the same land, since the land was so vast. The Mbororo accepted and their herds grazed side by side. After some time, Danpullo would decide to take his cattle to another place, parenthetically including the cattle of the Mbororo. In Wum, a young man alleged that up to today, Danpullo’s men take all of the cattle away if a cow of Danpullo has entered someone’s herd and he has not returned it immediately to Danpullo’s herd. Especially in Bamenda and Sabga people told me many stories about Mbororo families who lived around Ndawara and grazed their cattle there, who were ordered to either leave or work on the tea farm. Some of
the Mbororo who did not want to work on the tea farm but accepted to leave the land, were
given a certain amount of money for their resettlement, for others a new house was built. The
houses of those who did not leave were destroyed. Some of the men who offered resistance
were imprisoned, mostly on the basis of an alleged offensive act against Danpullo, like
stealing his cattle. The imprisonment was backed by some police officers and government
officials (Pelican 2008).

Danpullo’s methods to accumulate wealth exist thanks to a practically absent judiciary
system. Without the complicity of state officials, he would not be able to do this. He has not
only used his money and influence to buy the support of local government officials, it is said
that he is even befriended with president Paul Biya (see Davis 1995; Manyong 2008). Many
people are involved in a patron-client relation with Danpullo, receiving his assistance and
protection in return for their services and servitude. As Nyamnjoh (1999) describes, everyone
wants their own piece of the cake without questioning the origin of the cake. In this regard,
Chabal’s description of the patrimonial state is helpful (1993: 172-178). The system as such
largely remains unchallenged with people at the top being silent and others grumblingly or
patiently waiting for the moment they will get a turn. Most North Westerners agree there is
nothing that can be done against such an influential member of society; the power of his
money allows him to bypass the law and do as he pleases. However, Danpullo’s might does
not only exist by the grace of corruptive state officials, he is also supported by Fons, Ardo’s,
notables and common people.

Danpullo presents himself as a peaceful man always trying to avoid trouble. He gives the
impression he is never the one who starts a conflict, but is often a mediator instead.15 He
talks a language of unification and makes it seem as if he only reacts to problems that are
created by others.16 A young man attached to MBOSCUDA expressed his admiration for
Danpullo’s refined methods of perpetrating politics, of which a lot can be learned. On the
celebrations of the end of the Ramadan on 4 October 2008, Danpullo did not only get the
public support of the North West Ardo’s Union (NWAU) and the North West Fon’s Union
(NOWEFU), but also of the opposition leader John Fru Ndi of the SDF and former CPDM
minister Simon Achidi Achu. Such ostensible political unity, the young man concludes, can
only be realised by a force like Alhaji Baba Danpullo. That particular day, John Fru Ndi
lauded Danpullo by saying he had brought development into an area that was barren before.
Ndawara’s tea estate is presented as a chance for the people previously inhabiting the area to

15 In the Hausa community in Old Town, he tries to mediate between two camps that are diametrically opposed
to each other (conversation with anthropologist Samuel Hugentobler, 3 December 2008).
16 Conversations of Danpullo with his guests, 11 January 2009.
move forward towards a better (modern) future. Among other things, the development association SODELCO promotes the idea that the Mbororo are helped in their development by the employment offered by Danpullo.

**Bringing development for the Mbororo?**

The Mbororo are like their cows, they need to be drilled. You have to get a cane and beat a cow to direct him to graze at this or that place, the same goes for the Mbororo. They are secluded, they want things in a specific way. They don’t want civilisation. If they have meetings they talk Fulfulde.\(^17\)

The ‘Société de Développement d’Élevage et du Commerce’ was called into life by Danpullo in 1993. The official objective of this presently malfunctioning organisation is ‘to improve the well-being and living standards of the Mbororo/ Fulani and Hausa’ (SODELCO 2007). Seen from the perspective described in the above quote, the activities of Danpullo and SODELCO are urgently needed to ‘develop’ the Mbororo so they can also partake in the modern society. In the eyes of the accountant, the Mbororo do not understand how they can become ‘civilised’, so they have to be led towards the light by an association like SODELCO or a person like Danpullo. Although Danpullo seems to destroy the lives of the people who are obstructive of his plans, he has ‘developed’ the area around Ndawara. He provides a lot of employment, in fact, he is the largest employer in the North West Region, having thousands of workers. According to the accountant, Danpullo “has his weak points, like neglecting to pay his workers, but the good outweighs the bad”. For now, he is sitting in his office, waiting for Alhaji Baba to give him money to pay his three months overdue salary and resuscitate SODELCO.

The association is seen by many as a rival of MBOSCUDA. Their program consists of four components: income generating activities promotion, mostly sewing and petty trading; vocational training and education of youths; sensitisation on the HIV/AIDS pandemic; livestock production and development. Although the emphasis is slightly different, their activities display a large overlap with MBOSCUDA’s. When asked about the differences between SODELCO and MBOSCUDA, many Mbororo react with indifference. 22-year old Ibrahim assesses the situation as follows:

\(^17\) Interview with the accountant of SODELCO, 27 January 2009.
MBOSCUDA and SODELCO, they have the same objectives, the only difference is that SODELCO was founded by Alhaji Baba and MBOSCUDA by the Mbororo. They both want to educate the Mbororo and improve their culture. But the Mbororo are angry with SODELCO because they see it as something that Alhaji Baba has put there only to destroy MBOSCUDA.\footnote{Interview with Ibrahim, 3 October 2008.}

The North West Ardo’s Union (NWAU), also formed by Danpullo, is located in the same office as SODELCO. By its members and others, the two associations are considered as working for nearly the same goals. In December 2007 a meeting of the North West Ardo’s Union was called, in which the Ardo’s decried MBOSCUDA’s claim to be the sole representative of the Mbororo community (Lajong, Eden Newspaper 2007). MBOSCUDA often presents itself as a spokesperson for all Mbororo, not to be circumvented by other projects or organisations. Lajong describes the situation as follows:

The Fulani/Mbororo, who for sometimes now have been at each others throat, each claiming to be working on behalf of the other would soon unite for a common ground. […] Trouble started when SODELCO accused MBOSCUDA of mismanaging funds meant to empower the Fulani/Mbororo community. Business guru, Alhadji Baba Ahmadou Danpullo stepped in and the North West Ardo’s Union, NWAU, was formed to unite the community and have a common development platform. (Eden Newspaper, 18-12-2007)

The North West Ardo’s Union can be seen as another tool of Danpullo to frustrate MBOSCUDA. There are accusations of both parties towards each other, both claiming the other is refusing to work together and trying to ruin their association. As has been indicated above, there is some truth in the accusation of MBOSCUDA’s lack of financial transparency. On the other hand, SODELCO’s accountant discusses the internal mismanagement of SODELCO in length. When he came to SODELCO, there was no financial transparency. According to him, an amount between 30 and 50 million FCFA has been embezzled. The members were first contributing, but they have ceased to contribute when it became clear that accountability was absent. The power struggles between the Mbororo who were appointed by Danpullo were another difficulty. Fatou, who was the president of SODELCO’s women’s branch from 2005 to 2007, resigned because she felt seriously threatened – in the words of the accountant there was “some friction between her and the girls”.\footnote{Conversation with the accountant of SODELCO, 11 January 2009.} Fatou was in charge of buying all the sewing machines for SODELCO. Under her auspices, many women
were educated as seamstress. Fatou explains how she got involved with SODELCO and Danpullo:

The first time when I called, Alhaji was in Abuja [Nigeria]. I said I was in Mile 4 and I had a problem. Friday five o’clock he called back and he told me I should come to see him in Ndawara, so I took a motorcycle and reached at seven. They had not even given me a chair, he came and opened his office. He said that I should eat, drink, they should dress a room very well for me. There is cold and hot water, everything is there. Alhaji Baba has all the white-men-country channels in his television! He asked what type of qualification I had, whether I could work in his tea farm. I told him that I am very lazy, I don’t work hard. If you harvest from morning to evening you can get 25,000, if you work too much it is 35,000 [FCFA per month]! He said: “Ok, you can stand election for SODELCO”. He gave me 250,000. During the fasting period he told me to come to Douala, to Menuterie, where he gave me 300,000. He said: “If it is salaatu [the celebration marking the end of the Ramadan, sic.] today, the next day we will have elections in Ndawara”. The day came and we were standing election with 12 women. They asked: “What would you do if you were to be chosen president”. I said: “I know how to sew, I would teach Mbororo girls how to sew and give them education”. I became first, Maimouna second. I became the president.20

Since Fatou did not want to work in Danpullo’s tea farm, he proposed her to stand elections for president of SODELCO’s women’s branch. When Fatou told me, I found it difficult to believe what she said. It is a strange story, but what should particularly be gathered from it is that Danpullullo was committed to supporting Fatou. Although no hard conclusions can be drawn, Danpullullo’s commitment could have to do with Fatou’s late husband’s work for MBOSCUDA. When Fatou was elected, many people came to Alhaji Baba Danpullullo with damaging stories about her. Fatou complains that Mbororo are jealous. She says: “Many people think I slept with him to get his financial support, but this is not true”. In 2006, when she was visiting Danpullullo at his ranch, she reluctantly accepted his proposal to get into a relationship with a Hausa from Nigeria. She remarks: “The man had two wives and eight children, but he had money! I was fine by the time”. She had accepted to join him in his house in Abuja, but on his return, he was shot in a drive-by killing.21 Presently, she is seeing a man she calls her boyfriend, who is working at a bus agency in Bamenda and gives her and her children some financial support. It is uncommon for a Mbororo woman to openly say she has a boyfriend. Contrary to the denomination ‘fiancé’, ‘boyfriend’ gives the impression that

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20 Interview with Fatou, 20 December 2008.
21 Ibid.
the relationship will not lead to marriage. This is uncommon, because marriage is usually sought after by (temporarily) unmarried women (see also Regis 2003: 46-68).

As already presented at the beginning of the chapter, Fatou admires Danpullo a lot. She reacts highly indignantly when I mention the alleged threats and abuses of Danpullo towards other Mbororo. According to her, people call into life negative stories about him, because they are jealous of his wealth and his success. When Fatou talks about Alhaji Baba Danpullo, she generally refers to him as Alhaji, expressing their acquaintance. Inside his office in Ndawara where he receives his visitors, she stretches out on his couch and makes herself comfortable. In contrast, the other woman present sits on the floor. After an interview with Fatou, my research assistant Rukayatu looks at me with a conspiring smile, saying: “Have you seen how light she is? Alhaji Baba is either after her or her daughter, you know that he likes women of light complexion!” According to Rukayatu, Danpullo never gives people large amounts of money if there is nothing to gain for him. After a cousin of Fatou has told Rukayatu that Fatou is one of Danpullo’s girlfriends, it is evident to her that Fatou has fallen into Danpullo’s trap. In her eyes, a relationship with Danpullo is bound to end up in disappointment, a topic that she discusses often with friends in her home-village Sabga who have had an affair with Danpullo in the past.

Profitable but uneasy relations

Alhaji Baba Danpullo’s special interest in women comes back in many conversations. Danpullo is sometimes accused of not only taking away cattle from the Mbororo, but also their daughters. In Sabga, there is a lot of gossiping about Danpullo’s girlfriends and fiancées. Rukayatu and her friend in Sabga tell me that one of Danpullo’s girlfriends was “strolling through the streets as a queen”; she received a lot of money from him and she showed off the wealth. Another girlfriend of Danpullo called a few of her female cousins and friends together and they partied a lot with the money he had given to her. By the time that she had enough of Danpullo, she simply took out the sim-card of the phone he had given to her and threw it away.22

Wealth appears to be an important issue; because of the money, people are willing to enter into a relationship with Danpullo. People who have negative ideas about Danpullo and positive ideas about MBOSCUDA, assert that only ignorant and uneducated people enter

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into a relationship with Danpullo. However, as an inhabitant of the Grassfields, it is difficult to be ignorant of the negative rumours about Danpullo. Most people who actively search contact with Danpullo are most likely aware of these stories. The prospect of receiving Danpullo’s support is stronger than the fear of his alleged destructive powers. Turning to Danpullo is not without its consequences. To openly show and emphasise one’s affiliation with Danpullo can result in exclusion, whether self-imposed or perpetrated by others, especially in an environment in which many people adhere to MBOSCUDA, which is the case in Ntambang. At the same time, it leads to inclusion into Danpullo’s network. Fatou, for instance, hardly interacts with her neighbours, of whom she is absolutely sure that they are jealous of her position. Although she might not feel at ease in her quarter, she has good relationships with people affiliated to SODELCO and Danpullo. Whether Fatou stands aloof in her quarter out of her own choice or involuntarily is unclear, but her hostility stands out. She sneers that all her neighbours in her quarter would go over from MBOSCUDA to Danpullo’s camp if she would organise a meeting and distribute some of his banknotes.

Although it appears as if one can either be in Danpullo’s camp or in MBOSCUDA’s camp, it does not necessarily mean that their ‘followers’ are also mutual public enemies; there is space for negotiation. The quarter head’s wife wearing a SODELCO T-shirt is not condemned, and people adhering to MBOSCUDA enter into relations with others who have obvious ties with Danpullo. Patou for instance, a 24-year old woman whose brother is the right hand of Danpullo, appreciates MBOSCUDA, but since her brother and all her family members are on the side of Danpullo, she is also a SODELCO member. She is an apprentice of Madiya who is an active MBOSCUDA supporter.

Not everyone who is ‘with Danpullo’ necessarily supports him. Many of his present or past workers do not judge him positively, but they are there because they can possibly gain something. Similarly, the celebrations organised by Danpullo at his ranch in Ndawara attract many Mbororo youngsters who substitute principal objections for a more pragmatic approach; they want to enjoy. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter five. During these times, some also go to Ndawara with the objective of doing business with Danpullo or his protégés, with the idea that one has to be pragmatic (or opportunistic) if he wants to succeed in life. 23 This is an opportunity for Danpullo to show off his wealth; during the celebrations, tours on his tea farm are organised for his special invitees. Even youngsters who work as volunteer in MBOSCUDA’s office go to the parties organised by Danpullo,

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23 Conversation in a taxi to Ndawara with Saidou, a young man who hopes to acquire some business contacts during the celebrations, 4 October 2008.
which, again, does not say they support all his actions. However, the fact that Mbororo youth are massively going there, means that he provides in a demand.

**Conclusions: Siding with the powerful**

The negative judgement of Danpullo brings people together. Some groups claim that Danpullo wants to exterminate the Mbororo culture, but there are reasons to think that their culture is changing in any case. Because of the existence of Danpullo, MBOSCUDA has all the more reason to enforce a certain idea of what it means to be a Mbororo and to indicate a direction for the future of the Mbororo (see also de Bruijn 2008: 195).

Remembering the quote of Paolo Freire in the introduction of this chapter, it has become clear that a straightforward answer to who is powerful and who is powerless cannot be given. Political power is obviously in the hands of Danpullo and MBOSCUDA, but there are multiple ways in which common Mbororo deal with these two forces. Before, MBOSCUDA received a lot of support, but recently more Mbororo are complaining about their activities. The financial accountability leaves much to be desired, but also their vision on Mbororo-ness is not shared by all Mbororo (Pelican 2008). It has become blurred which party will serve the purposes of the common Mbororo best. As said before, Fatou presents MBOSCUDA’s lack of support after the death of her husband as one of the driving factors for seeking support from Alhaji Baba Danpullo. Although she has become isolated from her neighbours, the contact with Danpullo seems to be profitable to her. She is not the only one who thinks Danpullo best serves her own, and the Mbororo community’s interests. Danpullo might be an alternative way to find a place for oneself in the Bamenda Grassfields and in the wider society.

It depends upon the position of individuals whether or not they have the possibility to choose for MBOSCUDA, Danpullo or neither of them. It depends on their personal circumstances whether they reflect on their choice and whether they make an active effort for either of them. As I also stressed, it is not uncommon that people say one thing and at the same time do something else. Individuals are partly led by opportunism in their quest for financial security, but it has also become clear that they choose their strategies to achieve their goals. The polarisation that is caused by MBOSCUDA and Danpullo influences people’s agency but is simultaneously part of the framework in which people act.
5. Making a living in the city

Many people in rural areas have decided to move to the cities to try their luck. As has been mentioned in chapter two, the urban population in West Africa has increased enormously and the expectation is that by 2020, more than sixty percent of the projected 430 million of its inhabitants will be living in urban areas (Club du Sahel 1994). The move to the cities is not always solely instigated by poverty, but also by a feeling of curiosity and adventure, and the wish of independently gaining an income. In this chapter, the reasons for Mbororo to be in Bamenda will be discussed. The chapter describes – mostly economic – activities of several generations in the city, starting with adults and young adults, proceeding with youth and finishing with children. There are countless stories to tell about Mbororo making a living in Bamenda. I have chosen to first introduce different generations and then focus on the livelihood of some of my informants to illustrate the occupations of their generation.

The concept of social navigation coined by Vigh (2006), that was shortly discussed in the second chapter, is a useful way to describe the strategies of these young people in the city. They are constantly trying to make the best of the possibilities around them, in order to steer their lives in a beneficial direction. The livelihood strategies of the first two informants, Madiya and Isufu, are described more in detail than the following ones, because they have appeared to be especially skilful in navigating the urban space. However, all the individuals described below have their own ways of ceasing opportunities and directing their own lives. They do not seem to be afloat; in all cases there is a strong sense of direction. By arguing that agents simultaneously navigate the immediate and the imagined, Vigh (2006: 13) emphasises the differences between realities and desires, which will also come back in the cases described in this chapter.

As has been described in the methodology section of the introduction, the category youth is a social category. This will especially become clear from the comparison of Isufu with two young men who are in Bamenda to further their education. There is also a difference between Patou and Salamatou, the caretaker of Umamatu, whose stories will be described below. Twenty-six years old Salamatou is married, has a baby and takes care of two other children. Patou is about the same age, lives alone and takes care of herself. Their stories do not necessarily fall under different generational categories, but they do fall under different social categories. The elderly are not included as a separate category in this chapter because the majority of the elderly Mbororo do not live in Bamenda. They live in villages in the rural
areas, where they are no longer economically active but are sustained by their children, which, as we will see below, is the case with Madiya’s mother who lives in Sabga.

**Financial security, an entrance into adulthood**

The majority of Mbororo men in Bamenda seem to be working in the transport business, either as motorcycle driver, taxi driver, bus driver or conductor, loading and off-loading luggage in a bus agency or truck driver. There are quite a few Mbororo who are selling ‘traditional medicine’, which can be herbs, loose or in sachets, bark of certain trees, some strong alcoholic beverage which is said to cure gastritis, Koranic charms and amulets, to cure diseases or soothe all kinds of pains, like menstrual pains, toothache and so forth. Some of the ambulant traditional medicine sellers frequent the bus agencies every day, where they offer their merchandise to travellers and any other buyer. Others are in the petty trade, have a tailoring workshop, work as night watch, work for MBOSCUDA or another development association or have various other small businesses. The cattle market on Thursdays in Mendankwe seems to attract many of the Mbororo men from Bamenda and the surroundings, men who are hoping to do business, meeting family members and friends to discuss with, buying or selling a cow, eating meat and drinking a soft drink or, for some, under certain circumstances, palm wine.

There are hardly any Mbororo women at the cattle market, as well as in the transport sector. Most women have come to Bamenda because of their marriage; their husband took them there. Most of them are mother and housewife. Some women work for MBOSCUDA or other development associations, and some work in other occupations. A handful of women sell traditional medicine or use their Koranic knowledge to get by. Madiya is one of the rare Mbororo women in Bamenda who run a tailoring workshop, and she is generally known. She is eager to teach and to learn, which makes her excellent company and a pleasant informant.

*Madiya the successful business woman*

In the fasting month, Madiya’s workshop is full of customers who are preparing for the feast that marks the end of the Ramadan. It is obligatory for a husband to provide his family with new clothes for the celebration. For Madiya, this means that her business is peaking this month and she works overtime. Women walk in and out, discuss with Madiya or with their
friends, some come to bring money, others come to take wrappers or veils. Madiya’s foot is stepping on the pedal of her sewing machine while metres of fabric are stitched together. When a customer wants to say something, Madiya pauses for a while, then she steps on the pedal again. Sometimes she stretches her leg and feels it with her hand; it hurts. The day before the feast she goes shopping with her son Umaru and her youngest brother Hamidou. With his motorcycle, Umaru brings the groceries up the hill to Ntambang to their house, where his three sisters prepare their looks.

Madiya was born in 1972 in Ndraru, a village around Banso, some 70 km northeast of Bamenda. Her great-grandfather was the head of the first group of Mbororo who moved into the Grassfields. The group settled in Sabga, where he became the Lamido. As mentioned in chapter three, Sabga is one of the first Mbororo settlements of the area. From there, different Mbororo families spread again with their cattle to surrounding places, and others came to Sabga to join the families who were there already. When Madiya was eight years old, she went to school in the village of Ndraru, where she attended class one to five. Then her mother brought her to her grandmother in Sabga, where she followed class six and seven. Madiya was the first daughter in her family to go to school. By the time she had finished class seven, she decided to go back to her parents, where one of her uncles insisted that she should go to secondary school. However, her mother convinced her to marry, which she did. The first year of her marriage she stayed with her mother, and then she joined her husband in Nigeria, where he was working as a bus driver.

After the birth of a son and a daughter, she started a small business. She bought items like soap and sugar to sell in her house, and she looked for a female tailor willing to teach her tailoring, which she learned in seven months time. She contributed the money she earned with selling the small items to a njangi, an informal savings group (see Warnier 1985, and Rowlands 1993, for a description on njangis). On one Sunday, she gathered her money and bought a sewing machine. Her husband would not buy it, because, in her words, “he is not the type of person to think of the future”.24 They were in Nigeria for ten years when a violent conflict broke out and Madiya decided to pack her things and go back to Cameroon. She took her three children with her. Her son stayed in Bamenda with his uncle, she stayed with her parents close to Banso with her two daughters. Two months after their arrival her father died, which made her to stay with her mother’s brother. During this period she worked on the farm and sold food. She stayed without her husband for two years and six months. When

24 Interview with Madiya, 16 January 2009.
he joined her in Cameroon, they moved to Old Town, one of the central quarters in Bamenda.

Her husband had left the sewing machine in Nigeria, so Madiya went back to collect the machine and to sell the last belongings. Back in Bamenda, she started sewing in the bedroom until she had some money and they could move to a house with a bedroom and a living room. Two more daughters were born. Her husband had a motor accident in which he broke his leg, and for two years he was unable to work. Madiya worked and paid the living costs. As her husband resumed work, she started contribution money to a njangi again. When she had saved 250,000 FCFA by means of the njangi, Zeinabu, a niece of her husband, advised her to go to the north of Cameroon to buy fabrics and sell them in Bamenda. Madiya gave 100,000 FCFA to Zeinabu and together they travelled to Garoua. The reselling of the fabrics in Bamenda turned out to be quite successful and Zeinabu managed to give back the money. Madiya continued to travel to Garoua for the business in fabrics, and sell them in Bamenda.

In the course of the year 2007, Madiya and her family moved from their rental house in Old Town to their own house in Ntambang, in large measure funded by Madiya. The second daughter still lives with her aunt in Nigeria, her son Umaru rents a room in Old Town with Madiya’s youngest brother Hamidou. Madiya’s sewing workshop is still in Old Town. In February 2009, Madiya’s new kitchen was built out of mud bricks instead of the plaited bamboo she had before. The next year, she will have the toilet area built of mud bricks. She is clearly building and refining her life, and that of her children, with the money she gains.

Madiya’s husband has been jobless since a while; the bus he was driving was no longer wanted by the agency. Normally it is the husband who takes care of the family’s substantial needs, but here it is Madiya who provides for the family. Madiya explains: “He is weak, I am stronger than him”. She hurries to add that when he has a job, he is the one who will bring in the school fees of the children. Besides taking care of her husband and children’s needs, Madiya financially supports her mother in Sabga, as well as her three unmarried sisters and her youngest brother. Madiya has put in the money for Umaru to buy a motorcycle, with which he can transport customers from one place to another. He earns quite some money with this, but his school results clearly show his lack of educational devotion. If Umaru does not go to school or is not driving his motorcycle with which he earns some money, he hangs around with his friends. He is a member of the youth theatre group of MBOSCUDA called

25 1.000 FCFA is the equivalent of 1.52 Euro (August 2009).
26 Interview with Madiya, 16 January 2009.
Madiya has also put in the money for Hamidou to start his call-box near the carrefour at Savannah Street (see photograph 6). Hamidou’s call-box is running smoothly, the profit is good.

Photograph 6. Hamidou’s call-box in Old Town

It was only after the acquisition of a mobile phone that Madiya’s business started to flourish; the phone has enabled her to stay in close contact with her business partners and her customers. Once in a while, she calls with her uncle in the United States. Her customers phone her and explain her which fabric they want, as well as the kind of dress they want her to sew. She makes the trip to Garoua two or three times a year, but she often communicates on the phone with her business partners in Garoua. She has managed to build up a relationship of trust with some of them. If she needs a certain kind of fabric, she calls them and they send it to her, in return she sends the money with Express Union. Madiya has a lot of patience with her customers. Her customers will choose a fabric and take it with them, saying they will give the money in two weeks time. It can easily take a month before they pay, and some people never pay. She has a long list with an added amount of 200.000 FCFA.

*Sido* meaning *play* in Fulfilde, performs ‘engaged’ theatre plays in villages where MBOSCUDA encounters difficulties in the implementation of their programs. The difficulties are played by the youth and solutions are given in the play, aiming to help the community to surmount the obstacles in real life.
Some people refuse to pay, while others will pay after one year. One neighbouring family had bought fabrics up to 100,000 FCFA, and then the husband got sick. It was not their intention to not pay her, so Madiya never asked for the money, and after one year and three months they gave it to her. She explains:

If you are a Mbororo woman and you make a business, you make pulasku and you never cheat on your customers. […] If someone borrows I tie my heart, if I see you and say: “Hey, give me my money!”, I will be ashamed next time. If you are doing business, you have to be patient. If you are angry with your customers, the business will not move. If you insult one customer, you will lose ten. People trust me and like to buy from me because I have patience, I am always patient with them. I press my heart and hold on. I know everything is from God, I trust in God. 28

Madiya got into problems with her former landlady, of whom she was renting a sewing workshop in Old Town. Her son and youngest brother resided in the workshop, not only because of the higher costs of renting another room but also to guard the fabrics inside. The landlady started to “create small problems”; although Madiya always paid her rent on time, she was asked for three months rent which was allegedly overdue. Several times, Madiya, her son and her brother offered to put money together to fix the door of the workshop, but the landlady refused. One day she remarked that she would renovate the entire house two months later, which was a sign for Madiya that she was no longer wanted. Instead of getting into an argument, Madiya has decided to leave within a month’s time. She has a longstanding relationship with the woman; the house in which they used to live in Old Town was also owned by her. Madiya knows that it is not legal to suddenly ordain a tenant to leave, but Madiya does not want to go to court. She prefers to leave the place without making problems. Her son and her brother rent another room in Old Town. Madiya suspected the woman is jealous of her prospering business: “She wants to destroy my business, but I will not lose one single customer, they will all follow me wherever I go, and besides, I have my phone.”29 Before these difficulties she was already thinking of finding another workshop in a busier street, but she did not have enough capital for the big shop she had in mind. This situation has forced her to find another place, which is better located, close to the Nkwen market. Just as Madiya has been struggling to financially secure the future, Isufu is still not fully secured.

28 Interview with Madiya, 16 January 2009.
29 Conversation with Madiya, 30 January 2009.
Isufu’s quest for financial security

Isufu, a twenty-nine year old slender Aku man, has been living in Bamenda for about ten years. He finished his primary school in his natal village Esu, a village about 65 kilometres north of Bamenda. For his secondary education he went to the small town of Wum and to finish high school he moved to Bamenda. Recently, his seventeen-year old wife joined him in the city. Since his nineteenth, Isufu has known he wanted to marry his twelve years younger cousin, a daughter of his paternal uncle. Isufu is a son of Ardo Jaja, the Fulani chief of Esu.

One day, Isufu told me that he was selected to go to the United States with six others for a programme with the United Nations, for which he had followed a computer course. Four people withdrew from the programme early, because they thought it was a fraud. Together with a young man and a young woman he continued; they got their airplane ticket and their passport and they even obtained a visa. Their contact person required one more document to make sure they had not misappropriated funds, which had to be signed by officials and sent back within ten days. Isufu and the two others were already in Douala, but this last hurdle could not be taken. According to Isufu, the uncle and father of the young woman had caused suspicion by not being clear about the finances. The trip was called off, and he lost contact with the young woman shortly after that. The young man has recently called him to tell that he had arrived in the United Kingdom. He had apparently gone to Libya through Nigeria and Niger, where he was transported back to Niger. From Niger he managed to go to Morocco and from there to the United Kingdom. Isufu has tried to reach the young man again several times, but his number does not work anymore.

Isufu’s family has spent up to 3 million FCFA, which has not been paid back. The contact person and his two ‘companions’ cannot be reached anymore. Isufu feels like he has missed out on the opportunity of his life by a hair’s breath. Like many of his age mates, he still aspires to ‘fall bush’, to go to Europe or the United States. ‘Bushfalling’, as migration to foreign countries is called, preferably to Europe or the United States, but South Africa and Dubai are also popular, is a way to enhance one’s status (see for example Nyamnjoh 2005). Any insinuations that the programme might have been a fraud indeed are brushed aside by Isufu, but it is clear that he has not benefited from it at all, neither has his family. His father has told Isufu that he cannot expect more contributions from him for building up his future.

Isufu did not yet have financial stability when his wife was about to join him in Bamenda, which increased his financial worries substantially. If he would not be able to provide for her, it would put an enormous pressure on the premature marriage. He was afraid that,
without food in the house, she would run away. It is not uncommon for a wife to go back to her parents’ compound when she is unhappy with her marital situation. Isufu tried to make ends meet in several ways, like selling his mobile phone with profit and buying a new one, selling and buying again. He had put in several job applications for a position in different companies, and he was waiting for them to contact him. He also went to the cattle market in Upstation several Thursdays to sell cattle medicine, but he did not make a noticeable profit. The last time he went to the cattle market, he earned 2,000 FCFA, he paid a debt of 1,200 and 300 for a taxi, so he brought 500 FCFA home with him that day, roughly the equivalent of 80 Euro cents. At that time, his wife was already there and they were both chuckling when he told the story. I expressed my sympathy, not sure whether I should also start laughing. To laugh about Isufu’s misfortune might have been a way to deal with the insecurities of their life in Bamenda.

Isufu’s financial worries seemed to end when he was finally accepted for a job in the post room of a company, earning 120,000 FCFA a month. He brought the good news to me without overt joy or enthusiasm, but it was obvious that he was relieved of a great worry. However, three months later I received an e-mail in which he wrote:

Pls Rose put me amoung yr list in future, to be the first or amoung those who are intrested to come to Holland, i will pay for my flight if u got me that chance, things are not okay here as u sow for yourselve, my work, they pay me one month amount the three months i worked with them.  

The relatively enhanced level of financial security Isufu has reached when he was accepted for the job, seems to show some cracks. It might not be what he was hoping for, but he still earns more money with this than with selling medicines at the cattle market. His wife has not yet abandoned him and their housing has improved substantially.

Young Mbororo men looking for education in Bamenda

Among the youngsters who come to Bamenda, some come for educational purposes. The majority of them are men who come to finish secondary school. In the Anglophone educational system in Cameroon, children attend primary school from the age of 5 to 12. The lower secondary school is for students between the age of 12 and 17, concluded by an exam

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30 E-mail Isufu, 3 May 2009.
for the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level. The upper secondary school comprises two years, in which students can attain the GCE Advanced Level. The young men who come to Bamenda have usually followed lower secondary school in a town close to their village, and come to Bamenda to finish the last two years of formal secondary education. The majority of the young women do not come to Bamenda to finish their education, but to marry. A smaller part comes for other purposes, which will be discussed below. Most Mbororo girls do not reach the GCE Advanced Level; when a suitable marriage partner presents himself they marry, which is usually before the girl has finished high school.

For the majority of the girls and boys who grow up in Ntambang, school is a priority. They say they will not marry before they finish upper secondary school, and some of these girls, like Madiya’s daughter, have the wish to further their education after their GCE Advanced Level. Most of these youth in Ntambang can rely on their parents, who are wealthy enough to fund their children’s education. Other youngsters in town, like Abubakar, Isufu’s brother, are supported by their wealthy family in the village. Abubakar attends boarding school, which is more expensive than other schools. For other young men who come to Bamenda for their education, it is not always easy to secure enough funding. In the following sub-section, the itinerary of Ibrahim and Musa to get to school and how they manage to get sufficient funding for their education are presented. Both cases have elements in them that are shared by others, but they are also extreme cases, delineating the scope of possible itineraries before moving to Bamenda for education.

**Ibrahim**

22-year old Ibrahim came to town just before the start of the new school year, together with his wife and their child. Because of financial difficulties, the wife and child went back to their village. It was only after Isufu told me about his wife and child that I came to know of them. I even met them in his village close to Wum and took a photograph of his child, after a friend of him had told me this was his child. Even after I had given the photograph to Ibrahim towards the end of my stay, he never talked to me about them. Ibrahim’s family has come from Bauchi state in Nigeria about fifty years ago. They moved to the northern parts of the Bamenda Grassfields, where they first lived around Zoro, then around Laikom, and in 1973 they moved to Nyos. In 1986, the Lake Nyos disaster took away the lives of more than 2000 people (for a description, see Nkwi 1990), among two of Ibrahims sisters and a brother. Like of many others, all the cattle of Ibrahims father died. Ibrahim was born in a ‘Lake Nyos
Survival Camp’ near Wum, for which the government built some houses. Together with his older brother, Ibrahims father now cultivates corn, vegetables and pepper for export. From the profit, they can send some of their family members to school.

After Ibrahims wife had gone back to Wum, Ibrahim decided to stay with Isufu, who had been his secondary school mate in Wum, just like Abubakar. Ibrahim was waiting for his older brother to send him money for his school fees; he had two years left to get his GCE Advanced Level. He told me that when he would get his GCE Advanced Level, he would like to go to a professional school to become a history teacher. He would also like to become a mallam like one of his older brothers, but first he wanted to focus on his formal education.

By mid-October, Ibrahim’s older brother finally sent him money for his school fees, which was just enough to go to an evening school. The evening school was attended by a large group of students, in which Ibrahim could not concentrate. After Ibrahim got my promise that I would pay the missing half of his school fees, he decided he would try to enter a government high school. After waiting for hours in the office of the Government Officer, a Mbororo employee passed by asked him what he came for. He was permitted to explain his case in front of the officer who still admitted him to the government high school, without paying bribes, which is very uncommon for students who are too late to subscribe.

Ibrahim then moved away from Old Town because Isufu was about to bring his wife to Bamenda. It would not be appropriate to turn on the light at two in the morning for reading through his books. He moved to Mile 3, where there is also a mosque, to be better able to follow his own schedule. Falling behind for almost a month, Ibrahim had to catch up. An accident of his cousin made him to travel between Wum, Bamenda and a hospital in Bafoussam several times, which was another setback. Whether because of these or other factors, he failed the year and went back to Wum, to discuss with his older brother whether he should repeat the year or follow another itinerary. Eventually, Ibrahim told me that his brother had agreed that he would repeat the year and finish his secondary school, not in Bamenda but in Wum.

Musa

Musa’s itinerary is somewhat more complicated. He was born in a town in the north of Cameroon in 1975. Because he was his father’s only son, his father decided not to send him to school. When he was urged to send his children to school, he bribed the Divisional Officer to be sure his only son would not go to school. When Musa was ten years old, a cousin
convinced his father of the advantages of education, and Musa was finally sent to school. When he was in the fourth grade, his father told him to stop school because he wanted grandchildren. Although Musa was not physically attracted to women, he got married. When his wife got pregnant, he left to Yaoundé for four years, where he sold shoes. In Yaoundé he started dating men, and after a complicated relationship he left to a city in the southeast of Cameroon.

There, he drove a motorcycle to earn money, and he befriended two Americans. They urged him to go back to school, for which they offered to pay his fees, but he felt he was not yet ready to go to school. He accepted their offer to do a computer course in Bamenda for two and a half years. By the time he got the certificate, his father passed away and he went back to his home town. Back there, everyone pressured him to take his wife back, which he finally did. However, after having been married for three months, he divorced her and went back to Bamenda. In Bamenda, he sent an e-mail to his American friends in which he finally told them that he was homosexual. One of them replied that he was, too. After chatting for one year, Musa invited him and they spent some time together in a beach resort. The friend decided to invite him to the United States, but his visa application was refused. At the embassy, Musa had not revealed his sexual inclination which he regrets, because it might have given him an entrance into another world. In Bamenda, he went back to school and at the same time he sells small items at the market. He passed the exams for the GCE Ordinary Level in June 2009 and he has two more years to go before he gets his GCE Advanced Level. In the meantime he is looking for ways to go abroad, like many other youngsters. He is getting tired of Bamenda, were he feels people are not open-minded. After a friend told him about the possibilities of going abroad on a ship, he went to Douala to enquire about the conditions, but these were not favourable. First, he thought about moving to Douala, where he is able to meet other homosexuals among whom he can be himself, but living expenses in Douala are high compared to Bamenda. Then he decided to move back to his family in the north and finish his education there, before moving on to the next place.

**Mbororo youngsters looking for a different life in Bamenda**

Instead of going to school, unmarried youngsters can also have other reasons for wanting to be in the city, and other ways of spending their time. Generally, people gossip a lot about this category of Mbororo youth, which will be discussed in the following chapter. Some of the male youngsters are in the transport business, they drive a taxi, or a motorcycle, like
Umaru, or they carry luggage in the bus agencies. Others are involved in petty trade, work as apprentice in a tailoring workshop, sell ‘traditional medicine’ or work as night watch. On Thursdays, many of them can be found at the cattle market in Mendankwe, where they hang around and try to do some business. As intermediaries, some try to buy and resell cattle with a profit, sometimes mounting up to 10,000 or 20,000 FCFA. These young men are sometimes accused of being thieves, hanging around places where a lot of money is circulating.

Some of the female youngsters serve food in eating spots around Savannah Street in Old Town, where the vast majority of the customers are Mbororo. Others work as tailor, yet others do not seem to have a real job during the day. They wake up around ten in the morning, when their neighbours have already been up for hours. They dress and go to a restaurant at the carrefour to eat something and have a chat. Other people’s condemnation of women eating in a public place will be discussed in the following chapter. In the evening the women meet again around the carrefour, where they easily mix with men to enjoy themselves and possibly have some income. Some of these young women have been married before, they divorced and decided not to go back to their parents’ compound but to rent a room in Bamenda. They mingle with other young women who are renting a room in town. As will be discussed in the next chapter, this category of ‘loose’ women is frowned upon by other people. Loose is not meant as a derogatory term, but it expresses the temporary detachment of these youngsters from a family setting and the corresponding behaviour. According to Regis (2003: 45-51) being ‘in between husbands’ is a normal phase for women in Fulbe communities, in which there is a relatively high divorce rate. Remarriage is common, and some women stay with their families, in which their behaviour is closely monitored. However, some other women ‘derive a considerable proportion of their income from gifts left by their lovers as a token of their appreciation’ (Ibid.: 46).

From my observations and conversations it has become clear that quite a few of these young Mbororo women indeed have several partners, who can either be more ‘stable’ or more ‘occasional’. Some of these relationships are purely transactional; sexual services are offered in exchange for money. Although both parties are aware that the woman expects money or goods in return, prices are usually not discussed beforehand and sometimes the woman gets nothing. Yet others seem to have one male partner who pays their rent and other living costs. However, these relationships are not as stable as marriage and they can easily end. Men and women alike can have several partners at the same time of which not all parties are aware, which decreases the level of trust between partners. One of these young woman is Patou, quite a telling case of a Mbororo woman in her early twenties in Old Town.
Patou

Patou comes from a rich family in Nkambe and is a younger sister of a man who is close to Alhaji Baba Danpullo. She was married and had a child, but the marriage ended up in a divorce. The child lives in Bafoussam and Patou rents a room in Old Town. Patou had a boyfriend who paid the rent for her room; a young man whom she knows since her childhood. Before he cheated on her and they broke up, she told me that she wanted to marry him but her family did not approve of it. She explained: “They wanted me to marry someone, I denied him. Now I want to marry this one and they deny.”

Patou is Madiya’s apprentice and she is often in Madiya’s tailoring workshop. As Madiya’s apprentice, amongst other things Patou learns to hem up fabrics and stitch on ribbons to wraparound skirts. Madiya sometimes sends her to the market to buy fabrics or to pay a debt. Patou helps Madiya with the selling of fabrics, jewellery, veils and once in a while sandals. However, she often does not come to the workshop, sometimes because of ill health or travels, sometimes for other reasons. Madiya does not like it that Patou gives contradicting accounts of her absence. She is not satisfied with Patou, but she does not see it as her duty to re-educate her. She says: “If Patou doesn’t want to come, it is not my problem, she is responsible for her own actions.” If Patou is not in the tailoring workshop, in her room or out of town, she can usually be found around the carrefour. Although she has told me that she does not like to be friends with the Mbororo because they are not straight, I always see her with other Mbororo. Mairo’s restaurant at the carrefour is one of her popular spots, and she knows almost all the people who frequent the place. One day when we are sitting there, Patou tells an acquainted young man that she is tired of learning tailoring, it is too difficult. She says she wants to open a restaurant, somewhere around her house, where she will sell only one dish: *fufucorn* and *njama njama* (a traditional dish of pounded corn and huckleberry leaves).

Children’s daily activities in Bamenda

Just before sunrise, the family wakes up and everyone performs ablutions. Musa, the father, goes to the small mosque to pray. Madiya and the children pray in the house, then one of the children sweeps the floor, another cleans the dishes outside and another cleans the toilet.

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Madiya sweeps the courtyard. After sweeping the floor, they get a bucket of water and mop. When they are finished, they eat something. Around seven or eight in the morning, the children go off to school, walking down the hill in small groups. Depending on their schedule, they return between two and five in the afternoon. When Fadiza and Sureya come home, they enter into the kitchen and eat something small (see photograph 7). They wash themselves and change their school uniforms for their own clothes. In the afternoon, the children play with their friends and have some time for leisure. Fadiza, the youngest, usually returns around two and takes her wooden slate to go to her Koranic classes around three. Sureya is somewhat later and Ai usually comes only around four or five. When she is earlier, she usually makes homework and spends time with her friends. When Ai comes home, she walks to the communal tap to fetch water and puts it in the buckets in the kitchen.

When Madiya is working, she returns around five o’clock in the afternoon. She prepares food in the kitchen, which is served after the prayer at sunset, around seven o’clock. One of the girls brings a small container with fufu corn and a plate with sauce inside the living room, where their father takes his meal after his return from the mosque. Madiya and the girls eat inside the kitchen, sometimes accompanied by Madiya’s youngest brother, her son, or one of the children’s close friends or cousins. Once in a while, a lively female Grassfielder neighbour joins in and enjoys Madiya’s food. After dinner, all enter the house and the children make their homework, closely watched by Madiya. If they do not understand a question, Madiya and Ai help the younger girls. Madiya’s husband sometimes joins the...
living room and converses with his wife or Ai, or he listens to the radio he always carries with him.

Apart from going to school and studying at home, young children are sent to ‘read Arabic’; they learn to recite the Koran in the Koranic school. They sometimes do chores for their mallam (their Koranic teacher), like cleaning the floor after classes. The children in Ntambang are asked to fetch firewood for their mallam once in a while. On week-ends, school-going children have to wash their school uniforms. Boys usually only wash their school uniforms, girls are also expected to wash more clothes. Boys and girls in Ntambang are asked to fetch firewood. All children speak about carrying water from the tap to their house. Some girls also help to prepare food or prepare food on their own. It really depends on the parents what the children are asked to do. Generally, girls are assigned more household chores than boys, and school-going children are exempted from some tasks during the week. Girls are taught how to cook, boys have more time to play football and to hang around. Some children who are not going to school have a small business, like Umamatu.

**Umamatu selling ginger drinks**

Umamatu is ten years old. She is raised by Salamatou and Zacharia in Old Town, together with six-year old Mairu, who is a daughter of Salamatou’s sister, and Basiru, the one-year old child of Salamatou and Zacharia. Umamatu’s biological mother is a sister of Zacharia, living in a village in Binka. In the village, Umamatu has five older brothers, one younger sister and one younger brother. Umamatu and Mairu were given to their uncle and aunt when they got married. It is common in many families in Bamenda and beyond, regardless of their ethnic background, to raise children of their family members for a shorter or longer period. There is a wide variety of fosterage of children in Africa (see for instance Bledsoe 1990; Verhoef & Morelli 2007). In the case of Salamatou and Zacharia, the children run errands, do household chores and help to take care of the baby. Umamatu was sent to school the first year that she was in Bamenda, but she was not re-enrolled when the next school year started. She finished her Koranic education, which made her to be proud. Zeinabu, her mallam, told me proudly that Umamatu had now reached the level that she could also teach others to recite the Koran. Umamatu is one of the girls who do chores for Zeinabu, like cleaning the floor and fetching water.

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33 Meetings with the groups of children; 25 October 2008 in Ntambang and 26 October 2008 in Old Town.
Because she does not go to school, Umamatu has time to do other things. Many of her friends in the quarter are selling small things on the street, mostly snacks or drinks prepared by their (foster) mothers. The snacks are usually *gateaux*, made of sweetened dough fried in oil, or rolls made of groundnut fried in oil, groundnut-pepper balls, groundnuts, bananas, or other things. Like Bulo and some of her other friends, Umamatu now sells ginger drink (see photograph 8).

![Photograph 8. Umamatu selling ginger drinks in Old Town](image)

When I asked Umamatu whether it was her idea to sell or Salamatou’s, Umamatu says she is the one who wanted to do this. Umamatu said at first Salamatou refused, because she was afraid of the cars.\(^{34}\) According to Salamatou, she tried to avert Umamatu from selling on the streets for a long time, but Umamatu nagged on about selling the drinks until she finally agreed.\(^{35}\) Salamatou usually makes a quantity of ginger drink that fills five bottles, the contents of each bottle is sold by Umamatu for 600 FCFA in total. Sometimes she sells everything in the quarter, sometimes she walks along Sonac Street or Commercial Avenue or goes to the market to sell. When she comes back, she gives the money to Salamatou who keeps it for her. Umamatu explains that after some time, Salamatou will buy something for

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\(^{34}\) Short interview with Umamatu, 14 January 2009.

\(^{35}\) Conversation with Salamatou, 14 January 2009.
her with the profit, like clothes or shoes. Umamatu has the appearance of being proud of what she does (see photograph 8). Some of her friends in the quarter were already selling ginger drinks; she has now joined their group. Her action radius has become bigger; before, she was not allowed to walk along Sonac Street and Commercial Avenue on her own. Earning her own money and moving alone in a larger part of the city gives her a degree of independence that she did not have before. However, when asked whether she would stay with Salamatou in Old Town or with her mother in Binka if she could choose, Umamatu resolutely answers she would stay with her mother.

**Conclusions: Navigating the urban space**

In this chapter, I have described cases of my informants to show different ways in which Mbororo make a living in Bamenda. There are not only age differences and varying places of origin, but also different routes that people took before coming to Bamenda. Influenced by their past trajectories and future dreams, and by the possibilities these individuals see for themselves, they are moving around and shape their life in the urban space. They manage to create a place for themselves there, whether in a house in Ntambang, along Savannah Street or Sonac Street, in the dark streets of Old Town or in a classroom.

There are clear differences in what the urban space means and offers to the individuals presented here. For Madiya, Bamenda has provided an opportunity to realise her business. When she learned sewing in Nigeria, she might have never expected she would have a profitable sewing workshop in the centre of Bamenda one day. Her years in Old Town have given her the possibility to build up a network of reliable customers. She was able to secure the financial position of her family, to send her children to school and to build a house in the quiet, secluded quarter of Ntambang. She moves a lot between her house in Ntambang and her sewing workshop in Old Town, and has a lot of space of manoeuvre, independent of her husband. She has successfully negotiated a place for herself in the city, where she was able to develop her qualities. In the cases presented, Madiya is the only person who has permanently settled in Bamenda; the cases of Isufu, Ibrahim, Musa and Patou all bear an element of temporality.

The case of Ibrahim is insightful in the negotiation that can take place with family members in the village; without their support, he would not have come to Bamenda in the first place. Connections with the home village play a part in all the cases presented, and they are generally quite intense; if it is not because of the financial aid that is sent from the village
to the city or from the city to the village, it is because of the emotional ties with the village. However, connections within the city are equally important; Madiya’s business thrives primarily on the contacts she has acquired within Bamenda, and Isufu finally got a job by leaving his application letters with companies throughout the city.

Unlike Isufu’s wife, Ibrahim’s wife did not stay for long. Ibrahim was unable to create the right circumstances for his young family in the city and his wife moved back to the village with their child. It was not easy to convince his brother to send him money, and when he was finally sent some money, the school year had already started. His late start might have contributed to his failure to pass the school year. Also, he had difficulties trying to find the right place to live; he did not want to disturb Isufu, but he also wanted to live close to a mosque. He went back to Wum, not yet sure whether he would go back to Bamenda or not. In August 2009 it became clear that he would stay in Wum to continue his education, indicating a provisional end to his life in Bamenda.

Unlike Ibrahim, who had clear ideas about going to Bamenda, Musa did not have a life in this particular city in mind; he just went to Bamenda because the computer course was offered and he decided to stay for a while. For the particular reason of being homosexual, Musa does not have the feeling he belongs in Bamenda, or in Cameroon. Because of the taboo on homosexuality, he cannot disclose his real identity to the people around him, which is one of the reasons for his high mobility. Although he does not feel at home in Bamenda, he made some friends and is able to find his way through the city. He is determined to finish his high school, which will increase his job opportunities. By selling items at the market he earns some money, and so far, his Western friends have paid his school fees. His ability to link up with Westerners, who have given him financial and emotional support, has provided him with more opportunities. They have strengthened Musa in his abilities to navigate the sea of his imagination, especially the young American man who spent his holiday with him. For the moment, the place where he wants to be, remains a desire. However, he connects easily to Westerners and he is able to maintain relationships with them through the internet and through the phone. With his excellent social skills, he might create the right possibilities to realise his dreams one day.

Musa is longing for freedom, but the space that is offered to him by his society is limited. Because of the rules of his society, a vital part of his identity is hidden for his Cameroonian friends and his family. Umamatu is also longing to be somewhere else than where she is, without having influence on her place of living. However, in the restricted space of manoeuvre given to her, she has been able to create more space for herself. Umamatu has
successfully enlarged her freedom of movement by employing tough negotiation tactics to get her caretaker’s permission and commitment for selling ginger drinks. Even after granting her the permission, her caretaker Salamatou did not give the impression she approved of it, although she makes the ginger drink that Umamatu is selling. The fact that Umamatu enforces her will, indicates that Salamatou, willingly or unwillingly, leaves a lot of space for Umamatu to organise her own life. However, although Umamatu has managed to find a fulfilling occupation for the moment, she still dreams of the village of her parents, which will become clearer in the seventh chapter.

The large majority of children of the age of Umamatu do not choose the place where they live. As was touched upon in Ibrahim’s, Madiya’s and Patou’s case, others do make choices about the place where they want to live. They have moved to the city with an image of what they want to achieve there. Once arrived, they create opportunities for themselves in the social space that direct them in what they feel as an advantageous direction. To be able to go in that direction, they choose with which kind of people they want to interact and how they want to behave towards others. The urban space provides the framework and the opportunities for migrants to change their behaviour, intentionally or unintentionally. The subject of the next chapter is the behaviour and the judgement of the behaviour of Mbororo in the city, focusing on the ‘loose’ and the recently married youngsters. An attempt will be made to split the behaviour into socio-cultural and religious behaviour, since these can be seen as two different elements of Mbororo identity.
6. Following Islam, enjoying life: Sons and daughters in the city

“Come, let’s enjoy life! Let’s just go now, to my house, you and me. No one has to know, we can just leave now.” A young man called Issa has followed me outside, where I went to answer a phone call. Completely drunk he leans towards me, determined to take me to his house. He cannot be older than twenty years. I gently push him away and walk back into the off-licence where three young men are loudly singing a song. Opposite of them a young man embraces two young women while gazing in my direction, which makes me wonder who is studying whom. Another girl passes on a hand-rolled cigarette to her neighbour. Two Grassfielder friends whom I invited try to chat up the two young women, who clearly show interest in them. The oldest woman, who is roughly in her late twenties, gives my friends a phone number, saying they should really call because they are so cute. An old Grassfielder woman tending a shop next door exclaims: “You people are young, enjoy while you can!”

Most off-licences in Old Town can be found in the downhill streets off Savannah Street, the main road. Especially on Thursday and Friday nights and during week-ends, these places get crowded. Some serve only palm wine or corn beer, and many are run by women. Although in Bamenda many people drink a lot, the drinking Mbororo are a special category. An Grassfielder resident of Old Town explains that groups of Mbororo are barred from quite a few drinking spots because of their wild behaviour. They are renowned for their loud singing and drumming on tables. In such groups, men generally outweigh women, but the men are often accompanied by a few ‘loose’ women. Some of these women, like the women described in the above citation, are clearly looking for men, possibly customers. Their presence usually depends on the money of the young men; in Bamenda, the person who invites others for a drink pays the bill, and men are commonly expected to pay the women’s drinks.

In every society, there are people who behave in a way that is condemned by others. Especially young people explore the boundaries of their societies’ rules, and some of them cross these boundaries. In this chapter, different situations will be described in which Mbororo cross normative boundaries, making clear which kind of behaviour is seen as ‘right’ behaviour. As was briefly mentioned in the methodology section of the introduction, behaviour is only deviant if it is judged as such by the majority of the people. Studying deviant behaviour and the ways in which it is judged, thus provides an insight in the social

36 Notes about an off-licence in Old Town, 23 January 2009.
The Mbororo are generally of Islamic faith. Religious rules strongly recommend abstaining from alcohol and from sexual relationships outside wedlock. In the opening quote, it is clearly visible that the Mbororo youngsters described do not abstain from these practices. Sometimes their deviance of Islamic rules is emphasised, in other circumstances these youngsters are accused of blemishing the name of the Mbororo. De Bruijn and van Dijk (1995: 169, 198) describe the relationship between custom and Islam in the ‘social and moral codes of daily life’ of the Fulbe group they studied in Mali as a ‘dialectical relationship’. The social framework they found was not only directed by kinship, residence, age and gender, but also by the organisational features of Islam. The same can be said for the Mbororo. Although religious and socio-cultural principles are two different sets in theory, in practice they are entangled in people’s behavioural and relational frameworks. Both Islam and custom are essential elements of Mbororo identity; being a good Mbororo entails being a good Muslim.

The discussion of a ‘right’ marriage and a ‘wrong’ marriage in Old Town will again shed light on the underlying values of Mbororo in and around Bamenda. The individuals I describe below are mostly older youths, who are more or less in between the categories of youth and adulthood as described in the introduction of this thesis. Many of them are not yet married and do not have the full responsibilities of providing for a family. It will become clear that these youngsters actively shape their own identities and shape the world around them (see de Boeck & Honwana 2005; van Dijk et al. 2007). Before delving into the world of the dancing and drinking Muslims with whom this chapter opened, the ways in which some youth in Bamenda present their Islamic identity to the outside world will be represented.

**Islamic representation of oneself**

“We usually start a celebration like this one with a prayer. Maybe you could ask the young mallam over there to lead in prayer?” Madiya is looking in the direction of Isufu. Isufu is extremely well-dressed for my goodbye-party, just like his wife who has only recently joined him in his rental room in Bamenda. His white, long clothes make him look serene and the kohl below his eyes underlines his beauty. Although Isufu has always made the impression he is a pious Muslim, it never crossed my mind that he could be a mallam. However, from the way he
is dressed today I can understand that Madiya singles him out as the most appropriate person for leading the prayer.\textsuperscript{37}

From the above fragment in which Madiya calls Isufu a \textit{mallam}, it becomes clear how much appearance can do. Isufu has never finished the Koran, which could have given him the title of \textit{mallam}. Like many of his siblings, he was never sent to the Koranic school, but his father invited a \textit{mallam} in his compound to teach his children. However, there was not enough continuity to learn to recite the entire Koran, because the teachers mostly came during school holidays. When Isufu went to Wum for his secondary education, he did not continue Koranic education. Like all Muslims, he has learned how to perform his prayers five times a day, which he respects a lot. On Fridays he always wears his best clothes for going to the mosque, and he preferably performs the prayer at sunset in the mosque as well.

From his appearance, one could not discern that Isufu has not finished his Koranic education. The fact that he has not finished it is not so important, but it is interesting to see how strongly he presents himself as a pious Muslim and is perceived as such. When he was finally invited for a job interview, Isufu effectively called forth his religiousness in his effort to be assessed as a serious, reliable person. He dressed up in one of his expensive gowns and put on his Islamic prayer cap. The director remarked that he was happy to see that Isufu was such a devoted Muslim, and that he could be an example for his Muslim brothers. If the words of the director were genuine, Isufu’s presentation of himself as a pious Muslim seems to have brought him success.

Like Isufu, the youths in Ntambang with whom I had regular meetings clearly presented themselves as Muslims. In a meeting in which we talked about religious issues, Hawau’s way of dressing was made the subject of discussion. According to Jafaru, her long gown was up to standard, but the trousers underneath the gown were not permitted by religion. Hawau strongly protested against this, but when Jafaru asked the others to comment on her way of dressing, Hawau eased off. The two other boys agreed with Jafaru, the two other girls were silent. Not only with this incidence, but also in other ways it became clear that Hawau sees herself as a modern Muslim girl. She has lived in Douala for a while, where she came in contact with a more varied range of people, which has certainly influenced her. She sometimes uses a French word to indicate that she is a woman of the world. Hawau is always in for a discussion, contrary to Ai and Halima, who sometimes complained to me that Hawau talked too much. On one occasion, Ai’s father passed the room in which we were

\textsuperscript{37} Notes about my good-by party in Ntambang, 31 January 2009.
having a meeting. We usually had the curtain open, this time Hawau stood up and closed it. Hawau’s protest about her dressing should be seen in perspective; her readiness to have heightened discussions does not mean that she openly questions the social rules of her environment. She is not less religiously inclined than her peers; on the contrary, she helps to teach the children in her brother’s Koranic school inside their house in Ntambang. Her slightly different way of dressing indicates her capability to hold an individual interpretation of Islam, even if it is not fully shared with her peers. The Islamic inclination of the youth in Ntambang is clearly visible from some of the photographs they took themselves, intended to capture their most important activities. The boys took photographs of themselves in their religious gown, which they only wear on special occasions, like the Friday prayer and the Islamic celebrations. In their daily lives, they wear t-shirts and trousers, as can be seen on photographs 13 and 14 in the next chapter. Their wish to depict themselves in this way emphasises the importance they attach to showing their Islamic representation.

Photograph 9. Jafaru (by youth in Ntambang)

In the conversations with the children in both Ntambang and Old Town, Islam came up as an important issue. When we talked about the Koranic school, the children in Old Town addressed the following issues:
Rukayatu: Tell us what you like most in the Koranic school.

Aicha: We like learning.

Ai: For me I like learning because when I die I will not see any learning like this.

Dawda: I also like to learn, read the many religious books so that when I die my flesh will not have the taste of hell-fire.

Umamatu: I also like learning so that when I die I go to heaven.

Habiba: I like learning so that I will teach others, then when I die I go to heaven.

Rukayatu: You people like only learning.

Dawda: Yes. They told us school is for the earth and Arabic for the hereafter. If you learn, God will reward you. If you are beaten during learning up to the extent to have marks on the body, those portions will not burn in hell-fire.38

The hell-fire came back in many conversations; especially Dawda emphasised the prospect of burning in hell. Hell was described as the place where the Muslims who display wrong behaviour go; for Muslims who drink, for Muslims who do not pray, for Muslims who dance too much. Seen from this perspective, the behaviour of the group that will be described below is highly improper, and does not give the best chances to go to heaven.

**Enjoying life**

More than the drinking spots in Old Town and beyond, the restaurant of Mairo has served as a place for observing the behaviour of young Mbororo. The methodological challenges of these choices have been discussed in the methodology section in the introduction. In Mairo’s restaurant, practically all the customers are young Mbororo, most of them under the age of thirty. The young men and women described in the previous chapter frequent these and other restaurants. Some motorcycle drivers or petty traders come for a quick plate of rice or yam with sauce or beans, or *fufucorn* with *njama njama*, girls enter for a conversation and a bowl of porridge or something else. It is common for girls to come to the restaurant to talk about their boyfriends with Mairo. When a girl has left the restaurant after such a conversation, Patou, the apprentice of Madiya, complains that a restaurant is not a place for discussion. As was described in the previous chapter, Patou had a boyfriend who paid the rent for her room. In the beginning of their relationship she trusted him, but after a while she

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38 Meeting with group of children in Old Town, 2 November 2008.
suspected that he had another girlfriend. A little while before they broke up because of this she told us: “If I catch the girl, I will not beat her, I will use a knife!”

When discussing the subject of prostitution with Madiya, she explains that people see girls like Patou as a prostitute. They come to town without their family and rent a small room, they do not go to school and most of them do not seem to work. Although it might not be true, it is obvious for people that these girls can only survive by selling their body. About these girls, Madiya says: “You are eating what in the afternoon? You wash and go to the junction.” Ibrahim, the young student from Wum who was introduced in the previous chapter, strongly condemns the behaviour of the girls who hang around at the restaurant. According to him, girls like Mairo are selling their food during the day and during the night they sell their body. When we cross the carrefour, we run into a young Mbororo man who also frequents the restaurant. Ibrahim nods at him and remarks indignantly: “This boy cannot be else than a thief; he does not do anything during the day and he is still able to eat!”. The group of youth in Ntambang have acted a play entitled ‘pure enjoyment’, about these youth and the consequences of their behaviour, which is included in appendix III.

Most of these youngsters who do not live with their family come from villages outside Bamenda. Madiya emphasises that Mbororo girls are not the only girls who prostitute themselves, but they are more visible than for instance Hausa girls who, more usually than Mbororo girls, stay in their parental house in Old Town. During the day they sell their small goods, so people can think their wealth comes from their business instead of their nightly encounters. The emergence of this group of loose young Mbororo women in the city is said to be of recent date. Madiya explains:

In the past, if you did prostitution, it was quick. If you liked each other, you would see each other one, two or three times and then marry. This staying with boyfriends is a new thing. A girl like [my daughter] Ai will not do it, she went to school, she has knowledge. These girls from the bush, they want nice clothes. They see other girls who have nice clothes and say: “Oh they are beautiful, I also want that”. Nobody gives them advice, or maybe they do but the girls don’t listen. They want to have the good life, but they take the wrong way. You should come to town at the right time, after you have finished your school. Someone will come to marry you, if God wants it.

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40 Interview with Madiya, 16 January 2009.
41 Conversation with Ibrahim, 21 December 2008.
42 Interview with Madiya, 16 January 2009.
In this quote, marriage is presented as a rightful reason for women to come to town, a phenomenon that will be discussed later in this chapter. Furthermore, the idea that moving around with expensive clothes is ‘the good life’, is disposed of as a misconception of young rural Mbororo women. The comparison with Ai does not only suggest a superiority of urban girls on educational grounds, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter seven, but also the conviction of a mother that her daughter is well-educated. Although wanting to have nice clothes and wanting to enjoy life might be seen as objectionable, these are reasons for some youngsters to come to the city. In the following section, I will discuss occasions that attract a lot of young women and men to the heart of Old Town; the celebrations taking place after the Islamic holy days.

**Celebrating Islamic holy days**

Like Christmas, the feast ending the Ramadan and the feast of the Ram are celebrated lavishly, and are anticipated with great eagerness. For the Muslim population in Bamenda, the weeks before the feasts are busy; they go shopping for food, new clothes, shoes and sometimes other presents. In the days before the feast, women and girls spend a lot of time braiding their hair in a special way. Most of the younger woman who have some money, have henna painted on their hands and feet. Women prepare a lot of food, which they serve their many visitors on the celebration day itself and the days after. For the feast of the Ram, it is the male members of the family who occupy themselves with buying and slaughtering the ram. The majority of Muslims celebrate during the day of the feast with a lot of food, and they visit houses of acquaintances until a day or two after the feast.

A small part of the Muslim population assembles in Old Town where they keep on celebrating for at least another week. During these periods, the main street of Old Town is filled with partying Hausa and Mbororo. These celebrations are frowned upon by many people for several reasons. Drinking alcohol and entering into short-lived sexual relationships is not only disapproved of by Islamic standards, but by society in general. People of different backgrounds complain about the alcohol flowing in large quantities and the many fights that break out, mostly about women. Most Mbororo men are said to carry knifes, which can evoke dangerous situations. During these periods, staying around these places is discouraged, because the police possibly intervene, which does not always create more safety. In crowded places in the night there is a lot of theft; phones are especially wanted. Sometimes without pity, stories are reproduced about girls being robbed of all their
belongings, and boys having been caught by the police. There are many stories about people selling their clothes and mobile phones to get enough money for their travels back to where they come from. People lose their jobs or fail their exams because of the celebrations.

When I was walking in Old Town around the carrefour during these periods, the crowded streets and off-licences with singing people did not give the impression that this was a small part of the Muslim population. As is often the case, a small fraction that is visibly displaying deviant behaviour is often taken as exemplary for the entire group to which they belong. The majority of the group is held responsible for the behaviour of a minority of their members. The conversation that takes place in a taxi to Sabga on the eve of the feast of the Ramadan accounts to this:

A young Grassfielder man says to the Mbororo: “I want to become a Muslim, but there is one thing that I do not understand: why are you people fasting for one month and then when you are finished you commit all kinds of atrocities, you drink, you fight, you fornicate…” One of the Mbororo men replies calmly: “There are also Christians who go to church every Sunday, but that doesn’t make them good Christians either. It is a small group of bad Muslims who do this. They are not serious. If you want to become a Muslim it is a matter of the heart.” The other two Mbororo mutter approvingly. The Grassfielder explains that he is not a Christian but he believes in juju’s and ancestors, but he has started to believe there is more than that, and the Mbororo repeat that conversion is a matter of the heart.43 The above situation is a good example of how people of different ethnic groups easily create a platform for mutual understanding, in which differences can be discussed without agitation. These people in this taxi quite readily accepted their differences, although the Grassfielder started with equating the men in the car with the ones who ‘commit atrocities’ after the Muslim feasts. With slight differences, this conversation could also have taken place in a Dutch or a French city, although the globalised tensions between Muslims and (former) Christians might render dialogue more difficult. In Bamenda, there are hardly any serious conflicts between the Muslim minority and the predominantly Christian Grassfielder majority. People do however stress that religious and customary differences are sometimes addressed in a derogatory way from both sides, which will be shown in the following chapter. Now, we will return to the celebrations that were already mentioned in chapter four, organised in Ndawara by Alhaji Baba Danpullo.

43 Conversation in a taxi from Nkwen to Sabga, 29 November 2008.
Dancing in Ndawara and beyond

Each year, some days after the feast of the Ramadan and the feast of the Ram, celebrations on the territory of Alhaji Baba Danpullo in Ndawara are announced. Hundreds of mainly young Mbororo and Hausa and others travel to Ndawara, some three hours northeast of Bamenda. Some of them take along their drums, others only come with their best clothes and a little bit of money. These celebrations are renowned ones, with a lot of dancing, display of wealth and beauty, and horse races. It is said that one of the main reasons for Danpullo to organise the celebrations is the screening of beautiful young women, who can be added to his repertory of mistresses. Non-Mbororo and Mbororo alike decry these excessive celebrations and strongly dissociate themselves from the people who drink, dance and have short-lived sexual relationships there. However, many of them are at the same time attracted to the celebrations in Ndawara. One girl, whom I met just before she was going to Ndawara, told me that she was hoping to buy a mobile phone there. Being in Ndawara might bring opportunities to get material or intangible support for one’s problems or business plan. Some visitors might even get a chance to talk to Alhaji Baba himself or to get an appointment with him. The fact that beautiful young girls are dancing there does not necessarily have to influence their stay in Ndawara, according to Isufu. Isufu refers to this in an interview in which he discusses the perversity of dancing.

If you want to dance in your house, there is no problem, it is your husband, it is no problem. But if you dance with someone who is not yours it is a problem. […] Any way that a woman and man gather, anything that they do it is not good, it is not accepted. But I’ve seen it in Ndawara. Yes in Ndawara they do it. It is not good. But there are many people there! Yes, they don’t care, they don’t follow the rules, the Islam teaching. They see other people drinking, they are holding beer, their hands, drinking, they don’t care, they are mingling with their elders, it is not good. You see a girl dancing in front of her father it is not good. I was there in Ndawara, I have seen it myself, she was turning her buttocks in front of the father, it is not good. It is not good for whom? The girl… for all of them it is not good! It is not permitted for him to sit there to watch the girls dancing. So why did you go there.. I went there for a purpose. I stood there so I saw them dancing. You were also looking. Yes, I was looking, it is not good. I also saw you dancing with Rukayatu. You have been looking too much! 44

44 Interview with Isufu, 2 December 2008. The text in italics is mine.
Isufu denounces the celebrations at which Mbororo girls and boys dance their traditional dance. When he is confronted with the fact that he has also been looking at these girls, he manages to carry it off with a joke. Although Isufu never hinted in that direction, in his late teens or early twenties he might have partaken in these traditional dances. Presently, he is a respectable, married man of almost thirty and he behaves as such. More people explain me that partaking in Mbororo traditional dances is not advisable by Islamic standards. The most stringent Muslims also consider the popular Hausa music videos as being ‘not good’, especially the ones that display dancing girls in tight-fitting trousers. However, these videos are popular among Mbororo and Hausa of different ages, children and adults alike. Religious rules prompt people to give certain answers in conversations, but in their daily life they interpret the rules less rigidly. Saying that something basically is ‘not good’ is not the same as directing one’s behaviour following stringent rules.

These conflicting feelings are well displayed in a discussion about dancing of the group of ten-year old children in Ntambang. The children were asked to bring an object that they liked, and Sureya brought a drum, resulting in the following discussion:

Roos: Who else likes to dance?
Sureya: I like it!
Rahi: I do not like dancing because it is not good.
Sali: I do not like to dance.
Sule, Sa’a and Rahi: Sali you are lying, you like to dance Mbagalum.
Sali: It’s a lie. Dancing is not good, God can punish you, that is why. Satan can take you to the fire and you can die there.
Sureya: Drum is something that if you hear you will like to go there and dance.
Sa’a: If anybody hears the Mbambabe, everyone will be moved to go and dance.
Roos: So who agrees with Sali?
Rahi: Me! Me I don’t dance. Dancing is not good.
Roos: Sule you also think it is not good. But you like it.
Sule: I like it but it is not good. [...] You are dancing up but fire is under.
Sali: Look at the enjoyment that was going on in Banja, you are enjoying but fire is awaiting you. [...] 
Roos: Sureya, what do you think..
Sureya: It is good, but not too much.45

Rahi, who is two years older than the rest of the children, who are all ten years old, is clear in her disapproval of dancing. There are more instances in which she voices the norms that should guide female behaviour. When we talk about having a boyfriend or girlfriend, Rahi vehemently condemns it; a woman should prepare for marriage, obey her parents and later her husband. The younger children do know that dancing is considered a deviant activity. The ultimate consequence of dancing is that God punishes the dancer, and he will go to hell instead of heaven. For some of the children, this prospect is enough to renounce dancing, others are not that rigorous. Their opinion of course largely depends on their education at home and the behaviour of family members. The younger children do have an idea about the ultimate consequence, but they do not discuss practical consequences of deviant behaviour. In a theatre play, the youth in Ntambang do reveal their ideas about the consequences of such behaviour, in this case drinking alcohol:

Alhaji: Jafaru, you have impregnated somebody’s daughter, are you going to marry her?
Jafaru: I’m going to try.
Alhaji: How could you have done such a thing?
Hawau: Since the time that I was insisting that we would look for you a beautiful girl you refused and you went and impregnated an ugly girl.
Jafaru: She is the one who gave me drinks until I got drunk. It is because I was drunk, you know that when you are drunk you can do anything.
Ai: Halima, is it true that you are the one who gave him drink until he got drunk? Look at how this child has put me into shame.
Alhaji: Jafaru, you are very stupid, did she force you with the drinks?
Jafaru: The thing the drink was sweet, it was just like milk (kwasam), until I only discovered the next day that I was with someone in my house.
Ai: Halima, was that how it happened?
Halima: Yes.
The marriage is arranged. 46

Like in many cases, the woman in the play is accused of having seduced the man into drinking until he lost his mind and made her pregnant. Although Isufu does not justify the old man looking at the young dancing girl in Ndawara, it is clear to him that girls should not dance in public. By this double standard, which is not specific for the Mbororo in Bamenda, the same behaviour is judged more immoral for women than for men. The ultimate social

46 Meeting with the group of youth in Ntambang, 29 November 2008.
consequence for a woman is that she is no longer wanted as a marriage partner, as men usually do not want to marry a woman who is considered a prostitute. Some Mbororo men express their fear that a girl like that might have caught a sexually transmissible disease, and that a loose woman will always remain loose. In the case drawn by the theatre play, the marriage of the ‘stupid’ boy and the irresponsible girl will reduce the social damage, but the mother of the boy is clearly unhappy with this ‘ugly girl’. One of the ways to find a beautiful well-behaved woman for marriage is to look for one in the countryside, for instance in one’s village of origin. In the following paragraph, marriage will be discussed; a reflection of marriage as it was in the past and as it is presently, illustrated with two cases.

Marrying a decent girl

The first time we come together with a group of ten-year old children in the Koranic school of Zeinabu in Old Town, we start with asking the children to sing a song. Some look at the ground, others look at each other. Umamatu looks around and starts singing. When we translate the song into English, it appears to be a bridal sung about a newly wed girl who is about to travel to her husband’s compound:

O jere lale, o jere dakaré
I’m going out on a trip my mother, and I will not come back to the village/ Buy me so many things and put them in a bag/ O jere lale, o jere dakaré
I’m going to the village of my husband for a while/ When I reach there I will sleep/ O jere lale, o jere dakaré
There are many things I do not know how to do/ But all I know is that I have gotten married/ O jere lale, o jere dakaré
A car has come to carry the bride and her things and has taken her to her place of marriage/ O jere lale, o jere dakaré
We do not know whether the bride is going to stay according to the ways of marriage/ O jere lale, o jere dakaré
The journey to go to the place where I am married is tedious/ O jere lale, o jere dakaré
Her mother loves it, her father loves it, until now the bride has gone/ O jere lale, o jere dakaré
I will now enter a house that they have cemented until I will sleep in a cemented house/ O jere lale, o jere dakaré
I will never again enter a house that they have roofed with grass/ O jere lale, o jere dakaré
When I got married I entered a car, it carried me together with my luggage to this place/ O jere lale, o jere dakaré

Even if I have to fetch firewood, or I have to remove grass/ O jere lale, o jere dakaré
Even if I have to enter a car, or I have to remove grass/ O jere lale, o jere dakaré
Even if I have to ride on a bike, or I have to remove grass/ O jere lale, o jere dakaré
Even if I have to look for money, or I have to remove grass/ O jere lale, o jere dakaré

I will do what is right, I will cook so that my husband will eat and lie down, so that he will read the Arabic, then I will lie down on his feet, he will touch the hair of Mairania, he will touch the body of Mairania, and then after that I will wear good shoes. I will call him Modibbo and he will call me Hadjajo, there will be a lot of joy/ O jere lale, o jere dakaré

I will take care of my husband, take care of the grandmother and finally I take care of the Modibbo/ O jere lale, o jere dakaré

The melody is somewhat piteous, and together with the lyrics it gives an impression of the girls ambivalent feelings; sad that she is leaving her parental house, nervous because she enters into a new, unknown situation, acquiescent to take on her task as a woman but also hopeful that she will have a happy marriage. In Ntambang, on a visit to a compound with my research assistant, we encountered a newly wed woman, who looked at the floor and hardly talked to us. Later, Madiya explained me that a woman is restrained in the interaction with others in the first few weeks of her marriage. Traditionally, the new wife hardly talks to people, does not leave the compound and eats in seclusion. As will be shown below, young Mbororo couples who live in the centre of town interact with each other more freely.

The information about marriage was partly gathered in the meetings with the groups of youth, in which we asked them to perform a theatre play of a marriage in the days of their grandparents, and a present-day marriage. When talking to other people, the same sort of image was given about marriage, indicating the representative value of the youngsters’ theatre plays. In the past, it was normal for a Mbororo girl to move to her husband’s compound around the age of fourteen. Nowadays, a girl is usually married somewhere between her sixteenth and twentieth. Most parents still prefer their girls to get married early, to avoid shame resulting from the girl’s sexual behaviour outside wedlock. Marriage within the family still occurs, although it is less common than in the past. When a child was born, family members would visit the parents and propose a marriage between the newly born child and their own child. If the parents accepted, after some years the marriage was confirmed with a gift by the other parents, without the knowledge of the children. When the

47 Meeting with the group of children in Old Town, 19 October 2008.
girl would have a certain age, between twelve and fifteen, she would be sent to the house of her new husband. One of the reasons for this was, that the cattle would remain in the family.

Traditionally, there is a high incidence of divorce among the Mbororo; it is fairly easy to get divorced and marry again. A marriage can end if the union does not produce children, if the husband decides to have another wife, if he cannot provide for the family or if there are other insurmountable discomforts (also described by de Bruijn & van Dijk 1995; Regis 2003; Riesman 1992). Reasons given by women in Bamenda vary from ‘the love was finished’ to ‘there was no peace in the house’ or ‘there was too much suffering’. If there are children involved, they are usually sent to the father’s family, but some of them can be sent to the mother’s mother. Children are valued greatly, and if there are no children after three or four years of marriage, people start talking. One of the first things a niece of Isufu told me, was that she had a good husband, but she did not have a child yet. It was quite prominent that being childless was an issue of concern in her life. A woman who is not yet a mother, is not yet a full member of the adult community. When she is pregnant of her first child, a woman goes back to her parents’ compound, where she delivers the child and stays for a year until she returns to her husband’s compound.

The following cases depict two different situations in which a couple decides to enter into marriage. The first case of Iliasu and Rukaya represents a common way of finding a marriage partner, taking a girl from the village to the city. The second case is the marriage of Aminatou and Abdu, which was disapproved of by many Mbororo, especially by the family of the previous husband of the bride.

The marriage of Rukaya and Iliasu

Isufu is friends with Iliasu, a young taxi driver from Babessi, which is near Ndop. He rents two rooms in a compound, shared with another newly wed Mbororo couple and a Hausa couple with two children. Iliasu and Isufu were always joking about marriage; Iliasu told Isufu several times to look for a good wife for him. One day, when Isufu went to his parental compound in Esu, he sent Iliasu a photograph and a letter of his older brother’s daughter Rukaya. Iliasu decided to come to Esu to meet her. They went into a room where they talked for three or four hours, and then got to an agreement. The parents accepted the marriage and soon it was settled. Isufu steered everything in the right direction and arranged the car that brought his niece to Iliasu’s place in Bamenda. Rukaya was sixteen years at that time. When I meet her, she has been in Bamenda for about five months. I am her neighbour in January
2009, renting a room in the same compound (see photograph 10). Next to Iliasu and Rukaya lives another young Mbororo couple, Maimouna and Ali. Ali works in the motor park of a transport agency, where he loads and offloads luggage on top of buses. Maimouna and Rukaya have more or less the same day rhythm. They clean the house in the morning, then they wash the dishes of the day before. If necessary, they do the laundry before starting to cook. During the day, Ali is sometimes there, but Iliasu as a taxi driver only comes home in the evening. After cooking, Rukaya takes a meal and rests some hours, sleeping, watching television or chatting with Maimouna. They sometimes go out to visit a friend or family member, or to congratulate someone with a newborn baby or bring condolences after a decease, but not after having asked their husbands for permission.

Before his wife joined him in Bamenda, Isufu entered the room of Iliasu and talked to his niece Rukaya openly. When his wife has just joined him and he visits Rukaya again, he does not enter the room but sits outside while talking to Rukaya, independent of whether Iliasu is in the house or not. It is only if Iliasu urgently asks him to enter that he does so. Other male friends of Iliasu enter the room only when Iliasu is around, for instance to share a meal together. On a trip to their village, Isufu accompanies Rukaya while he leaves his wife in Bamenda.

To marry a girl from the village has several advantages, such as the greater probability that she is still a virgin, highly desired by many Muslim men. This attachment to the village is not shared by all Mbororo in town to the same degree. Some families go to great lengths to
find an appropriate bride, who is deemed to have ‘better’ behaviour, for instance obeying her husband better. The Mbororo are not special in this in Bamenda; when looking for an appropriate marriage partner, Grassfielders usually also have clear demands about the status and ethnic origin of a partner’s family. In general, children who are educated in the village are thought to be more obedient and to respect their culture and religion more than the ones in town. They know their place and they know how to work. When they are still young, they can be moulded by the husband to be a perfect wife. Iliasu sometimes treats Rukaya like he is a sort of father-figure, and he confirms that he can feel like a father. Although usually in a playful way, he explains her about how he wants things to be done in his house. Rukaya has her own way of making him clear how she wants it, but she does not openly dispute Iliasu’s authority.

For instance, after dinner Iliasu asks Rukaya to serve him tea.48 She reaches for the tea flask and puts the tea in a cup. Then she gets the jar with sugar and opens it. Iliasu is following her with his eyes. She puts one sugar cube in his cup, she puts the second one, a third one and then she closes the lid. Iliasu protests, and while she opens the jar again, she laughs that four sugar cubes is way too much. He looks at her with amusement while she puts the fourth sugar cube in his cup, and then she puts the cup in front of him with just a little bit more force than is necessary. Both smile. The next evening, Iliasu does agree with three sugar cubes. Negotiating about the amount of sugar cubes in a husband’s cup of tea is not the same as negotiating about sending children to school or visiting one’s family in the village for a week or two, but it does tell us something about their interaction. With the sugar cubes, they seem to playfully explore each others boundaries; a game of power in miniature.

*The much-discussed marriage of Aminatou*

In Madiya’s tailoring workshop three female customers discuss prices of clothes and other issues with Madiya and her apprentice Patou. In a plaintive tone of voice, one of them says she feels so weak, her stomach aches, her life is so difficult. When she leaves the tailoring workshop, the other two customers start: “This Aminatou, she complains and complains, she is not even hospitalised!” The women are clearly incensed about Aminatou’s behaviour.49

On a visit to Aminatou two weeks later, she looks pale and she complains that she does not feel fine at all. She wants to go to the hospital. It seems as if she is on the edge of crying. Ever since her husband passed away, life has been difficult. He left her and their five

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49 Conversation of three women in Madiya’s tailoring workshop, 22 September 2008.
children behind, and ever since she is struggling. Two children are with her mother, two are
with her late husband’s family and one is still with her. Isufu tells the story of her husband’s
death; he died in a car accident one year ago. He had gone to Bafoussam to ask back 20.000
FCFA he had loaned someone. The person did not have the money and asked him to wait
until Thursday, he would give it back at the cattle market. He gave him 500 FCFA for
transport back to Bamenda. When Aminatou’s husband was waiting for a taxi, the first three
cars passed, he entered the fourth car, driven by a friend of his. Next to the driver, there were
three other persons in the car. The driver lost control over the car and hit a tree. In the
accident only Aminatou’s husband and another passenger who was picked up alongside the
road died. Her husband’s body was scattered; Aminatou is said to have only recognised him
from his feet. Isufu insinuates that there is something odd about the death of Aminatou’s
husband. To him, it is telling that the driver was a friend of Aminatou’s husband, as well as
the fact that none of the people who had entered the car in the car park died. It might not be
coincidental that he was the one to befall this tragedy. This also tells something about Isufu:
his experience of Islam does not exclude superstition.

A month later, we visit Aminatou again and the difference is stunning. She wears a
beautiful gown and her blinking earrings go together with a blinking chain, her skin is
shining and she smiles. She looks glorious. A man comes out of her bedroom and sits down
next to her with a radiant grin. He introduces himself as Abdu. Not only Aminatou has
changed, even her living room is transformed. The chairs and cupboard have been shifted,
there is a new table and her collection of pots has doubled. All this seems to indicate that the
man who is sitting beside her is her new husband. She tells us that she is pregnant.

Aminatou appears to have accepted to marry her late husband’s best friend, and many
Mbororo in Old Town are gossiping about the marriage. Hulera for instance explains that
Aminatou was her good friend, until she heard about the marriage from someone. When she
meets Aminatou she will not say anything, because she “never received a kola nut”. To
Hulera, it is shameful; she tells that when Aminatou’s husband died, Abdu cried for three
days continuously. He brought all sorts of things for Aminatou and people did not suspect
him, because he was such a good friend of her late husband. They had not idea he wanted to
marry her. People speculate about their relationship; were they already having a relationship
before Aminatou’s husband died, did Abdu have a hand in the death of his friend, were his
friendship and her love never genuine, and so forth. Others tell us that the family of the late
husband is particularly unhappy. Isufu tells that they took away the children to their
compound in Wum, except for the youngest child. Hulera has heard that Aminatou’s son
was so angry when he found out about the marriage that he took away the television and the audio-player. She says: “The television you people saw was brought by the new husband, he bought too many things. When Aminatou’s daughter married, Aminatou gave her all her pans and pots, otherwise you would have seen a lot more things in the house.” When I ask Madiya for her opinion, she answers she does not know. She adds that everyone is talking now, but nobody gave Aminatou anything when she was suffering. Aminatou is the only one who knows the real story.

In short

Like the stories of Ibrahim and Musa, these cases have extreme elements in it, reinforced by one another; Iliasu and his virgin wife who just turned sixteen when she was brought to her new life in Bamenda are opposed to Aminatou and Abdu, whose marriage almost got devilish proportions. There are many brides and grooms who regularly went out dancing when they were young, for whom their marriage marked the transition to a more serious life. Some young men continue to go dancing, which is sometimes met with opposition from their wives, sometimes accepted as being part of marriage. As was similarly played by the youth in Ntambang, marrying was probably a better option for Aminatou than not marrying, although Abdu could have decided to leave her behind with her problems. The details about her relationship with Abdu are known only by Aminatou and Abdu themselves, as Madiya remarked. The negative assessment of Aminatou’s complaints form a bridge to the next subject; Mbororo customs.

Eating and shame in the public space

“Aren’t you ashamed of yourself, as a Pullo, eating on the street where everyone can see you?!” Ahmadou’s eye has caught a Mbororo girl eating a plate of koki (mashed beans) on the roadside. The girl turns away, clearly ashamed, trying to finish her food as quickly as possible. Still somewhat disconcerted, he turns to me and fires away: “They don’t care (ils s’en foutent)! You see, there is no pulaku left in Cameroon, especially in the North West. The Mbororo in Bamenda do not behave properly, they have no shame, no pulaku”. When I ask

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50 Conversation with Hulera, 3 December 2008.
“What about you, do you have pulaaku?” Ahmadou replies with twinkling eyes: “Me too I don’t care. Why would I, nobody knows me here!”"\(^{51}\)

Ahmadou is a widely-travelled marabout from Burkina Faso who enjoys to share his ideas with me. Usually I meet him on Fridays on a bench in an eating spot where they serve omelette with spaghetti. He explains me about the differences between Fulbe in his home village in Burkina Faso \(^{52}\) and the Fulbe in Cameroon. To his record, it is impossible to see a young Fulani woman eating on the street in Burkina Faso. In the village where he was born, a woman waits until everyone is asleep and then she enters her room. She wakes up before the sun comes up, because she would be too ashamed if people would see her coming out of her room. According to him, the Mbororo in Bamenda are a disgrace to all the Fulbe. The eating girl on the street is a perfect example of this. He explains:

The Fulbe are in different degrees; the Fulbe of Bamenda are tough, they are stingy as I have never seen before. The Fulbe of Maroua give, but here they do not share. It is shameful, it is the character of the environment that makes the differences between the Fulbe. The Fulbe of Bamenda have spoiled our name of Fulbe.\(^{53}\)

Ahmadou is not the only one who feels embarrassed with the sight of a Mbororo girl eating in public. The majority of Mbororo women I talked to, prefer not to eat in the public space. As Amadou (2007) describes, a place can already be public when there is more than one person present. Several Mbororo in Bamenda explain to me that in theory, not only Mbororo women, but also men are supposed to avoid eating in the same space with unknown members of the other sex. In the past, in the first months or even years of the marriage, husband and wife would preferably eat in separate rooms. However, this practice is losing grounds, especially amongst newly wed couples who live in a rented room in town, like Iliasu and Rukaya. Inside town, the kitchen is usually less private than a room, and some women rather eat with their husband’s friends than in the kitchen. It should be noted that most of Iliasu’s friends who come for a visit and share a meal, are unmarried. In Ntambang, it is more common for women to eat in their kitchen. Madiya explains me that she would never eat in the same room with the older brothers of her husband.

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\(^{51}\) Encounter with Ahmadou, 11 October 2008.

\(^{52}\) Ahmadou tells me that when he was a young boy of about ten years old, two whites, Paul and Suzanne, arrived in his village in a white Peugot 404. At first he and all the other children ran away from them out of fear. When they started giving candies, the children came to see them often. Ahmadou’s home village is in the Jegolbe, the area where anthropologists Paul and Suzanne Riesman carried out their fieldwork with the Fulbe.

\(^{53}\) Interview with Ahmadou, 11 October 2008.
When talking about refusing food that is offered, the children and youth in the focus groups in Old Town and Ntambang commonly mention that their grandmothers would rather die than openly accept food that is offered to them. Although the following incident is about a grandfather, it illustrates the argument:

Kenneth, a Grassfielder friend, knows that I am interested in stories about *pulaaku*. When we meet in an off-licence, he tells me with eyes aglow that he needs to share a story with me. When he was in Wum, he witnessed how an old Mbororo man was openly offered food and refused it. Then someone suggested: “Take the man inside a room and then offer him again”. Once inside, the old man ate all the food that was offered to him, and even asked to put some more meat in a bag so he could take it along for his children. Triumphantly Kenneth concludes: “So there is your *pulaaku!*”.

In some circumstances, the children and youth themselves would also refuse food, which will come back in the following chapter. As was also described in chapter two, refusing food serves as an example of wanting something and not showing it, thus being in control of one’s feelings. The public display of weakness leads to a feeling of shame, which is to be avoided in all circumstances (Pelican 2008; Regis 2003). Aminatou’s complaints were clearly a sign of her bodily weakness, which might have been a reason for the women to denounce her behaviour.

**Conclusions: Social rules and transgressive behaviour**

This chapter has given a range of situations and incidents in which Islamic and socio-cultural values were either exceeded or reinforced. In some cases, these values are conflicting, like in the case of the traditional Mbororo dance. From an Islamic point of view, partaking in the dance is not recommendable, but many young Mbororo do it. As has become clear from the different stories, the verbal condemnation of certain practices does not mean that the people who show this kind of behaviour are fully excluded from social life. Neither does it mean that people who rhetorically distance themselves from certain behaviour are not at all involved in the practice. The marriage that was acted out in the play of the youth focus group from Ntambang and the real marriage of Aminatou and Abdu shows that there is room for negotiation, even when behavioural ‘mistakes’ are made. Aminatou could have decided to go back to her parents’ compound after her husband’s death, but she chose to stay

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54 Conversation with Kenneth, 2 October 2008.
in town. For her, marriage was the most logical option to be able to remain where she was. The gossiping of people in the quarter is widespread, which was also discussed by Fatou in chapter four, who entered into a relationship with Alhaji Baba Danpullo. When the gossips subside, Aminatou and Fatou will probably both have a more secured future than if they would have chosen another itinerary.

Likewise, the young unmarried Mbororo who live in town are commonly being regarded as thieves and prostitutes, but a young woman like Patou will most probably marry and start her family within the coming ten years. There are hardly any adult or elderly Mbororo in the many off-licences in Bamenda, which seems to indicate that ‘enjoying life’ is a phase in life that mostly belongs to young people. This underlines the stage of ‘becoming’ and exploring boundaries, which is part of being young. The enjoyment of life is partly also a connection to a globalised youth culture; the fact that girls want to have a trendy mobile phone reveals their desires for another life. Their desire for beautiful clothes is partly a common expression of Mbororo to show their wealth; new clothes are presented as gifts in marriage and Islamic celebrations. These young women seem to take a short cut; they do not want to wait until marriage, they want it now. The social environment provides a space for them that enables them to fulfil these desires. They put this into practice with behaviour that is disapproved of in their society, but it is a kind of behaviour that takes place in every society. In some cases, their families might not even know what exactly their daughters and sons are doing in town. They are a lot less able to control their children in town, compared to their children who have remained in the family compound.

In general, there is less social control in the city, which does not preclude gossiping, but people interfere a lot less in the behaviour of others. The Burkinabe Ahmadou forms an exception; his background requires him to correct the girl’s behaviour when he sees her eating in public. The girl is ashamed, but in the evening, she will walk hand in hand with her boyfriend around the carrefour again. She will not adapt her behaviour to the expectations and wishes of an old man. The characteristics of the urban space have provided her with this possibility; an old man can complain that life should be different, but listening to this old man is not the only option in the city. If the girl does pay notice to the words of the man, she will not be corrected by others in her social environment. The city is a space in which many people and customs come together. Especially young people take over the customs and behaviour of their age mates; Flexibility and openness towards outside influences are characteristic qualities of people in their youth. However, their behaviour shows that they still relate to themselves as Mbororo; they dress like other Mbororo, the majority of their
friends are Mbororo and they speak Fulfulde every day. These particular Mbororo youngsters act in the framework of Mbororo-ness; they do not reject their ethnic identity. With their behaviour that is so visible in the urban space, they do however contribute to redefining urban Mbororo identities.

As we will see in the next chapter, these young men and woman, of whom most have grown up in a village, have other expectations of Bamenda than youngsters who have lived there since their childhood. Amongst others, this has to do with their education. In the next chapter, the ideologies underlying Mbororo behaviour in Bamenda will be discussed, which is linked to the educational foundation of aspirations for the future of oneself and one’s children in the city.
7. “We are civilised now”: Passing on ideologies

What I want for my children; I do not want them to move around carelessly, sleep in other people’s houses like that, they cannot just sit with any kind of friends and discuss things that are irrelevant. I want my children to always go to school and learn Arabic. My dream for my children is that they should be educated, so that in the future they will be able to know where to get a job and get it, they will know how to eat and where to find food.55

In this chapter, I describe the ideologies that underlie the behaviour of different generations of Mbororo in Bamenda. The issues that are mentioned in the above quote are deemed important by many parents: education, being a good Muslim, and displaying good behaviour. The focus is especially on how children and youth experience and express these issues, and compare these with what their parents have in mind. Attention will be given to the ways in which children incorporate the values and ideas that are deemed important by their parents, for instance the significance of cattle. Values and ideas are transmitted to children and youth in many places; at home, in school, in the Koranic school and on the streets. Considered their interaction with other people, objects and ideas in an urban environment, this can create a certain in-betweenness for Mbororo children and youth, as is more often the case for second-generation migrants. They create their own ways of dealing with specific norms and values and find new ways to incorporate all these different elements in their lives.

This chapter is mainly based on the information that was gathered in the meetings with the groups of children and youths in Old Town and Ntambang. The aim of this chapter is to give an impression of the ways in which Mbororo children and youth perceive and interact with the ideologies of the older generation in the urban area. I will also emphasise differences in the behaviour and perception of individual children, youth and parents, which have been formed by their personal histories and family background. We will first have a look at the future perspectives of the youth and children who partook in the group meetings.

55 Interview with Hamidou Joro, 10 October 2008.
Children’s and youth’s aspirations for the future

Drawing 1. Future job (by Hawau)

Photograph 11. Hawau (by youth in Ntambang)

Drawing 2. Future job (by Ai)

Photograph 12. Ai (by youth in Ntambang)

Drawing 3. Future job (by Souibu)

Photograph 13. Souibu (by youth in Ntambang)
The photographs and drawings above give an interesting insight into the aspirations of the youth. As was discussed in the previous chapter, Hawau’s way of dressing was a point of discussion. The way she has drawn herself in her future job as journalist or accountant is poignant; she wears trousers (see drawing 1). This does not necessarily imply that she will wear trousers, but it does imply that she sees herself in a job in which women can also wear trousers. The difference with Ai’s drawing of her as a future doctor wearing a long skirt is telling (see drawing 2). It can be said that Hawau is leaning more towards a ‘modern’ city life than the other girls do. The photographs with Aminu on the motorcycle and Souibou with the cattle are also interesting, depicting what they find important to show of themselves to the outside world. There is also a photograph of Aminu with the cattle.

The group of children in Ntambang has also explained their future jobs during a meeting.\(^{56}\) When asked what they want to be when they grow up, three girls answer they want to become a tailor, because they like it. One of them adds that she will be able to sew her mother’s dresses when she becomes a tailor. The fourth girl, Rahi, who is twelve years old, says she does not want to work. Rahi will stay inside the compound and be a mother, a pathway she wants to take to achieve her aim of going to heaven when she dies. The boys have a more technical future in mind. Sule wants to work for the electricity company so he can always provide light for the quarter and earn good money. He adds that his father has told him that he will go to the garage to learn for car mechanic if he fails school. He will be a mechanic and then carry irons for Amour Mezam, a transport company. Sali wants to be a car mechanic, because then he can always repair his father’s vehicle. Sali’s father is physically absent in Sali’s daily life. Sali’s answer could therefore be interpreted as an expression of his feelings about this absence. Yaja first says he wants to go to the technical

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\(^{56}\) Meeting with the group of children in Ntambang, 15 November 2008.
school and learn to be a carpenter, but when Sule and Sali fantasise about their future in a garage, Yaja expresses his wish to drive his car and earn money.\textsuperscript{57}

What is clear is that the young boys want to do ‘men’s jobs’ and the young girls aim for tailoring, the job that is seen as being appropriate for Mbororo women to do. As was shortly mentioned in the fourth chapter, SODELCO used to organise tailoring classes for women. MBOSCUDA also encourages Mbororo women to learn tailoring as part of their women empowerment programme. Many Mbororo still see the trajectory that Rahi envisages for herself as the most appropriate trajectory for women. When Bulo, one of the girls in the children’s group in Old Town, says that a woman can drive a motorcycle, the other children protest vehemently. Umamatu stresses that only Christian women ‘climb on motorcycles’. We then enter into a discussion about an unsuitable activity for women:

\textit{Roos: So what is a job that a woman can never do?}

\textit{Dawda: To drive a taxi.}

\textit{Yusufu: A taxi, a taxi!}

\textit{Bulo: No, women drive taxis!}

\textit{Umamatu: Women are not supposed to drive a car. In my village, even when a woman buys a car, it is somebody who will drive her and not herself.}

\textit{Roos: So why can a woman not drive a car?}

\textit{Aicha: Because she cannot take people from one place to another, because she is a married woman.}

\textit{Roos: But if you’re not yet married?}

\textit{Zarau: The woman will not know all the places in the city and drop people [at their destination] in the same way as the man knows.}

\textit{Roos: What will the men do when they see women drive like that?}

\textit{Bulo: They will not be angry because they know the woman is going somewhere.}

\textit{Umamatu: They will not be angry because they know that she will bring money in the house which will assist all of them.}\textsuperscript{58}

Bulo and Umamatu have a progressive view about gender-relations and labour. As long as a woman contributes to the family income, she is not restricted to do tailoring or tend a shop, like the other girls and the boys propose. As was described in the fifth chapter, Umamatu and Bulo both sell ginger drinks, which makes them quite independent. Their caretakers support their ambulant business, with which the girls receive a sign that it is appropriate for

\textsuperscript{57} Meeting with the group of children in Ntambang, 15 November 2008.

\textsuperscript{58} Meeting with the group of children in Old Town, 26 October 2008.
young girls to have a small business. Umamatu’s caretaker Salamatou also sold foodstuff on the streets when she was a young girl. The fact that these girls have their own ambulant business, that enables them to independently move around in the streets of the city, possibly also influences their ideas about what a grown-up woman can and cannot do. The ten-year old children in Ntambang are not exposed to the same circumstances; they are sent to school. The differences between these children will be discussed in the next paragraph, which deals with children’s interpretations of the rules their parents and society impose on them.

Children’s interpretations of social rules

The two above drawings have been made for the assignment ‘draw good and bad behaviour’. The ten-year old children in Ntambang were not sure what to depict as bad behaviour; they started with their mother beating them. After talking about the assignment, Rahi drew a thief and Sule added fighting with his brothers and sisters. Sule is often beaten by his parents after having fought with his siblings. The ‘good behaviour’ was easier, in which Rahi drew herself praying and learning Arabic. As can be seen in the drawing of Sule, fetching firewood and carrying water are tasks that belong to ‘good behaviour’. We later discuss when their parents are proud of them. They explain that this is the case when they
pass their exams, perform well in the Koranic school, do household chores.\textsuperscript{59} Children are punished if they disobey their parents, if they refuse to carry out a task that is assigned to them, like carrying water or washing their dress. They are usually corporally punished with a cane or by hand. In the focus group discussions, from informal conversations, interviews and observations ‘good behaviour’ of children also comprises to obey parents and seniors, and to be humble in their company. Children are not supposed to watch their seniors into their eyes and when they greet them in public, they ideally kneel down (see also drawing 7). Girls are taught early to wear only wraparound skirts and to wear a veil when they leave the house. Although most of them are not heavily punished when they do not wear a veil, when the years pass it becomes more important. Another important feature of a girl’s appearance is her hair; it should always be braided. Ten-year old Umamatu explains: “If you untie your hair without braiding, in the night the devil will come and braid it for you”. \textsuperscript{60}

Children are taught to say ‘salaam aleikum’ or ‘excuse me’ before entering a house, waiting for permission to enter, with which they show their respect. It is uncommon to see a Mbororo entering a house without announcing his arrival and waiting for an answer. A neighbouring Grassfielder woman from Nkwen marks this behaviour with the words “they overshame!”\textsuperscript{61} She would prefer it if the Mbororo children would enter her house without showing too much humility. To visit houses of people with whom the parents are not so acquainted, is also to be avoided. The children in Ntambang know well in which houses they can eat and in which houses they are not supposed to eat. Most children eat in the house of their aunt, their brothers and sisters. Some also eat in houses of other neighbours, which is condemned by the others. As has been discussed previously, refusing food in the house of a stranger is usually given as example of \textit{pulaaku}, to which we will come back later. All the children know that Sule sometimes goes to places he is not allowed to go, and he eats in houses of many neighbours. The others seem to be more rigid in their choice which houses to visit and where to eat, especially the girls. They explain they do not want to be ashamed; everyone will talk about it and denounce the child’s behaviour, which they want to avoid. Sule tells that he gets beaten when his parents find out he has visited houses he was not allowed to go to.

In Ntambang, it is not difficult to know which children are not behaving the way it should be; there is a lot of social control. Generally, Mbororo children in Ntambang are more supervised than in Old Town. Ntambang is a lot smaller, more orderly and quieter than Old

\textsuperscript{59} Meeting with the group of children in Ntambang, 25 October 2008.
\textsuperscript{60} Short interview with Umamatu, 14 January 2009.
\textsuperscript{61} Informal conversation with a woman from Nkwen, 15 October 2008.
Town. Everyone knows each other and can intervene more easily in their neighbouring children’s lives. The parents can be quite sure their children will pray around the prescribed times because their neighbours will urge the children to do so. The susceptibility of the children for deviant behaviour is considered to be primarily dependent upon the way their parents raise them. However, parents of male children, past the age of sixteen, who display objectionable behaviour past a certain age, are usually judged more mildly.

![Drawing 7. Good behaviour (by Rashida)](image1)
![Drawing 8. Bad behaviour (by Rashida)](image2)

Ntambang seems a peaceful and safe community, where children are protected from ‘bad’ influences and their behaviour is mostly formed in the Mbororo community. However, Ntambang is not an isolated place, and even then, some children display deviant behaviour. At a certain moment, there were thieves in Ntambang who stole mattresses from locations that were apparently well-known to them. They also stole chairs from the community hall that was constructed by MBOSCUDA. One evening, a young man living in Ntambang came back on his motorcycle and saw one of the boys of the quarter moving into the opposite direction on a motorcycle with a pile of chairs on the back. The next day, he was caught by the police. Before the boys were caught, they had stolen five mattresses and chairs. Especially the fact that they were stealing chairs from MBOSCUDA was felt as a great disillusion. It was clear that these boys had not understood that MBOSCUDA is there to help people like them.

Striking was that one of the boys was the sixteen-year old son of a respectable man in the community. The man apparently said that the police should lock his son up for the rest of his
life, which is a rigorous standpoint. Madiya explains that the parents were not to blame for the behaviour of their son. When the new school year started, he refused to go to school, and as he was already sixteen years of age, they could not force him. When children are still young, parents can beat them, but when they are older and they refuse to listen to their parents, there is not much the parents can do. Sometimes they cannot prevent their youthful children from following other pathways than they had envisaged for them. Although in the previous chapter, marriage was already discussed, we will now return to it, to discuss discrepancies between parents’ and children’s expectations and requirements, and the changing power relations between parents and children in the decision-making process.

Marriage or education?

The drawing by Halima shows ‘bad’ behaviour of a girl and boy holding hands. At the right side, the girl and boy no longer hold hands. Furthermore, the girl wears her hair in braids and the drawing could be interpreted in the way that the skirt is intended to be longer than that of the other girl, but the entire girl was drawn bigger, not only her skirt. At a certain age, parents want their children, especially their daughters, to get married. Although MBOSCUDA and other development associations promote the education of girl children, many parents still prefer to approve of a marriage candidate who presents himself when the girl is only fifteen. They do not want to run the risk that their daughter will come home pregnant and puts the family to shame. Furthermore, parents sometimes do not see the added value of education for their girl children, as their future will be to get married, have children and take care of the household and the children. In a theatre play of the youth in
Ntambang, this is represented in the lines of a father whose daughter has just asked his permission to marry a rich man:

If we give this child to this man, who knows, we can change this house we live in to a better house. Let us give her and have money. Since she went to school and come back to the house for this year, what have we benefited from that? You send children to school, spend money on them, what have we benefited from them? She has been in the house now for three years, no? Let’s give her to him.62

Once the father has heard that the prospective marriage partner is a rich man, he directly agrees with the marriage. In his opinion, the schooling of his daughter has not yielded anything; her marriage instead will bring a fair amount of money, because a rich man will bring a substantial dowry. The mother is more reluctant, and complains that she is supposed to be the one who is in charge of finding an appropriate husband for her daughter, not her daughter. However, when she hears the marriage partner has a good job and he has gone to school, she accepts her daughter’s wish. Although wealth is of overriding importance for both parents, there are clear differences between their reactions and wishes; it should be kept in mind that fathers and mothers have their different ideas and interests. In another play, the youth in Ntambang displayed a clear discrepancy between the attitude of a young man and the expectations of his mother, played by Hawau, about his marriage:

Hawau (mother): It is better for you to get married now.
Jafaru (son): Mother, don’t bother me with this issue of marriage right now. Who told you that I can just come here, marry and take the wife abroad?
Hawau: You should get married and leave the wife here.
Jafaru: I’m still small, and besides, I have not earned enough money to marry a wife. I need to build a storey building and then buy a car. Do you know what it costs, a storey building. I have not seen any girl to get married to.
Hawau: Girls are full everywhere.
Jafaru: But I will not just get married to anyone. I cannot get married to a girl and you send her go and buy maggi or buy bread, and she will not know it. Do you know maggi and bread? (All laughing) Aha, you don’t know. I’m the one to look for my wife.
Hawau: God should give you long life.
Souibou (father): Times have changed; everyone wants to look for a wife himself.

Hawau: I’ve discussed so much with this boy, thinking he was going to change his mind but he did not change his mind.  

What is interesting in this case is that the son is living abroad; the youth have given him a large degree of independence. All these plays can be interpreted as a projection of the players’ ideas, or even their wishes, about marriage. The parents sigh that the present-day youth do not want to listen to good advice anymore, but they accept it that their children make their own plans. It also seems as a reflection of reality; there are not many youngsters in town who step into a marriage arranged by their parents. An example of this is the marriage of Iliasu and Rukaya, described in the previous chapter. It is far more common to call upon a friend as intermediary than to have the marriage arranged by one’s mother.

Many parents in the city do not choose the partner for their children anymore, but they still do have a say in it. In most cases, the children will renounce the marriage if their parents do not accept it. In the past, the mothers had knowledge about suitable marriage partners, who were the ones of a good family and with a lot of cattle. However, presently there are other criteria to which parents might attach less value and about which they have less knowledge than their children, like the meaning of one’s level of education. The ‘substance’ of wealth has changed; cattle has been replaced by money. In the past, family marriages were common, one reason being the cattle remaining within the family (cf. de Bruijn & van Dijk 1995: 382-385). Nowadays, the size of one’s herd is not the main indicator of one’s wealth anymore, which has changed the process of finding a right partner. The diminished importance of cattle is an expression as well as a cause for changes in the Mbororo community in Bamenda. The role of cattle and ‘the village’ in children’s urban lives will be discussed in the following section.

**Importance of cattle**

Sali: There were many cattle in the past but now they are finished.

*Roos: Why?*

Fadi: Because they sell it to get money.

Rahi: They sell it to take care of us.

Sule: They steal and they sell. All is finished.

*Roos: Who steals it?*

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63 Meeting with the group of youth in Ntambang, 22 November 2008.
Several kids: Both Christians and Muslims steal the animals. Everybody.

Roos: _Me too I am stealing?_

Kids: No! (Laughing)

Roos: _Why?_

Sule: Because you have not gone there.

Roos: _But you can steal a cow Sule?_

Sule: No.

Roos: _Why?_

Sule: I will not do it because the animals will hit us. One time a cow that was having a small calve hit me. I only discovered myself in the water.\(^{64}\)

Like adult Mbororo, the children in the above fragment give different reasons for the diminishing of the livestock of Mbororo. Rahi, the oldest and most serious child, mentions that parents sell cattle in order to take care of their children. Sule, who is always trying to act tough, starts about theft. The children speak a lot about thieves and robberies, something that is clearly on their minds, and to which I will come back below. Another issue that becomes clear from this fragment is the children’s lack of knowledge of the cattle, voiced by Sule. The large majority of the grandparents and most of the parents in Bamenda, roughly all Mbororo above thirty years of age, have grown up with cattle. The same counts for the majority of the younger Mbororo who did not grow up in the city and came only recently to find work. They all express their wish to pass on their ‘culture’ to their children, including some basic knowledge about cattle rearing like milking the cattle. To achieve this, Mbororo hope to send their children to their grandparents during school holidays or for a longer period. For some children, learning about cattle rearing is less successful than for others. Sule, for all, has not appreciated it:

Roos: _So who likes to move around with cattle?_

Several children: Me, me, me!

Sule: For me, no. I went only once and then I came back with tattered dresses. I will not try it again. Cattle enters the farm and if you are not careful farmers will cut you. I did it only once. I will not do it again.\(^{65}\)

The others are clearly enthusiastic about the idea of moving with cattle. Their reference to cattle can also be seen when the children are assigned to bring an object that is important to

\(^{64}\) Meeting with the group of children in Ntambang, 22 November 2008.

\(^{65}\) Ibid.
them. Sali brings his rubber gun and Sule his history notebook. Three of the girls bring a calabash, one for turning milk into butter, one for drinking porridge and one for carrying milk. It appears that on visits to the village, most of them have witnessed their grandmothers making butter. Although I have never seen anyone drinking cow milk in Ntambang, the children fervently talked about how much they like it. It is well possible that the mothers of the girls suggested to them to bring a calabash, to show me, the white researcher, something about their culture. If so, the calabashes can be seen as objects that are deemed to be important in the representation of a Mbororo girl, at least in Ntambang.

The majority of the parents of the children in Ntambang still own cattle and the children relate to cattle as part of their life, albeit a minor part. In Old Town, this is less obvious. Umamatu, the only child who draws a cow when given the assignment ‘draw your favourite animal’ is being laughed at when she shows her cow with a heavy udder. She is also the only one in Old Town who does not only draw a house but also a cow when asked what she would do with a lot of money (see drawing 10). Like some other children in her group, Umamatu is not raised by her real parents; she is raised by her mother’s sister. Her parents and siblings live in Binka, a village close to Nkambe. For the assignment ‘draw your family’, Umamatu did not draw the people with whom she lives, but her family members in Binka (see drawing 11 and 12). These drawings, but also her behaviour and her words, indicate that Umamatu presently feels more attached to her family in Binka than to her caretakers in town. She longs for her past life in the village, perhaps because, as yet, her circumstances do not provide a safe basis for attachment to the people and places in Bamenda.
So whereas some children are sent to the village to learn about the culture, other children are sent to the city. Although most agree that the ‘true’ Mbororo values are better preserved in the village and children who grow up there have better manners, the future for their children is in town. Values are of course conditional and changing over time, but people do feel that their values are being affected by influences in the city. They are prepared to put up with these influences, like the wider prevalence of alcohol and the existence of ‘bad’ role models as prostitutes and thieves. Of course, the increased interaction with a variety of people, the widespread availability of consumer goods and a more open flow of ideas in the city cause changes in people’s minds. One of the most influential driving factors in this is formal education of the children.

**Importance of formal education**

Back in the days, you started to teach your son when he was around five years old how to rear the cattle, like removing ticks and tying the young ones so they cannot suck milk from their mothers. Between his fifth and tenth year, you sent him to the Koranic school where he learned how to pray and to recite Koranic texts. Around twenty years old, he married and you gave him some cows so he could start his own herd. Nowadays, when a child is five years old, he goes to school. You do not give your child cattle, but you give him education, which will be like his cattle.  

Ardo Jaja catches very well the changed value of cattle in the life of the Mbororo, and emphasises the importance of education in the world of today. He is not the only one. Asked what they would do if they could live their life again, many adult Mbororo answered me that they would go to school. For some people, it is especially painful that they have not followed education up to a certain level. Iliasu, the taxi driver in Old Town whose marriage was discussed in the previous chapter, always consults his friend Isufu when he has to deal with letters or decrees. Sometimes Isufu jokes with Iliasu and refuses to read the letter to him, saying he should have gone to school. For Isufu, these are moments to show his educational superiority. Iliasu might have a job as taxi driver, Isufu has gone to school. Issa, a forty-year old man, is particularly sad that his family did not allow him to further his education:

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66 Interview with Ardo Jaja, 26 December 2008.
From my seventh to my tenth I went to school, but in class three I refused. My grandfather said: “If you stay in school, all you learn is how to be a thief”. My grandfather did not even talk Pidgin, he only knew Fulfulde. I am not educated, the thing hurts me now. Sometimes I want to knock my head on the ground; all I know is how to work with cows.\(^{67}\)

The way forward is school; reaching a high level of education is seen as improving children’s chances for a better future, so they do not have to suffer like their parents. School is expected to cause social mobility (de Valk & Crul 2008: 63; Verhoef & Morelli 2007: 39; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 1999), and it seems as if the first educated Mbororo do indeed have better chances to find a job than their uneducated peers. Many people do not only regret their low level of education, but also ascribe abuses and suffering of some of their fellow Mbororo to their ignorance. According to one man, the ignorance of some Mbororo makes that “anyone can just go to the bush, threaten the Mbororo and even lock them up”.\(^{68}\)

As mentioned in chapter five, Madiya was the first girl from her family to go to school. Her uncle encouraged her to further her education, but she let herself be convinced by her mother to marry and forget about her formal education. One day, standing in her courtyard, Madiya remarks that in another life, she would like to be a man, “because they have more rights than women”.\(^{69}\) She is determined to see her own daughters graduating from high school and maybe even university. Like many other children in Ntambang, Madiya’s children receive financial support of MBOSCUDA for their education. Unlike some others, Mbororo like Madiya can afford to send all their children to school because of their financial and social position. Except for the resources, children also need their parents’ conviction that education is a good investment. Fadimatu, a fifteen-year old girl, explained to me that her grandmother would hide at times when officials would come to convince people to send their children to school: “She escapes to the bush and runs and starts dancing, you know, that school is not made for us, they have to marry, that is what they know”.\(^{70}\) Many Mbororo feel that they as a group have started to see the importance of education late in comparison to the other groups around them. As Biba, an old woman in Sabga, puts it: “It is school that holds everything in the world now. In those days, people were just in the bush”.\(^{71}\) Mbororo are haunted by the feeling that they are considered not only as being less educated, but also as less civilised, as described by Madiya:

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\(^{67}\) Interview with Issa, 22 January 2009.
\(^{68}\) Interview with Hamidou Joro, 10 October 2008.
\(^{69}\) Conversation with Madiya, 30 October 2008.
\(^{70}\) Interview with Fadimatu, 27 September 2008.
\(^{71}\) Interview with Biba, 28 September 2008.
When the Germans came, they wanted to work together with the Mbororo because they saw the Mbororo are rich, they have many cattle, but the Mbororo did not understand it, they were afraid to send their children to school. So instead the Germans started dealing with the Grassfielders and sent their children to school. So now the Grassfielders say that we are illiterate, that we do not know anything. We are considered the lowest but we were the highest before.72

The much-discussed feeling of superiority of Fulbe groups, as described by for instance Dupire (1970) and Burnham (1996) filters through this last quote. At the same time, this quote makes clear that the majority of Grassfielders indeed has an educational advantage over the Mbororo. A brother of Isufu says the following about this: “The natives think we are inferior. Also the Hausas think that we are inferior, but it is not true. Many of us have had education, we are not like that anymore. We are civilised now!”.73 Photograph 15 shows Biba, sitting on her bed with her grandson, who is in his school uniform. It is not difficult to imagine that his youth is completely different from his grandmother’s youth.

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72 Conversation with Madiya, 10 October 2008.
As was discussed above, the amount of cattle of some Mbororo is diminishing, which is one of the reasons that they are less wealthy than before. However, the symbolic value of the cattle has also decreased, as was described by Ardo Jaja in the opening quote of this paragraph. The Mbororo in the city who still own cattle in their home village obviously have an advantage over others who do not have this resource on which they can fall back in times of need, but in an urban environment education seems to be more important than cattle. Education is still becoming more important, but as described in chapter two, education also has an altering influence on children’s mindset, which is not always wanted by their parents. At school, another set of values and norms is inculcated in the children, in this case largely a Christian, Grassfielder set.

**Grassfielders, Hausa and pulaaku**

Although there has always been interaction with other people, interaction increased substantially when Mbororo moved to the city and sent their children to school. The interaction of their children with others is also of another level, as the majority of the teachers, who are role models for their pupils, are non-Mbororo. When discussing with the younger children, they are aware of the Christians and the prejudices that exist between the two groups. Children sing Christian songs in school, which is not always appreciated by their parents. When the children in Ntambang sing a Christian song in the focus group session, we discuss the issue. Some of them shout that they do not like Jesus and that Christians honour the wrong God. Rahi vehemently contradicts this and shouts that Jesus is also a prophet for Muslims. In many sessions with the children and youth in Old Town and Ntambang the importance of Islam in their life-worlds is recurrent. For instance, at the beginning of a session in Ntambang, Sule plays with small cards which he has brought, with a ‘Guinness’ sign on it. When I enquire about it, Sali accuses Sule of drinking alcohol:

*Roos: Guinness, Guinness, Guinness, What do you want to do with this?*

*Sali: He wants to go and drink mimbo [Pidgin for alcoholic drinks].

*Roos: leie!*

*Sule: I want to play with them.

*Sali: No he wants to go and drink mimbo with them.

*Sule: No this one he wanted to beat me yesterday and take them. This one you see. This rat like this.*
Sali: If you joke I will take them right here.
Sule: I swear, take them! […]
Roox: So who gave you this?
Fadi: He went and picked them up at Guinness
Sule: Fadi she is lying. It is a lie.
Sali: They went and drank mimbo and were given this, so that they will bring it to drink again.
Sule: You see this your lies with your small head like a cassava, your teeth like a broken bottle! You people are looking for problems.
Roox: So Sule where did you get them?
Sule: They gave us in school.⁷⁴

Sule is clearly angry at Sali’s accusations, which does not only derive from the fact that Sali accuses him of drinking alcohol. As can be seen in this fragment but became clearer from the rest of the conversation, Sali also wanted to have the cards. Sule accuses Sali of having wanted to beat him to seize the cards. This might be exactly the reason why Sule brought them to the session; to wave them in front of Sali’s eyes to make him more jealous. Religious reasons are not the only reason why children – or adults, for that matter – get angry at accusations of one another.

However, from most conversations with Mbororo of different generations, it has become clear that the majority expresses their differences on religious grounds. Mbororo are different from Grassfielders because they are Muslim. Connections with the Hausa are emphasised, and in certain contexts Mbororo equal themselves with the Hausa. To a large extent, answers about these issues depend on the context and on the way the question is posed. The first few times that I meet Zeinabu, the female mallam, she explains that Mbororo and Hausa are almost the same. To her, the only difference is that the Hausa do not have pulaaku, younger Hausa siblings fight more easily with their older siblings, and they eat in all kind of places. Just after she had heard that her brother in Yaoundé was attacked by two Hausa youngsters, who stole his phone and stabbed him with a knife, she remarked that the Hausa are very violent people, more violent than other groups in Cameroon.

Once inside Ntambang, influences of non-Mbororo are practically absent, which is appreciated by most inhabitants of the quarter. Parents in Old Town also have their strategies to reduce unwanted ‘outside’ influences of other children. Children of some families are ordered to come home directly after school, and they are not allowed to play

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⁷⁴ Meeting with the group of children in Ntambang, 1 November 2008.
with other children outside their compound. Some of the children are only allowed to play with other Muslim children, while others live so closely to Christian families that interaction is unavoidable and even welcomed. Commonly, interaction with Grassfielders is not necessarily seen as a bad influence; susceptibility of the children is considered to be primarily dependent upon the way their parents raise them.

In Ntambang, children get a different idea of non-Mbororo than in Old Town, because they are surrounded by almost only other Mbororo. It is widely known that ‘business people’ live in Ntambang, which makes the quarter a target for thieves. The sons of the quarter who stole some mattresses pale by the thieves who robbed Alhaji of 200,000 FCFA and a large amount of clothes and shoes. Several times during the group sessions, the children in Ntambang spontaneously start about these robberies, which make them feel less secure:

Sa’a: Thieves met Alhaji. […]
Rahi: They will see how God will punish them. They destroyed the Koran looking for money. They locked them in a room and took the keys. They said that they would come back and they came back.
Sule: They were chased with his gun. […]
Roos: Were the thieves Mbororo?
Rahi: No they were not Mbororo but Christians.
Sule: You know these people who come for feast and see people’s houses. They monitor both the rich and the poor. Parents said they will stop them this year from entering people’s houses. If they see any Christian they will ask him where he is going.75

Although the children still have the details in mind of the case of their two criminal neighbours, the last remark in this quote is something that could well influence these children’s ideas about Christians. Around the time of the Muslim celebrations, any unknown non-Mbororo in the quarter might be a thief. At that time, the children, and especially Sule, will probably be too busy eating food in different houses. This brings us back to the issue of pulaku.

In chapter three, pulaku is described as a flexible concept that should not be essentialised and does not mean ‘the moral code of the Fulbe’ in all Fulbe communities throughout the Sahel. What does it mean to Mbororo youth and children in Bamenda? Sometimes my informants, my research assistant and I talked about pulaku as something that one can ‘have’, ‘do’ or ‘make’. Davis (1995) and Pelican (2008) also described ‘making pulaku’. When

75 Meeting with the group of children in Ntambang, 29 November 2008.
having discussions about *pulaaku* in Bamenda, it seemed as if I could never really grasp its significance. There is general agreement that Mbororo in the city have, do or make less *pulaaku* than the ones in villages or in the hills, and older people have more than the young ones. Hamidu, a middle-aged traditional medicine seller in Old Town, told me: “If you make *pulaaku* here, you are dead”.76 Before I could ask him what he meant, he took off. A fifteen-year old girl in Sabga explained that she did not have *pulaaku*; she presumed laughingly that her parents had “done away with it”.77 As shown in the previous chapter, Ahmadou, the marabout from Burkina, is of the opinion that the Mbororo in Bamenda do not know *pulaaku*. Yet some others assured me that once *pulaaku* is in one’s blood, it cannot disappear. When I discussed my confusion about the term *pulaaku* with Djibril, a young man from Wum and asked whether he ‘had’ or ‘owned’ it, he smiled at me and then said, rather seriously: “I have twenty percent *pulaaku*”.78 He added that he never had a hundred percent. When I enquired about his parents, he answered: “My parents have more than me”. Abdou, a sixteen-year old youngster from Ntambang, explained me that he does not ‘make’ *pulaaku* in town.79 When he travels to the village of his parents or another place he is not so acquainted with, he makes *pulaaku* for a few days, until he sees how people interact with each other and adjusts to it. The children in the focus group in Ntambang have their own ways of questioning each other about *pulaaku*:

*Rukayatu*: *Halidou do you have pulaaku or not?*

*Sule*: *Halidou is not having.*

*Halidou*: *I am.*

*Sule*: you are lying, lying, lying.

*Sule*: Face this way and tell me. Last time, where did the gari [cassava product] and rice go to?

*Halidou*: In my stomach.

*Fadi*: Where did the rice, cocoyam and potatoes go to?

*Halidou*: In my stomach.

*Sule*: And then you say you have *pulaaku*? You are lying.

*Halidou*: I do *pulaaku* not always. Even you Sule you do not always do it. Even me.80

Whereas Djibril explains he has only a small percentage of *pulaaku* left, Abdou describes *pulaaku* as some kind of ‘asset’ that he can use for his convenience. Abdou adds that the

76 Conversation with Hamidu, 12 December 2008.
77 Interview with Fadimatu, 27 September 2008.
78 Conversation with Djibril, 6 January 2009.
79 Interview with Abdou, 16 October 2008.
80 Meeting with the group of children in Ntambang, 22 November 2008.
degree of *pulaaku* that someone has, depends on his surroundings. He argues that children who go to school interact with non-Mbororo children and therefore lose some or all of their *pulaaku*. The examples that have been given above give the impression that *pulaaku* can be negotiated. Whether or not to take into account one’s own *pulaaku* almost seems to be an individual choice for the children and youth presented here. This seems to contradict the accounts of mostly older Mbororo, who assure that once someone is born with *pulaaku*, he cannot lose it. In the next chapter, the concluding chapter of this thesis, I will return to this ostensible discrepancy.

**Conclusions**

First of all, this chapter has given an insight into the directions that children and youth want to take in the city. These projected itineraries are more or less in line with their parents’ expectations, although the ideas of some of them conflict with general Mbororo ideas. Economic activities of women are still restricted to specific jobs, like tailoring. The achievements of women like Madiya encourage the girls to develop their capacities and to dream of reaching beyond the common female pathway of getting married and taking care of children. At the same time, girls like Rahi pursue this much-travelled itinerary, convinced that it will lead to heaven. Parents want their children to be good Muslims, a wish they sometimes translate by preventing their children as much as possible to interact with other children after school.

Mbororo parents search for a place in an urban society that is not yet theirs, which can be seen for instance in the way the parents in Ntambang deal with the robberies in their quarter. During Muslim celebrations, many people visit the quarter, but the visiting Christians will be scrutinised to prevent ‘wrong people’ from entering into the quarter. By doing this, Mbororo willingly distance their own group from other groups in the environment. Although this might not be the opinion of the majority of the inhabitants of Ntambang, the fact that children talk about it indicates that certain ideas about ‘strangers’ are transferred there. However, the children, youth and adults in Ntambang are all aware that Christians are not the only thieves around; from their midst, some youngsters were also doing petty crime. These disobedient youngsters had dropped out of school, against the wish of their parents, and they sought other ways to fulfil their wishes.
School has caused a major change for the Mbororo community in Bamenda. However, up to the present, going to school is mostly privileged to urban Mbororo children; in the rural areas, there are still many Mbororo families in which children are not sent to school. Formal education brings tensions, which has been illustrated with the example of the Christian songs that are taught in school, and are not received with enthusiasm in the Islamic home environment. Children sometimes surpass their parents in their education and have more knowledge of certain issues. In a way, this is what parents want, as education is commonly deemed to bring more opportunities for a successful future in town. Like the children, the parents emphasise the civilised-ness of urban, educated Mbororo, contrasting themselves with the previous generations who only had knowledge of cattle rearing in the bush. The past of cattle rearing is visible and the importance of cattle is arguably still alive. Although parents still express their wish of educating their children about cattle rearing, for practical reasons, their children will learn only the basics of it. Some children are not even interested in it, as was shown by Sule. Their parents also see their future in town.

However, also in the city, some parents encourage their girl children to marry once a suitable marriage partner has presented himself. For the parents, this is also a way of securing the future; if the future husband is wealthy and well-mannered, their daughter is in good hands. The youngsters in Ntambang expect more of life than marriage they want to pursue their studies once they have finished high school. It remains to be seen whether this is only their wish or whether they can create the right opportunities to further their education. Of course, their ability to create these opportunities does not only depend on them; their environment also determines their space of manoeuvre. In the next and last chapter, this dialectical relationship will be elaborated upon, forming part of the general conclusions of the thesis.
8. Conclusions

To wind up, I will recapitulate the main findings of the research and formulate an answer to the leading question of this thesis: In which ways do several generations of migrated Mbororo find and create a place for themselves in the urban space in Bamenda, Cameroon? Firstly, I will describe the field by means of a metaphor, then I will shortly reiterate the main concepts, the structure-agency debate and the concept of social navigation. Then I recapitulate the main issues that are of importance for the Mbororo in Bamenda in their urban lives. Finally, I will make some concluding remarks and give suggestions for further research.

An old woman in the urban space

One day, when I am travelling in a shared taxi, a Mbororo man helps an old Mbororo woman in the taxi, tells the taxi driver where she has to get out and gives him the money for her trip. She carries a suitcase with her, which she clasps between her legs. When we take off, the man raises his hand as a greeting and turns around. The old woman looks out of the window. When we arrive at the junction where she has to get out, the taxi driver stops and says something to the old woman. She does not understand his words, but she understands that this is her stop. She gets out of the car, we drive on, and when I look through the back window, I see her with her suitcase in her hand nervously looking around her and subsequently rushing across the street. She has reached the other side of the street, but where is she going, and does she know it herself? And, does she want to go there?

This incident can be seen as a metaphor for what happens in the urban space with the present-day Mbororo society, and it is a beginning of an answer to the central question about the different ways in which several generations of migrated Mbororo find and create a place for themselves in Bamenda. The old woman then symbolises the older generations of the Mbororo community, that are ambivalent in the city; there are many things they do not understand, the familiar has become faint, and is replaced by something new. Older Mbororo generations in town display a visible uneasiness and uncertainty of movement in the urban. They are not very well able to navigate, and some are even afraid to do so, as it is

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81 Notes, 23 November 2008.
strange and new for them. However, they have chosen to be there, because the new generation has a future there.

The Mbororo society in the urban space is being directed and guided by the new generation, because it is somewhat lost in this new world. The new generation knows how to navigate in town and guide the old generation, but it does this only to a certain extent. The new urban generation has the time to explain the highly necessary, and then it proceeds in its own direction. The man could have also stepped into the taxi, but he had his own reasons not to do so. Maybe he did not have enough time and he had to go back to his work, maybe he was of the opinion that the old woman was responsible for taking care of herself, maybe the old woman had convinced him that she was doing fine and she did not need help. Different generations mutually negotiate their ways and directions. The older generation is not as flexible and fast, but will also find its way, eventually. To what extent it is problematic that the older generation navigates its own way through town, and has more difficulties with finding ways of belonging than the younger generation?

The older and younger Mbororo generations do not only negotiate their way mutually, but also with other groups in the city. To be able to do this, specific knowledge is needed. The young man used another language than his mother tongue to explain the taxi driver where the old woman had to get out. Because he possessed the knowledge, he defined her movement; he decided, together with the taxi driver, where her movement should stop. He arranged this for her own sake, and she fully accepted this. At that moment, did she have another choice, there, where she was? In which directions does the Mbororo society evolve? The young man probably has an image of where the old woman is going to. He might know the junction, he might even know the holes in the road, the difficulties that lay ahead before she reaches her aim. Conversely, she might have a vague image in her mind, or a clear relation; maybe she will meet her daughter there. On the road to where she is heading, she develops different images and perceptions of the city than her son does; because of her different position and her ignorance, she might experience the city as a much more threatening place than her son.

The city offers people all sorts of changes and pathways, but it also limits their movement. One needs specific knowledge to navigate town successfully, different knowledge from what is needed in the bush. The encounter of these different sorts of knowledge in the urban space lays a foundation for the different directions Mbororo people are able and willing to take.
Existing views on migration, ethnic identity and belonging in the urban

The discussion about the Mbororo in Bamenda can be held in different ways. A common way is to study and emphasise ethnic differences between the Mbororo and other groups. The Mbororo can partly be seen as a Fulbe group. Throughout time, the Fulbe have been approached as being different from other groups, not often without insinuating a superiority to other African groups. In the existing literature *pulaaku*, cattle and Islam have often been mentioned as Fulbe identity markers. This thesis does not completely deviate from this literature, as it has distinguished the same identity markers for Mbororo in Bamenda.

These concepts, however, are not sufficient to describe what happens with the Mbororo who have moved to Bamenda. Many problems they encounter in their new life in the city, are also experienced by other migrant groups. Seen from this perspective, most of the possibilities and difficulties that Mbororo encounter in the process of finding a place in the urban area do not necessarily demand an ethnic description, but are common phenomena in the migration process. The phenomena that were given attention in this thesis, take place at the level of interpersonal and intergenerational relations. In this context of migration, intergenerational differences are subjected to pressure. In Bamenda, we have considered intergenerational differences of the Mbororo in the encounter with the existing structures and social rules of the place to which they have migrated, and the more structural situation of belonging to another ethnic group than the majority in the larger society.

These existing structures and social rules are not fixed structures, but also subjected to change, as will be emphasised again in the next paragraph. In the urban space, to which they have migrated, they have to deal with a constantly changing context, complicated by processes of globalisation. One of the consequences of globalisation is the increasing interconnectedness of people and places, which is especially manifest in the urban space. They are not only moving in an urban context, but also in a global context. A viable way of taking all these factors into consideration and studying how individuals find their ways and find a place in between these factors, is the concept of social navigation that is linked to the perspective of agency.

Structure, agency and social navigation

The concept of social navigation, developed by Vigh (2006), came up as a result of the structure-agency debate of the late eighties, nineties and into the twenty-first century. In
chapter two, agency was defined as reflexive, purposeful acting, directed towards a changing of the predicament, structure or condition that was perceived in the first instance. It was described as referring to the ability of individuals or groups to negotiate about their perceived social and physical space. An important condition of agency is that it is made possible and is at the same time limited by social structures. The position of children and youth in reproducing the social structures and rules of their society has been a main focus in this thesis. The society of the Mbororo is made up of the Mbororo community and the larger community, which often have conflicting social rules. Both fields are rapidly changing, and to a certain extent, individual Mbororo can choose which social rules they reproduce and which ones they leave behind. This is only to a certain extent, because the social structures of their community limit their space for manoeuvre. Some of the Mbororo discussed in this thesis displayed deviant behaviour, but like the others, they all relate to the structures of the Mbororo community. I will come back to this in the next paragraph.

The agency perspective has revealed the ways in which young and adult Mbororo experience and act upon the continuously changing world in which they live. As was mentioned in chapter two, social navigation goes further than agency; it covers the ways in which actors act in relation to each other, their social structures, and in relation to the complex interaction between agents, their environment and events. The concept of social navigation has proved helpful in considering the movements and experiences of the Mbororo in the urban landscape. It is especially suitable for rapidly changing situations, where instability and social flux are part and parcel of the social structure. This is the case in the lives of the Mbororo in Bamenda, who, as migrants in the urban area, move around in a space in which different sets of social rules apply for different situations, events and actors. We will now look into the most important fields that are navigated by different Mbororo generations in Bamenda.

Social navigation of different Mbororo generations in Bamenda

We have seen that many factors determine the lives of Mbororo in the urban space. In this paragraph, I will describe these factors. Some of these factors are structural factors, others are part of a relation and of interconnectedness between people, goods and ideas and ideologies. As was explained in the discussion of the concept of social navigation, not only social actors, but also structural factors are subject to change. Especially in an environment in which circumstances are rapidly changing, it is unclear what to cling on to and whom to relate to.
The Mbororo in Bamenda find themselves in a rapidly changing social field; they have only recently come from the rural areas to the city.

Rephrasing Mbororo identity

One of the continuities in the lives of the Mbororo who have moved to town is the importance of cattle for the adults, but the children who were born in town also still have themselves photographed with cows. Although they do not live with cattle, it remains important in children’s representations. Ideas about the value of cattle are transmitted to children. Many Mbororo in town talk about the importance of transmitting knowledge about cattle rearing to the children. They express their wish to send their children to their natal village during school holidays, and some of them indeed do so. Some families still have cattle and sell a cow when they are in trouble. For them, their cattle is still a resource, like a savings account. However, more and more, cattle has only a symbolic value. During school holidays, some knowledge can be passed on to children who visit their grandparents or uncles in the village, but they will not learn everything that has to be known in order to be a good cattle herder. These children and their parents will not return to a life with cattle, their future is in town. The reality of this group of Mbororo is that something of the ‘old way’ of life is getting lost. Instead, formal education is deemed very important. It is seen as the way forward and the way upward in an urban society.

It is not the cows themselves that are of concern here, but rather their symbolic value for the Mbororo. Even in the city, cattle remains a part of the identity of some Mbororo. It remains to be seen whether this will still be the case for, say, five future generations. An organisation like MBOSCUDA stimulates this kind of expressions of ethnic identity. If Mbororo will keep on relating to their ideologies and keep on uniting behind this organisation, new Mbororo identities will be formed, based on their perceptions of that which makes a Mbororo a real Mbororo. It is also well possible that MBOSCUDA loses its legitimacy because of internal problems, which remains to be seen, as has been described in chapter four. In any case, the ingredients for clinging onto a renewed ‘traditional’ Mbororo identity are plentifully present; uncertain, constantly changing circumstances, being a minority group in a big city, migrants with a shared background, Muslims in a Christian environment, a government that reinforces ethnic differences, a history of being different, and all of this in an increasingly complex globalised urban space in which traditional frameworks are no longer meaningful for everyone.
The choice of agents to determine what they think is best to do, is determined by several factors. For the Mbororo, one of these factors that seems important is *pulaaku*. The extent to which *pulaaku* is being seen as part of Mbororo identity determines what an individual Mbororo defines as the right action or behaviour, which is linked to agency. One’s perception of how he can best live, is determined by the social rules or one’s values and norms, which, following many Mbororo and social scientists, is closely interrelated with *pulaaku*. People will act *pulaaku*, which at the same time is formative for people’s identity. For instance, some Mbororo who feel that they have *pulaaku*, find themselves superior to others who do not have *pulaaku*.

As was discussed in chapter seven, a young Mbororo smilingly says he only has twenty percent *pulaaku* left. The youngsters do emphasise its importance, but at the same time they claim they do not have it anymore, because times have changed. They may find identification with the generation of their parents of less importance, which has offered them possibilities for identification with others. Perhaps they identify easier and more readily with other groups and places in the urban space. However, older and younger Mbororo also describe *pulaaku* as an internal quality of Mbororo, saying that once one has *pulaaku*, it cannot be lost. These differences can be combined by considering *pulaaku* at the same time as being part of structure and being part of agency. *Pulaaku* is structural as part of the Mbororo group identity, but it is at the same time a dynamic quality that is changing under influence of the urban. At the same time, individuals can feel they have lost *pulaaku* and that Mbororo can never lose their *pulaaku*.

*Different ways of relating*

Individuals react in different ways to these circumstances. In chapter six and seven, we have seen that especially older, but also younger Mbororo fall back on a relatively simplified classification of the world, in which a woman marries, gets children and takes care of the household, and her husband takes care of the income. In this world, some behaviour brings individuals to heaven after their death, other behaviour brings them to hell. In chapter six, we have also seen that, especially in the city, some young Mbororo do not seem to take notice of these issues, and act as if they were not worried about heaven and hell. This very visible group of youth celebrates life in town; they drink, party and have an active sexual life, activities that are not uncommon for youngsters all around the world. However, these youngsters still move within the framework of being Mbororo. For instance, the girls keep on
wearing the same clothes as other Mbororo women, and do not change to tight jeans or short skirts. They do not actively intermingle with other ethnic or social groups. They might want to reject their parents’ version of Mbororo-ness, but they do not embrace Grassfielder appearances, customs or languages. They remain Mbororo, but they choose their own form of being Mbororo. However, it might well be that most of them eventually choose for a life in which their behaviour resembles more the behaviour that is seen as common and ‘correct’ Mbororo behaviour. Their behaviour also belongs to the phase of youth in general, exploring the boundaries of society. In any case, they will bring changes, even if they marry and move to another place, which will be interwoven with the education of their children.

In a way, the young men who come to town, find a job, follow Islam and marry a wife from the village might show more specifically what it means to be a Mbororo in Bamenda. They, more than the partying Mbororo, can be considered agents of change; they are the ones who are actively creating a new Mbororo identity, trying to find meaningful ways of relating and living in the urban, interweaving different mindsets. For some of them, just like is the case with some minorities in Western countries, Islam seems to become a more important identity marker than for their parents. Islam can give people grip in the city that brings confusion; Mbororo are surrounded by Christians and others who drink, interact loosely with each other and wear tight-fitting pants. In some circumstances, Mbororo link up to Hausa, but in other cases they do not consider themselves as being equal. In light of their religious similarities, the Mbororo might take over some of the Hausa practices. Hausa music videos are already popular among Mbororo and Hausa alike, and this similar taste could extend further into other fields.

Connecting to the urban space

By marrying a young woman from a village and bringing her to the city, young men continue the process of the second generation migrants. Time and again, ideas and values from the village are implanted in the city, and all the individuals concerned have their own ways of dealing with these issues. Some of them do not make it in town; if a man cannot raise enough income, a wife can decide to go back to the village, with or without their offspring. This also has to do with individuals’ financial status and their ability to connect with people within and outside the city. Some have a powerful network because they come from a wealthy family, and they can easily link up to members of their own or of a related wealthy family. Others cleverly make use of new networks and link up to people and
institutions that are a viable choice only in the city. The urban space offers people all sorts of chances, but also works restricting. For people who do not have the knowledge to move around, the city can be even more restrictive than for people who have access to new forms of knowledge.

One of these forms of knowledge is formal education, which was described in chapter seven as playing a large role in the changes in the Mbororo community. Children acquire knowledge their parents do not have; for instance, they learn to speak English, they have subjects as history, biology and geography of which their parents have no idea. Also, through their interaction with other children in school, they learn about the dominant customs and ideas of the communities among which they find themselves, in a relatively short time and limited space. The parents will not always be pleased with this, but most of them have a fairly acquiescent attitude; with the move to town, some things unavoidably get lost.

As was mentioned in the introduction, an extreme case of losses which has remained underexposed, is the disappearance of some Mbororo in the urban space, the individuals who no longer relate to their environment as being Mbororo. They dissolve, so to speak, and they would be an interesting group to study, although it has to be noted that they are difficult to find and do not exist as a group. However, most Mbororo, also the individuals and families who live dispersed throughout the city, continue to relate to their environment as being Mbororo and mainly interact with other Mbororo. Like is the case with other groups, good relations with the family are important, and if one wants to dispose of one’s Mbororo-ness, it is almost imperative to break with one’s family. Only a few Mbororo want that.

Another extreme answer to the urban is the exact opposite of this; the move away from the inner city to the Mbororo quarter of Ntambang, uphill, where Mbororo amongst each other can live a relatively secluded life, somewhat away from other ethnic groups. Although they live close by, and interaction with other groups has actually never been absent from the lives of Mbororo, in the past and the present. In Ntambang they can regulate that interaction somewhat more, and, moreover, they can better watch their children. In Old Town this level of supervision is almost unimaginable; children run around in the small alleys and do all sorts of things of which their parents have no knowledge. Just like parents cannot fully control the behaviour of their children, they cannot fully control their children’s dreams and thoughts, which are also influenced by their daily experiences in the urban space.
Infinite processes

In this thesis, I have examined how the city has become engrained in the lives of different generations of Mbororo and how they have become part of the city. I have also discussed how different generations of Mbororo deal with their life in the city and which ideas form the basis of their behaviour in the city. The Mbororo children in Bamenda can be seen as vessels that reproduce the social structure of their parents, but they are at the same time finding their way and creating their own place, in the Mbororo community as well as in the larger society. They relate in different ways than their parents to people and ideas. Living in town has changed the ways of interaction between young and old.

Some issues need further research, like the processes that migrant children in Africa go through. Seen from a more psychological perspective, this can reveal more about their different ways of belonging. More research is also needed into the question what happens to formal nomadic groups, and as mentioned before, it would especially be interesting to have more knowledge about the ways in which former nomads ‘dissolve’. Where do these people end up, what are their pathways and how do they relate to their past and present circumstances? Also, more emphasis could be placed on interrelations and perceptions of Grassfielder groups and Mbororo in the Bamenda Grassfields, between Mbororo in Bamenda and in other larger and smaller centres, within and beyond Cameroon. As was mentioned in the methodological section of the introduction, it has been difficult to examine the perceptions and experiences of the youth in town who display deviant behaviour. However, their motives are worth investigating. Also, there are many possibilities for ethnographic research with children. What, for instance, about the experiences and perceptions of foster children, who are not raised by their parents, but by family members or others? Furthermore, in the field of anthropological methodology concerning child-centred research in Africa and beyond, there is a lot of knowledge to be gained. One suggestion is to categorise the drawings of children in different African contexts and compare them with drawings of children in other places in the world.

This research has contributed to the field of knowledge about African migrant children and youth. An insight has been given into multi- and intergenerational differences between Mbororo in a changing urban environment. In finding their ways, children partly follow the direction that their parents indicate to them, following formal education and not forgetting their ethnic and Islamic background. In this process, they encounter different ideas and find different social rules that they incorporate into their lives, and sometimes they challenge or
deviate from their parents paths. This process is infinite, as the world is ever changing and new generations always encounter opportunities and limitations that are dissimilar to the circumstances of their parents when they were young. There will always be old women who either nervously or enthusiastically look around in the new world of their children. They are moving around in their own worlds, but they are also moving into the spaces their children have explored, appropriated and incorporated into their lives.
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Appendix I: List of fieldwork data cited in thesis

**Interviews**

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**Conversations**

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**Group meetings with children and youth**

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Appendix II: Group meetings with children and youth

Group meetings

My research assistant Rukayatu and I have worked with four groups of five to six Mbororo children and youth in Ntambang and Old Town; two groups of children (10 to 12 years) and two groups of youth (15 to 22 years). On Saturdays we met in Ntambang, on Sundays we met in Old Town. Throughout the six months fieldwork period, there were six to seven meetings with the four groups, some more intensive than others.

The meetings in Ntambang were held in the room in which I lived for one month. This was a room in a family house, with a separate entrance to the courtyard. After discussing the criteria, Madiya, the woman with whom I stayed in Ntambang selected the children and youth. In both groups, one of her daughters was included. The meetings with the youth in Old Town were held inside her tailoring workshop, in which her son and youngest brother lived. In the group of youth in Old Town, her son was included. Two other girls were suggested by her, another boy was selected by me. The meetings with the children in Old Town were held inside the sleeping room of the children of Zeinabu, a female Koranic teacher, who teaches inside her living room. The meetings were held after the Koranic class, around 9.30 a.m. Sunday morning. These children were selected by Zeinabu and most of them were in her class.

The duration of the meetings was usually around two hours. In the groups of youth, some participants were always half an hour late. During the first session we explained that (1) what is discussed in the group, stays in the group, (2) no one has to say something if they do not want to, and (3) there are no wrong answers. The programmes for the youth were somewhat different from the programmes for the children. We were flexible in changing the programme when we saw the children were losing their concentration or had to go home. At the beginning of a session, I would normally explain the intended programme. With the groups of children, we usually started by singing a song, followed by an assignment to draw something. Examples of assignments are: draw ‘yourself’, ‘your favourite animal’, ‘three things in the village and three in town’ ‘good and bad behaviour’. After ten to fifteen minutes, the children came to me one by one to explain their drawings in English, during which I tried to ask questions related to the subject. If everyone was ready, I brought up the subject of the drawing in the group, in which the children talked about it. I did not ask the groups of youth to make many drawings. They instead acted more theatre plays next to the drawings, and held group discussions. In the middle of a session, we took something to drink and eat. After the break, the participants either acted a drama or drew again, concluded by a short group discussion. Concluding, we told them when the next session was planned and finished the session by thanking the children and youth for their participation.

Group of children in Ntambang

The group of children in Ntambang consists of four girls and two boys. The boys, Sali and Sule, are both ten years old. The girls, Sureya, Fadi, Sa’a and Rahi, are ten years old, except for Rahi, who is twelve years old. Sometimes, Halidou, Aicha or another child joins and is given a pencil to draw. They also partake in the discussions.
### Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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</table>
| 18 Oct 2008| Introduction  
Talking in pairs of two, then explaining family background of the other  
plenary  
Drawing yourself  
Drawing what you would do if you would have a lot of money                      |
| 25 Oct 2008| Group discussion with reference to objects that children brought  
Children acting the chores they do in the house  
Singing songs  
Drawing good and bad behaviour                                                  |
| 1 Nov 2008 | Acting a school class  
Drawing your favourite teacher  
Acting the Koranic school  
Drawing your favourite food  
Storytelling  
Talking about future jobs                                                      |
| 15 Nov 2008| Talking about cattle and thieves  
Talking about future jobs                                                        |
| 22 Nov 2008| Acting a school class  
Talking about daily activities  
Talking about objects some children brought  
Talking about food and *pulaaku*                                               |
| 29 Nov 2008| Drawing three things in the village and three in the city  
Discussion about five propositions                                               |
| 10 Jan 2009| Drawing the most important things in your life  
Explanation on how to take photographs and giving single-use-cameras             |
| 17 Jan 2009| Discussion about photographs                                                     |

### Group of children in Old Town

The group of children in Old Town is the least stable. It consists of four ten-year old girls, Umamatu, Bulo, Aicha, Aicha and Habiba, one eight-year old boy Yusufu and a five-year old girl Mairamu.

### Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 19 Oct 2008| Introduction  
Singing songs  
Talking in pairs of two, then explaining family background of the other  
plenary  
Drawing yourself  
Drawing what you would do if you would have a lot of money                      |
| 26 Oct 2008| Discussing about cattle and horses with reference to small animal toys  
Children acting the chores they do in the house                                  |
| 2 Nov 2008 | Acting a school class  
Drawing your favourite teacher  
Acting the Koranic school                                                        |
Group of youth in Ntambang

The group of youth in Ntambang consists of three girls and three boys. The boys are fifteen-year old Souibou and fourteen-year old Jafaru and Aminu. The girls are sixteen-year old Halima and seventeen-year old Ai and Hawau.

Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. 18 Oct 2008 | Introduction  
Drawing your mental map  
Discussion about male and female roles, sexual activities before marriage and suitable marriage partners |
| 2. 25 Oct 2008 | Acting a Mbororo marriage in the past  
Acting a present-day Mbororo marriage                                        |
| 3. 1 Nov 2008 | Acting a Mbororo marriage in the past  
Acting a present-day Mbororo marriage  
Acting a play about deviant behaviour (pure enjoyment, included in appendix III) |
| 4. 22 Nov 2008 | Acting a play about Danpullo  
Discussion about Danpullo, MBOSCUDA, SODELCO  
Drawing  
Discussion about the past, moving with cattle, grandparents  
Youth go home with assignment to write about their preference for either MBOSCUDA and SODELCO |
| 5. 29 Nov 2008 | Acting a family situation in which a son displays deviant behaviour  
Acting a situation in which a girl falls pregnant  
Drawing the person you would like to be  
Discussing future jobs  
Youth go home with voice recorder to interview their parents |
| 6. 10 Jan 2009 | Explanation on how to take photographs and giving single-use-cameras |
| 7. 17 Jan 2009 | Discussion about photographs |

Group of youth in Old Town

The group of youth in Old Town includes two girls and two to three boys. The boys are nineteen-year old Umaru and twenty-two-year old Ibrahim, in the beginning sixteen-year old Ismael joined, towards the end it was eighteen-year old Hamidou. The girls are the sisters Rachida, 13 years old, and Altine, 17 years old. The father of the girls is Mbororo, their mother is Grassfielder. For the others, both of their parents are Mbororo. Ibrahim is an Aku.
Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. 19 Oct 2008 | Introduction  
Drawing your mental map  
Discussing about Grassfielders, Mbororo and Hausa |
| 2. 26 Oct 2008 | Drawing good and bad behaviour  
Talking about *pulaaku*  
Discussion about sexual activities and Islam |
| 3. 2 Nov 2008  | Acting a Mbororo marriage in the past  
Acting a present-day Mbororo marriage |
| 4. 30 Nov 2009 | Discussion about Old Town and Ntambang  
Drawing the person you would like to be  
Discussing future jobs |
| 5. 18 Jan 2009 | Drawing the thing you would like to be  
Drawing the animal you would like to be  
Acting deviant behaviour |

Connections

Close family ties exist between children in several groups. In the group of children in Ntambang, Sule, Sureya and Fadi are cousins; their mothers are sisters. Sureya is the younger sister of Ai in the Ntambang youth group and of Umaru in the Old Town youth group. They are Madiya’s children.
Appendix III: Theatre play ‘Pure enjoyment’

Group of youth in Ntambang, 25 October 2008

Scene 1

Ai: Ange, woehoe, we will go tomorrow. Enjoyment, did you get the enjoyment in it?
Halima: Tomorrow let us not go to school.
Ai: True! Let us not go to school. You go to school, you only take a pen and you are writing
you are writing, this thing does not help you ey. What is good for us now is enjoyment.
Halima: Did you hear that there is a dance in Babanke?
Ai: When?
Halima: Tomorrow.
Ai: Babanke. Yusufu, are they going to go?
Halima: Yes.
Ai: Mmm what about this girl, Hawau?
Halima: I don’t know.
Ai: Halima, what about you, don’t you want to be beautiful? Take this thing and paint, I
know if it is only for you, you will not paint.
Halima: Take this thing and leave me with that your jealousy
Hawau enters: How are you people, where have you been all this while? You people just
disappeared in the thin air.
Both: Ooow we have news for you
Hawau: You people always have news. Your news is not always good news.
Ai: This time it was about dancing and drinking.
Hawau: Dancing? Did you people not come here because of your books?
Both: Uwayo! There is nothing that she knows. She is just missing so many things. You are
not civilised.
Hawau: You people should wait let me tell you something. It is your education that will help
you in the future, and not this thing that you people are doing. Ok fine. If you people do not
want to go to school, go and tell your father and get married.
Ai: What will school help us? Get out from here if you don’t want to join us.
Hawau: I’m just telling you people something that will help you in the future.
Ai: Get out of here and leave us alone. To Halima: Look at this girl, she is not civilised at all.
This person was even waiting for us. Let’s go and see him.

Scene 2 Jafaru and Alhaji Aminu

Jafaru: So how are you?
Aminu: I’m fine. How are you?
Jafaru: I’m fine, as usual, let’s start with drinking.
Jafaru: I even heard that there was an occasion that way.
Aminu: My God
Jafaru: Look at those two girls who have just come in. Maybe we should go and talk to them.
Aminu: Ok.
Jafaru: But are you sure they are going to accept?
Aminu: Of course yes, if we go and talk to them.
Souibou: How are you people? What are you people doing here?
Jafaru: We have come again to eat our money.
Souibou: So you people are drinking alcohol?
Both: It’s not alcohol, it is champagne.
Souibou: So you people are drinking champagne.
Aminu: Oow sit down and let’s drink.
Jafaru: Sit down, sit down, let’s drink.
Souibou: I want to ask you people a question. What really takes you people into drinking alcohol?
Aminu: Est-ce que it’s alcohol? It is not beer, it is champagne.
Souibou: Are students even supposed to sit here drinking champagne? I can never drink beer.
Jafaru: We, we will drink beer until the end of the world. Leave us alone and move out of here.
Halima: Move out of here.
Aminu: Don’t wound my head now when you talk stupid, leave this place.
Halima: Leave.
Both boys: You people do not know this guy, he gives a lot of problems.
Jafaru: What about you young girls?
Halima and Ai are fighting for the drinks
Jafaru: What about you young girls?
Both: We are fine.
Ai: How are you people?
Jafaru: You people should sit down, let’s have something to drink.
Ai: Me I am sitting here now.
Aminu: Where are you going to?
Ai: You people are really enjoying the world.
Jafaru: Should I get some bottles for you?
Ai: Bring it.
Jafaru: Where have you people been all this while?
Ai: We have just been around.
Aminu: Give them drinks first now.
Jafaru (in pidgin): This is drinks, you people should drink.
Ai: This is what we call life, not school.
Jafaru: School does not help in anything. If you drink your alcohol and at the end of the day study a bit of Arabic it is ok.
Ai & Halima drink the drinks quickly
Aminu: You people should drink gently, don’t drink like villageois.
Jafaru: Somebody should sing for us now.
Ai starts singing a song
Halima: This is enjoyment.
Hawau enters: So you people are enjoying? Young girls, ey, so you people are also included?
Halima: What is your problem?
Hawau: So this is how you people abandon your education and you come her and sit here for foolish things.
Jafaru (and others): Get out of here, are you mad? Is something wrong with your head? How can you just batch on people and start controlling them?
All: Go, go, get out of here.
Hawau: Me I have gone.
Jafaru: Look at this girl, she just came in and was behaving like a mad woman.
Ai: We are already angry, we are going.
Jafaru: These girls and their friend, they have used us and drink our drinks, and went away. Next time we will not buy them any drinks again.
Aminu: Do they think they are the only girls?
Jafaru: Look at me rubbish.
Aminu: Rubbish.
Jafaru: We were here enjoying our drinks, drinking, singing our songs, and see how the world is moving. These stupid girls have just come and spoiled our day. Aaah foolishness. Amongst the two girls that you’ve seen, which one do you want to take?
Aminu: It is Ai.
Jafaru: I’m very happy, I will take this one who was sitting by me.
Both: What we are doing is very right. About school, what help can school give us? Let us not go to school, let us go back to the house.

Scene 3
Ai: Binta, if I did not have a friend like you I would not have survived on this planet.
Halima: What about the idea that our friend gave us, if we don’t follow her advice, we may end up useless and people will laugh at us.
Ai: Laugh at us?
Halima: Laugh at us.
Ai: Laugh at us?
Halima: Obviously they will laugh at us. It is better for us to leave their ways and follow our friend.
Hawau: Salamu aleikum. Well, I am the rejected one amongst you people. Anywhere I follow you people you reject me.
Ai: You are the one who is rejecting yourself, not us. If you want us, then join us.
Hawau: I cannot join you people. I cannot accept your ways because what you people are doing will never help you. You people should do something that at least will help you people on earth.
Ai: So what are we doing that will not help us?
Halima: Me, today I have heard all what you have said. I will follow you to school and attend all my classes. For her, she has refused to go back to school.
Ai: You are putting yourself to shame. Hawau, you are fooling this girl.
Halima: Leave her alone. I am just from quarrelling with her because I asked her that we should go back to school. To herself: Now I will sit down and listen to my friend and follow her, because if I will follow this way of life, it will not help me in any way, I will only be the loser.

Scene 4
Ai enters, scratching her body
Ai: Doctor, are you inside? Doctor, are you inside?
Hawau: What is wrong with you?
Ai: My stomach is paining, and my body is itching.
Hawau: Please let me look at your eyes. You have a serious problem. Nurse!
Halima enters. Ai: Ie! I know this girl.
Hawau: You know her?
Ai: Wait, wait, I know her. Ah! Hawau! Are you the doctor here?
Hawau: Who is it even?
Halima: It is our friend who we spoke to and she refused to listen to us.
Ai: Uwayo, I cannot even stand.
Hawau: Ah ah, is it her who has become like this?
Ai: Ow let me get up.
Hawau: What’s wrong with her?
Ai: Hawau that you are the doctor here.
Halima: Did I not advice you until you refused to listen to me? Do you know her problem?
She gives the papers to Hawau.
Hawau: Pregnant and HIV positive
Ai collapses.
Hawau: She was our classmate! Let’s carry her and take her out.

Conclusions

Hawau: Ok this is the conclusion. There are three students, two bad ones. This is what happens to those who do not listen to their friends. This is the disadvantage of those who do not want to understand what the friend is saying about education.
Roos: What happens to the boys?
Hawau: The boys, one was a thief, they became rascals, armed robbers. The other one that was advising them is now working. So it’s always good to listen to your friends’ advice.